

AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT – QUAKER FLUTTER

There is a new move to press for a national Human Rights Act. The Australian Human Rights Commission has launched a proposal (9 March 2023) which includes a model for an Act. The president, Emeritus Professor **Rosalind Croucher**, said that the starting point for an Act is to recognize that everyone's rights matter all of the time. She made the following additional 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.

Details of the proposed model can be found at <https://humanrights.gov.au/free-and-equal#FCmD9>

At present, Victoria, Queensland and the ACT have human rights legislation in place covering similar principles as are being proposed for a national Act. For many years, Friends have advocated such legislation as essential to fill the gaps in existing mechanisms to protect and advance human rights.

Friends may wish to make their views known by contacting their Federal MP, or the following ministers:

Senator Penny Wong - Minister for Foreign Affairs

The Hon Pat Conroy MP - Minister for International Development/Pacific

The Hon Andrew Giles MP - Minister for Immigration/Citizenship/Multicultural Affairs

The Hon Clare O'Neil MP - Minister for Home Affairs

The Hon Mark Dreyfus MP - Attorney-General

The Hon Amanda Rishworth MP - Minister for Social Services

The Hon Mark Butler - Minister for Health and Aged Care

The Hon Bill Shorten MP – Minister for the NDIS

Specific Ministers can be contacted via the generic link – <https://ministers.pmc.gov.au>

QPLC welcomes further ideas and feedback on Quaker action to promote the creation of a national Human Rights Act.

Canberra, March 2023