



God may not rate in Guides' new promises

Cosima Marriner

"I promise that I will do my best: to do my duty to God, to serve the Queen and my country; to help other people; and to keep the Guide law."

THESE are the first words a little girl utters when she becomes a Girl Guide and they haven't changed in over 40 years.

But now the Girl Guide promise is being reviewed to bring the 100-year old organisation into the 21st century – and God and the Queen could be casualties of the modernisation. The word "obedient" as a girl guide law is also under review.

The Board of Girl Guides Australia is asking its 30,000 members to suggest how the Guide promise and law could be made more relevant to their lives today.

The Australian Guides are trying to shed their old-fashioned folksy image to appeal to a wider group from different faiths and cultures.

"We're seen as outdated, yet the programs we run are far from outdated," the NSW Guides Commissioner, Belinda Allen, said.

They introduced new uniforms last year, run modern leadership and personal development programs alongside their traditional outdoor activities, and now want to overhaul the promise and law, last updated in 1969.

"We feel it's time it was in language that is appropriate to girls of the 21st century, and to Australia, because the

nature and composition of the Australian community has changed dramatically since 1969," Ms Allen said.

The Australian promise – a code of living that Guides strive for – is nearly identical to the promise made by British Girl Guides.

But Canadian Guides don't mention God or the Queen in

their promise. After reviewing their wording last year, they now pledge "to be true to myself, my beliefs and Canada".

Ms Allen is reluctant to publicly single out which parts of the promise and law are likely to change, lest she preempt the survey responses of Guides. But it is believed that the references to God and the Queen are key elements up for review. It became optional last year for Australian Guides to promise to serve the Queen.

Guides in the Netherlands and Switzerland can omit the words "with the help of God", while Guides in Britain and the US can substitute their preferred spiritual deity for God.

When it comes to the Guide law Ms Allen has a "big problem" with the sixth law which states "A Guide is obedient".

"It is totally out of step with girls in this day and age," she said.

"In a time of gender equality it's very important that girls are empowered to think for themselves and make good decisions. I think the word we'd like to use is respect, as opposed to obedience."

After declining during the '80s and '90s, Guides membership has stabilised and is now growing again.

Ms Allen hopes a new, more inclusive promise and law will

encourage more girls to join the Guides.

"I hope we'll broaden our appeal," she said. "I'm sure there

have been cases in the past where girls felt [excluded]."

Ms Allen doubts many Guides will be alienated by any changes to the promise and law.

"Anything is controversial where you are looking to change," she said.

"With any change do you please everyone? We are listening to our membership."

A new promise and law are likely to be unveiled next March.





Stepping away from the past ... the Girl Guides are examining how they can modernise the organisation to be more relevant to girls today.