



Submission:

**The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights
Inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework.

I make this submission on behalf of **Amnesty International Bendigo Group**.

Bendigo is a regional Amnesty International group campaigning for human rights. We are part of an independent, global movement of more than 7 million people in 150 countries who stand together for justice, freedom, human dignity, and equality.

We support the legislation of a federal Human Rights Act. Australia is the only western liberal democracy without a human rights charter or similar. Charters of Human Rights promote respect for human rights and give people power to take action if their rights are breached.

In a recent survey that our Amnesty group conducted in Bendigo, we discovered that many people we spoke to believed that Australia already had a Human Rights Act. When people discovered this gap in our federal laws, they expressed disappointment, concern, and even anger. They had believed that their, and all Australians' human rights were legally protected, and were shocked to find this was not so.

A federal Human Rights Act would give legal recognition and protection to many important human rights, particularly civil and political rights. It would promote and protect the values of freedom, respect, equality and dignity.

It would help to prevent human rights abuses by placing human rights at the core of decision-making, requiring governments to acknowledge human rights when drafting laws, developing policies, and delivering services. And it would give people the power to take action if their rights were violated.

Though the Australian Constitution protects some rights, it does not include all rights as we understand them in this country. A federal Act should include the human rights Australia has already promised to uphold under international law, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the rights of children and people with disabilities.

And it is outrageous that a person's rights may be dependent on the Australian state in which they live.

Human Rights Acts have been passed in Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory and, most recently, Queensland.

The lack of an overarching federal instrument means that a person's access to rights protections is wholly contingent on where they live.

Australian Human Rights Commission

Recommendation: That this Inquiry recommends the Federal government legislate a Human Rights Act.

Yours sincerely,

Jan Govett, Convener, Amnesty International, Bendigo Action Group