

27 February 2019

MEDIA RELEASE: Queensland Human Rights Act a cause for optimism and celebration.

The soon-to-be Queensland Human Rights Commission has welcomed the passage of the Queensland Human Rights Bill through state parliament, saying the legislation gives Queensland the strongest and clearest human rights protections in the country.

The Human Rights Act will rename the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland to the Queensland Human Rights Commission from 1 July, and expand its remit to include human rights as well as discrimination law.

“The passing of the Bill is a great step forward for Queensland and really does make us a national leader in terms of human rights protections,” says Commissioner Scott McDougall.

Queensland will become just the third Australian jurisdiction to protect human rights in legislation. Victoria and the ACT have legislated protections, but neither has a dedicated complaints process.

The Queensland Human Rights Act, which places obligations on public entities – state government departments, local councils, Queensland police, state schools, and organisations delivering public services – includes a complaints mechanism, which will be administered by the QHRC from 1 January 2020.

“The inclusion of an accessible and affordable complaints mechanism is a first, and gives the Act meaning for everybody, not just people who are prepared to litigate and go to court,” says Commissioner McDougall.

The Act will also require the parliament to consider human rights while debating and passing legislation, which the Commission argues will strengthen the relationship between the parliament and the people.

“The Human Rights Act isn’t a threat to the basic structures of government, including the separation of powers. Parliament still reigns supreme under the Act – but we believe it will result in better decision-making and give people a way to raise their concerns,” says Commissioner McDougall.

“Before I came to the Commission, I spent many years working in the community legal sector. Over the course of my career, I would have seen hundreds, if not thousands, of clients who would have benefited from a human rights act. This Act will extend protections to every person in Queensland, and give them ways to raise their concerns if they feel their rights are being trampled. That is definitely a cause for optimism and for celebration.”

-ENDS