

PRESTIGIOUS AWARD COURTS CONTROVERSY

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PRESTIGIOUS AWARD COURTS CONTROVERSY

Tennis great and conservative pastor says she doesn't understand anger over honour

RHIANNA MITCHELL

Margaret Court has called for a stop to the bullying she says she has received over her views on same-sex marriage, with the former tennis champion embroiled in a furore over the decision to award her the highest possible Australia Day honour.

The run-up to Australia Day has once again been mired in controversy, with Mrs Court's appointment as a Companion of the Order of Australia leaked by a Melbourne journalist on Twitter five days early, causing a furious backlash.

Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews said her "disgraceful and hurtful" views, which she shares as a reverend at her Victory Life church in Osborne Park, meant she should not have received the honour, while WA Premier Mark McGowan said the Order of Australia awards

should go to "unsung heroes across the country".

Mrs Court said she was "very disappointed" by both the backlash and the leaking of the announcement, but insisted she would continue to voice her beliefs, saying she had the backing of many in the community.

She has previously spoken out against same-sex marriage, and said during a church sermon that LGBTQI school lessons were "of the devil".

"All I know is over the last few years I've never had anybody out in community come to me and say, 'We don't like you', or 'We don't like your beliefs'. I've had thousands

come to me and tap me on the shoulder and say, 'Thank you, we really appreciate you', she told The West yesterday.

In Tuesday's honours, Mrs Court will be recognised for her service to tennis as an internationally acclaimed player and

record-holding grand slam champion, and as a mentor of young sportspeople.

"This is about my tennis . . . I loved representing my nation and playing for it, nobody will ever take that away from me," she said.

Mrs Court said while she supported freedom of speech, she felt she was being bullied.

"Over the years, I've taken a lot, and I think I've been bullied in one way, and I think, it's time to stop," she said.

"I'm a minister of the gospel and have been for the last 30 years, I always say what the Bible says. And I'll never change those views.

"I have nothing against people — I love the people. We have them come into our community services, all kinds — whether they're gay, transgender, whatever they are."

Mrs Court described her award as a "wonderful honour" which was as significant to her



as her 1970 Grand Slam. “To win all four in the one year, that was difficult . . . somehow I knew I was going to win it that year, and this honour has come many many years later and I think it goes right next to that.”

With controversy swirling yesterday, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said he was unable to comment prior to the official announcement on January 26.

“It is a system that recognises Australians from right across the full spectrum of achievement in this country. So I can’t really offer a comment on something that is speculative,” Mr Morrison said.

Mrs Court, the record-holding singles champion, has previously faced calls for her name to be removed from the tennis arena in Melbourne named in her honour.

Brian Greig, from LGBTQI lobby group just.equal, said the recognition for Mrs Court was a “reward for prejudice” which would only encourage further division and discrimination.

“The key issue is that Mrs Court’s opposition to LGBTQI equality and inclusion has caused deep harm and that harm should not be honoured,” he said.

The Australia Day honours

are overseen by the Council for the Order of Australia, an independent body made up of 19 men and women, including former politicians and community representatives. Their recommendations are made to the Governor-General, who considers them before approving them for appointment or award.

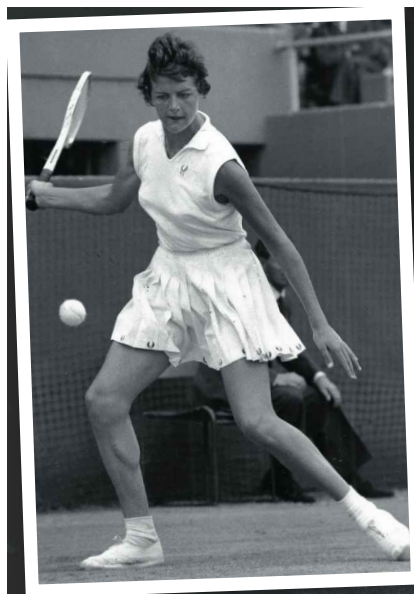
The council is chaired by former Northern Territory chief minister Shane Stone, and includes WA Treasury Corporation chief executive Kaylene Gulich and former WA attorney-general Cheryl Edwardes.

Last year, the council rejected calls for the cancellation of honours awarded to controversial commentators Bettina Arndt and Mike Carlton.

In a public statement in September explaining the decision, the council said terminations or cancellations were considered when someone had been convicted of a crime or subject to an adverse legal finding, or if the nomination had been based on false or misleading material.

It can also terminate an honour where “an individual has behaved or acted in a manner that has brought disrepute on the Order”, but this must have involved a “conviction, penalty or adverse finding”.







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Main picture: Danella Bevis

**I don't share
Margaret Court's
views, in particular
around gay and
lesbian people.**



Order of Australia awards should go to unsung heroes across the country.

Mark McGowan
WA Premier



I do not believe that she has views that accord with the vast majority of people across our nation, that see people particularly from the LGBTQI community as equal.

Daniel Andrews
Victorian Premier



Margaret Court has already been honoured for her tennis prowess. Making her a Companion of the Order of Australia has nothing to do with

tennis.



Anthony Albanese
Federal Labor leader

I can't comment on an award that's done through an independent process that hasn't been announced.

Scott Morrison
Prime Minister

I don't support the views that have been expressed by Margaret at all.

Zak Kirkup
WA Liberal leader



So incredibly well deserved for the world's greatest female tennis player and a champion of pastoral care and support for huge number of needy people in

Perth.

Mark Latham
Ex-Federal Labor leader



This is like awarding Pauline Hanson for her work in the fish and chip industry. Australia's top award shouldn't go to a racist, homophobic, or transphobe just because they were good at their day job.

Nick McKim
Acting Greens leader



Evonne Goolagong is a role model for all, Margaret Court ... not so much.

Martina Navratilova
American former tennis player and coach



This is about my tennis ... Margaret Court
I loved representing my nation and playing for it, nobody will ever take that away from me.