



# **THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF GRAFTON**

**The Right Reverend Dr. Murray Harvey**  
Bishop of Grafton

---

## **Media Statement**

Recent comments by high profile Rugby player Israel Folau stating that hell awaits homosexuals (and others) have attracted a lot of media attention, including a wave of interest on social media. While this has come to a head in the last couple of weeks, a look at his social media posts indicates that he has been expressing these views for about a year now. He claims that free speech gives him the right to say anything he wants and blames others for the offence they take. While he is free to hold to particular religious views, how he expresses these views in public is another matter. Free speech is not hate speech and should not be used to vilify others. Threatening people in this way cannot be disguised as protected religious activity. If it was, then things like ethnic cleansing and slavery could be justified on religious grounds as having divine approval.

I applaud the efforts being made by many Rugby clubs to build inclusive communities and promote rugby as a sport where everyone is welcome to participate. Like many sports they have taken the lead in addressing racism, equal opportunities for girls and women and more recently LGBTQI persons. Having been a member of the rugby community at the local level in clubs in Australia and the UK for many years I can say that his views are not representative of the wider rugby community.

Israel Folau is a tremendously popular young Rugby player. When autographs are being signed his is often the longest queue after the game. I hope he can see the potential impact of his statements on impressionable young fans and others who see him as a role model. Words have consequences, sometimes dangerous ones, especially in this case amongst young people who might be questioning their sexuality. I call upon Israel Folau and other high profile role models to carefully use the platform they have to send a positive message about their faith, promote social inclusion and community well-being.

Dr Murray Harvey  
Bishop of Grafton

**Further Information**  
**Vivian Hoskins, 02-66572860**

