**ACTION ALERT 23-5: AUSTRALIA’S POTENTIAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACT**

As Quakers we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government, we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.

*May 2023*

**Submissions close 1 July 2023**

The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights invites public submissions in relation to Australia’s Human Rights Framework – in particular whether the Australian Parliament should enact a federal Human Rights Act, and what it should look like. QPLC’s Quaker Flutter of March 2023 flagged that such action was on the horizon.

Information about the Inquiry and how to make (and upload) a submission is on the Australian Parliament House website at

<https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Human_Rights/HumanRightsFramework>

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has produced a great deal of useful information including a position paper, two-page explainers and a summary. The position paper was formally launched in March 2023, and a video recording of the speech and panel discussion (as well as the documents listed above) is on their website at <https://humanrights.gov.au/human-rights-act-for-australia>

AHRC president, Emeritus Professor Rosalind Croucher, stated that the starting point for an Act is to recognize that everyone’s rights matter all of the time. She also made the following points:

* A Human Rights Act sets out the basic rights of Australians, requires proactive consideration of how they are being protected, and provides avenues for redress if rights are infringed.
* Such an Act is the central missing piece of government accountability in Australia. It will increase transparency and trust in governments by requiring them to fully consider human rights in their decisions, laws, policies and practice.
* Complaints can be dealt with through conciliation or administrative appeal through the Federal Court – an approach drawn from the Commission’s 30-year experience in managing discrimination complaints.
* Neither the constitution nor common law rights established by courts can be relied upon for sufficient protections.
* During the pandemic, a Human Rights Act could have helped give clarity to the rights of Australians in relation to public safety measures; and in the case of robodebt, such an Act would have provided safeguards by ensuring that public servants had a legal duty to consider human rights impacts.

**What Friends can do**

We encourage Friends to write a submission about why Australia needs a federal Human Rights Act – the Human Rights Commission material is written in plain English and is full of good points which you may find useful. A submission doesn’t have to be long, formal or academic. The Government is asking what you think and why it’s important to you. The number of submissions received does make a difference, so please share this opportunity and encourage your networks to make a submission.

Advice from the Australia Parliament House website suggests that the best submissions:

* clearly address some or all of the terms of reference
* are relevant and highlight your own perspective
* are concise
* begin with a short introduction about yourself or the organisation you represent
* emphasise the key points
* outline not only what the issues are but how problems can be addressed
* only include documents that directly relate to your key points
* only include information you would be happy to see published on the internet.

May 2023