
Tasmania needs Victorian-style human rights Act

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Human rights need to be better protected in Tasmania with the introduction of a state-based human rights Act, similar to that working effectively in Victoria, the Australian Lawyers Alliance said today.

Alliance Tasmanian director, Brian Hilliard, said it was regrettable that the federal government lacked the political courage to introduce a federal, statutory charter of rights, at this time, and this is making it imperative for Tasmanians to shore up rights on home soil.

“The Rudd Government is showing that it is afraid of powerful naysayers in the media at a time when it is about to go in to bat at election rather than doing what it knows is right – to correct a situation where Australia is the only democratic country in the world that doesn’t have a federal document protecting human rights,” Mr Hilliard said.

He said politics was increasingly about being seen to be doing things to protect people when really it was all about re-election and this had been the case with the federal public consultation into human rights.

“Eighty-seven percent of the 40,000 submissions received were in favour of the introduction of such an Act, yet the decision has been made to introduce a charter at this time. Why have a consultation in the first place if you don’t listen to what is being said?” Mr Hilliard queried.

“Tasmania has a large number of disadvantaged people – mentally ill, homeless, et cetera – who need protection from discrimination and bureaucracy and without such a document they cannot be adequately protected,” Mr Hilliard said.

“The attorney-general, Lara Giddings, has had on her desk for almost two years a report from the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute that recommends a Victorian-style human rights Act, and now the state election is behind her it is time to make good on her commitment to act on those recommendations.”

Mr Hilliard said the major winners from the Victorian Act were disadvantaged groups who, as a result, could access adequate housing and care facilities, ensure their families remained together, and be secure knowing that they would continue to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their physical circumstances.

The *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* was a simple but important document that set out the rights, responsibilities and freedoms of everyone within that

state. It enshrined basic civil and political rights in law and ensured public authorities and government employees acted compatibly when making decisions and delivering services to constituents.

“It has always been both Labor and Green policy to introduce such an Act so why do politicians continue to stall something that can only bring fundamental benefits for those it represents?” Mr Hilliard queried.

“Tasmanians’ rights, and the rights of everyone on Tasmanian soil, need to be better protected and the government needs to show it has a conscience as well as some spine and introduce such an Act, now,” Mr Hilliard said.

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