



WESTERN AUSTRALIAN DEBATING LEAGUE

INCORPORATED

2019 Policy on Contentious Topics

1. Introduction

This document details WADL's policy on contentious topics. WADL recognises that certain member schools and individual debaters have strong religious or ideological beliefs that make them reluctant or unwilling to participate in debates on certain topics.

WADL therefore makes provisions in this Policy for schools to register their objection to these topics. WADL continues to emphasise the educational and personal benefits of debating divisive and controversial social issues.

The organisation hopes that, in time, all members schools will recognise the importance of debating these social issues in a formal and constructive manner and will be willing (and indeed eager) to participate in debates on contentious topics.

This Policy applies to all topics used in the General Rounds and Finals of the WADL Schools Debating Competition.

2. Competition Draw Review Period

For the purposes of this Policy, these terms carry the following definitions:

- 2.1. Following the release of the Draft Competition Draw, and prior to the release of the Final Competition Draw, schools will have the opportunity to review the topics they are scheduled to debate.
- 2.2. If a school has an objection to a topic they are scheduled to debate, they must notify the Technical Vice-President of this objection no later than three (3) days following the initial release of the Draft Competition Draw.
- 2.3. A school may not object to the topic of a debate unless one or more of its teams is scheduled to participate in that debate. All topics are finalised with the release of

the Final Competition Draw; schools will have no opportunity to object to topics outside of this designated three (3) day review period

3. Registering a Complaint

- 3.1. If a school has an objection to its students debating a particular topic, they must submit a written notification of this objection to the WADL Technical Vice-President, outlining the grounds upon which the objection is made.
- 3.2. This written notification must be submitted in accordance with the guidelines established in Section 3.
- 3.3. The WADL Committee will review all objections and determine whether there are sufficient grounds for the issuing of a replacement topic. In its decision-making, the Committee will consider the following:
 - (i) If a debate of the topic is likely to cause offence or distress to individuals on the basis of their religious or ideological beliefs, the topic may be deemed to be contentious;
 - (ii) If a debate of the topic will merely require students to rationally and constructively discuss the premises or assumptions of a particular religious or ideological belief, the topic will not normally be deemed to be contentious;
 - (iii) In all cases of doubt, the committee will be guided by the recommendations of the Australian Curriculum (available for viewing at www.australiancurriculum.edu.au) - if the topic is consistent with the learning outcomes, content descriptions or achievement standards of the Australian Curriculum then it will not be considered contentious
- 3.4. If the WADL Committee upholds an objection and determines that the topic concerned is contentious enough to warrant a replacement, a substitute topic will be provided in accordance with Section 5.
- 3.5. If the WADL Committee does not uphold an objection, the school raising the objection will be provided with a written notification of this and an explanation of why the topic was deemed to be appropriate.
- 3.6. In all cases the decision of the WADL Committee is final and is not subject to appeal.

- 3.7. If, in the case that a school's objection has not been upheld and the school remains unwilling to participate in a debate of the topic concerned, then the school must forfeit the relevant debate.

4. Provision of Replacement Topics

- 4.1. If the WADL Committee upholds an objection to a contentious topic in accordance with Section 4, the contentious topic will be replaced with a substitute topic.
- 4.2. The replacement topic will be provided only for debates in which the school providing the objection was scheduled to participate.
- 4.3. Any replacement topic will be justifiably non-contentious, and will not under any circumstances be subject to further objection. The replacement topic will be published in the Final Competition Draw

5. Impromptu Topics

- 5.1. Topics provided in Senior Division impromptu debates may not under any circumstances be objected to under this policy
- 5.2. As a result, the WADL Committee will in all cases:
- (iv) Actively refrain from providing Senior Division impromptu topics that could be considered contentious;
 - (v) Be able to justify, preferably with reference to educational guidance material such as the Australian Curriculum, why any provided Senior Division impromptu topic is appropriate for debate, and why an objection to this topic would not be upheld at that time or any other