

Peter Dutton blasts big business for pushing a PC agenda



Minister for Immigration Peter Dutton. Picture: AAP

[Chris Merritt](#), Legal Affairs Editor, 8:06PM August 5, 2018

Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton has denounced the rise of political correctness within the business community and warned that it is adopting the agenda of radical activists while remaining largely silent in debates over the economy and industrial relations. “They are participating in social and political debates that have absolutely nothing to do with their stated purpose,” he told a legal conference on Saturday. “These companies are using company funds and brand equity to pursue pet political and social causes. Some businesses are now acting in the interests of special-interest activist groups.

“The interests of shareholders are becoming secondary considerations, if they are being considered at all.”

His remarks, at a conference of the Samuel Griffith Society in Brisbane, coincide with disquiet in the business community over pressure from activists and the Australian Securities Exchange to take up social policies that go beyond the interests of their shareholders.

The ASX is considering a proposed update of its corporate governance principles that urges companies to adopt employment policies that take account of gender identity and the cultural background of employees while

avoiding “aggressive tax minimisation” and acting in a “socially responsible manner”.

Mr Dutton singled out Qantas for campaigning in favour of same-sex marriage and Queensland University of Technology, which had “buckled under pressure from protest groups and agreed to divest from fossil fuels”. He said his concern about Qantas was not aimed at stifling free speech and he believed there was nothing wrong with Qantas chief Alan Joyce expressing his personal opinion about same-sex marriage.

“Regardless of your view on that topic, this was a multi-million-dollar publicly listed company throwing its weight behind one side of a debate it had no business getting into,” Mr Dutton said.

Mr Joyce and other business leaders were engaging in “ideological indulgence” when they used company funds for social activism. Activist shareholders and investment funds were targeting companies, including Woolworths, the Commonwealth Bank and BHP Billiton, with the goal of pressuring these companies into policy changes on issues such as climate change or in some cases to force the resignations of board members, he said. Organisations such as GetUp! were targeting businesses involved in border protection and major banks had established ethics committees that were turning away companies engaged in lawful, profitable activities.

He said it was even more concerning that companies were being subjected to retaliation when they chose not to take sides in particular debates over social policy.

“We constantly see pressure heaped on businesses to observe all manner of left-wing ideological fetishes,” Mr Dutton said. “The difficulty is that many of these companies have now withdrawn completely from any discussion about economic or industrial relations policy. No company is out there at the moment flying the flag on business tax cuts, very few companies are talking about the need for industrial relations reform and it is not good for public debate.

“Economic reform becomes much harder if the government is left as a lone voice in any argument. “When the business community is more comfortable pursuing left political issues than it is standing up for its shareholders something has gone terribly wrong. “When Australian businesses are routinely

bullied into supporting ideological positions, we have a big problem,” Mr Dutton said.