



ATTORNEY-GENERAL
THE HON ROBERT McCLELLAND MP



09/26338, MC09/15936

13 NOV 2009

Ms Julia Irwin MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Irwin *Julia*

Thank you for your letter of 9 September 2009 referring to a petition submitted to the Standing Committee on Petitions regarding the adoption of a charter of rights.

As you are aware, the Attorney-General, the Hon Robert McClelland MP, received the report of the National Human Rights Consultation Committee on 30 September 2009 and publicly released the report, on behalf of the Government, on 8 October 2009.

This report represents more than nine months of consultations by the independent Committee chaired by Father Frank Brennan SJ AO and comprising Mary Kostakidis, Tammy Williams and Mick Palmer AO. The Committee received more than 35,000 submissions, conducted 66 community roundtables in 52 locations, commissioned research and focus groups, conducted online forums and had discussions with many Australians.

The Government welcomes the Committee's report. The Committee has provided the Government and the community with a valuable document which gives an overview of what we do well and options for addressing the areas where we can do better in the area of human rights protection.

The petition that was attached to your letter discusses whether the Government supports the introduction of a statutory bill of rights. The Government has not made a decision about this issue. The Government has made it clear that any options developed by the Committee should preserve parliamentary sovereignty and not include a constitutionally entrenched bill of rights. It is also important that any response appropriately balances the rights of all groups in society.

In addition to its recommendation about a statutory bill of rights, the Committee makes a number of recommendations to enhance human rights education and parliamentary scrutiny and legislative processes. The Government will be giving careful consideration to all of the Committee's recommendations before responding to this report in the coming months.

I trust that this information is of assistance to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Robert McClelland