




Speech By
Peter Russo
MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

Record of Proceedings, 26 February 2019

HUMAN RIGHTS BILL

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (4.40 pm): I rise in the House today to speak in support of the passing of the Human Rights Bill 2018. In my first speech to this House, on being elected for the first time, I spoke about the need for the introduction of human rights legislation to protect vulnerable Queenslanders from the excesses of government. We saw many examples of how such legislation would have protected Queenslanders from the excesses of the Newman LNP government.

There were many submissions on this legislation, some in support and some against. Whilst I do not have sufficient time to deal with all of the submissions, I do intend to speak to the submission made by the University of New South Wales, Sydney. I should note at this juncture that both Dr Janina Boughey and Professor George Williams wrote their submission in a personal capacity. The submission advised that the Queensland Human Rights Bill follows the same general model as the human rights legislation in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the ACT and Victoria. Importantly, the submission says that the bill does not seek to fundamentally alter the roles of or the relationship between the three branches of government. Rather, the bill aims to encourage dialogue about human rights protection between the branches and foster a human rights culture within government.

The submission went on to say that the bill builds on the experience of the human rights legislation in those jurisdictions that have already passed similar legislation, particularly Victoria and the ACT. The submission went on to say that this bill is the best drafted and most effective shield of people's rights yet seen in Australia.

I will now deal with one of the differences between the Queensland legislation and the Victorian and ACT legislation. Again, I draw on the information contained within the UNSW submission. One of the main problems with the Victorian and ACT human rights acts is the absence of an accessible, affordable and effective complaints mechanism. The Queensland bill overcomes this problem by providing for a low-cost mechanism of resolving complaints through the Human Rights Commission. The submission referred to this feature of the Queensland legislation as an excellent feature.

I will now turn to some of the history of the process that has brought us to the historic position we are placed in today when this legislation will be passed. It is without any doubt that a federal bill of rights would be a great thing for the people of Australia but, as is often the case, it is left to the Queensland government to do the heavy lifting on social change. The bill aims to embed a human rights culture in the Queensland public sector so that public functions are exercised in a principled way that is compatible with human rights. The bill will be an ordinary act of parliament, as opposed to a constitutionally entrenched model, and will maintain the existing relationship between the executive, the legislature and the courts about human rights.

As I referred to earlier, the differences between our legislation and the Victorian model include dispute resolution. Dispute resolution, as I have already said, provides an accessible, independent, appropriate avenue for members of the community to raise human rights concerns with public entities with a view to reaching a practical resolution.

The bill primarily protects civil and political rights, drawn from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and one right drawn from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The bill imposes obligations and functions on the three arms of government consistent with the dialogue model.

In closing, I take this opportunity to thank all of the parliamentary staff who worked on the report on the bill and the previous committee, which dealt with the issue of whether or not to have a bill of rights. I also acknowledge Norm Bullen and Frank Carroll, two true believers and advocates for the introduction of the bill, strong supporters of a fair go and members of the Yeronga branch. I also thank all of the submitters to both of the committee inquiries and those who attended hearings. I acknowledge the group Human Rights Act for Queensland and the hard work that group did in lobbying for the introduction of the legislation, and Aimee McVeigh. Last but not least, I thank the Attorney-General, the members of cabinet and the entire parliamentary Labor Party for their support and the departmental staff for their hard work in bringing to the House a workable and progressive piece of legislation. I commend the bill to the House.