



26 October 2018

**NZ CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE COMMENT ON NEWLY RELEASED LAW COMMISSION  
REPORT ON PROPOSED ABORTION LAW CHANGES**

Today, the ministerial briefing paper providing advice to the Minister of Justice on proposed changes to the abortion laws in New Zealand was released. It provides advice, outlining three alternative options, that could be taken if Parliament were of a mind to propose a policy shift to treat abortion as a health issue.

Bishop Pat, President of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference commented, “the paper is substantial and so we need time to read it and give it careful consideration. However, we must not lose sight of two key facts in this discussion. As we argued in our recent submission to the Law Commission, abortion is both a health and justice issue and our laws should continue to treat abortion as such. There are always at least two human lives involved – the unborn human person and the mother. The current abortion regime recognises this.

When you look closely at the current law we do not believe that it criminalises women as some say – indeed in the section describing unlawful abortions, the law explicitly states that “a woman shall not be charged as a party to an offence against this section”. Taking abortion out of the crimes act will, however, effectively remove all legal protections for the unborn child.

“In taking the stance we do, we also acknowledge that the law must adequately protect the well-being of women and their families. The experience of Catholic agencies with a long history of working with women who have had abortions is that many women experience negative consequences following an abortion, often because they made the decision under duress. Thus, we welcome the discussion in the document about the need for better informed consent by way of the provision of effective and independent counselling for all those contemplating an abortion. The changes in legislation we would advocate for are those which would further recognise and protect the rights of the unborn child while promoting the well-being of women.”

The Law Commission received just under 3,500 submissions from the public of which just 18% supported removing abortion from the Crimes Act.

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*Ko te Huinga Pihopa o te Hāhi Katorika o Aotearoa (NZCBC) te kahui whakahaere o ngā mahi whakapono a-motu me ngā rōpū minita o te Hāhi Katorika. Otirā ngā rōpū mātauranga, tika me te pono, kaitohutohu Māori, whakapaoho whakawhiti whakaaro me te toro atu ki te iwi nui tonu, ritenga o te Hāhi, whakawhanaungatanga o ngā Hāhi, matatika koiora, whakawhanaungatanga o ngā whakapono, mahi minita ki ngā whareherehere me ngā hohipera, oti atu.*

*The New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference (NZCBC) is the assembly of the Catholic Bishops of New Zealand coordinating national activities and ministries of the Catholic Church. These include education, social justice, Māori advisory, communications and engagement with the public, liturgy, ecumenism, bioethics, interfaith relations, pastoral work in prisons and hospitals, and more.*