

Written evidence submitted by Association of English Cathedrals

WRITTEN EVIDENCE SUBMITTED BY THE ASSOCIATION OF ENGLISH CATHEDRALS TO THE HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE'S INQUIRY INTO PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

Who we are

1. This submission is made by the Association of English Cathedrals (AEC) which represents the 42 Anglican cathedrals in England and two Royal Peculiars (Westminster Abbey and St George's Chapel, Windsor). The cathedrals range from those of international importance (such as St Paul's Cathedral) and those in World Heritage Sites (Canterbury and Durham Cathedrals) to less well known cathedrals such as Blackburn, Bradford and Sheffield. Whilst a cathedral is often the most historic and architecturally important building in its environment and of immense significance to the heritage, culture and community life of the area it serves, its primary purpose is as a place of Christian worship in the Anglican tradition. Cathedrals hold services each day of the year, and indeed are required by Canon Law to so.

The problem

2. We wish to express our concern that the term 'psychoactive substances' in the Psychoactive Substances Bill can be interpreted so broadly that it risks criminalising the use of incense in cathedrals, churches and other places of worship as, we assume, an unintended consequence of the Bill's drafting.
3. Cathedrals regularly make use of incense during worship services, especially celebrations of the Eucharist. Incense has been used for worship purposes for millennia, and by the Christian church since its foundation. Incense has an important symbolic role; the smoke represents the presence of God, prayers rising to God, and the offering of gifts and lives as a sacrifice to God. Incense is used to enhance the worship experience, and no longer being able to use it would have an adverse impact on the conduct of worship.
4. **We request that a specific exemption for ecclesiastical use of incense be included in Schedule 1 to the Bill to enable its continued use in places of worship.**