



**For immediate release**

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## **Commerce should not trump Christ this Easter**

Moves by national retailers and gambling agencies to operate during the Easter weekend have drawn strong criticism from religious leaders concerned at the erosion of Christian traditions in Australian society.

More than 80 stores including Myer, David Jones, Kmart, Freedom and Officeworks have submitted applications with the Director General of the NSW Department of Commerce, Mr Graeme Head, for permission to trade on Easter Sunday and Boxing Day this year. In a separate move, gambling agencies such as TABs across NSW and Victoria will be allowed to operate on Good Friday.

There are good reasons to restrict commercial trading and gambling at Easter and Christmas, according to NSW Council of Churches Public Affairs Director, the Rev Rod Benson.

The Christian faith has profoundly shaped Australian society, has a central place in Australian life, and will shape Australia for generations to come. In these troubled times there is increased community interest in the symbolic, ceremonial and spiritual meaning of Easter and Christmas. The Gospel story is the central narrative of western civilization, and these special days reserved for religious observance and spiritual renewal should not be displaced by blatant unprincipled commercialism.

The needs and aspirations of retail workers should also be respected on traditional public holidays. This is a cynical attack on families and people of religious conviction who expected to be able to relax and spend the day together.

The decision by TAB to open for business on Good Friday is especially disappointing. We live in a free and democratic country, but gambling does absolutely nothing to contribute to personal wellbeing, community harmony or the common good.

Gambling on Good Friday shows very poor form. To those who gamble this Easter, I ask you to consider that it was those who crucified Christ who gambled at the foot of the cross as he died for their sins and ours. There are more important goals in life than the unprincipled pursuit of pleasure and excess. Easter calls us to confront ultimate reality and objective truth, and to respond.

As Easter approaches, plan so that you don't need to shop at these major retailers on Easter Sunday, and avoid gambling altogether. Spend quality leisure time with family and friends. Join with others in celebrating the great Gospel events of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Write to the Director General of the Department of Commerce, to your local state politicians, and to the companies, expressing your view on the recent decisions.

Religion is not in terminal decline in Australia, and ordinary Australians do not support further encroachment on our essential religious heritage, and further erosion of our rich cultural traditions. Commerce should not trump Christ this Easter.

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