

A person wearing a yellow cap, a dark t-shirt, and red shorts is walking on a large, layered rock formation. The rock is reddish-brown and has a jagged, uneven surface. The person is looking down at the ground. In the background, the ocean is visible, with a clear blue sky above it. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

Human rights in the community

Community education and training

The Human Rights Act gives the Commission functions to:

- promote an understanding and acceptance, and the public discussion, of human rights
- make information about human rights available to the community
- provide education about human rights and the Act.¹¹⁸

This work is integral to achieving the Act's objectives of protecting and promoting human rights, building a culture in the public sector that respects human rights, and promoting a dialogue about the nature, meaning and scope of human rights.¹¹⁹

After several years of After several years of events being cancelled or held via alternative formats due to COVID-19, 2022-23 saw a strong return to face-to-face events. This year we took part in or attended over 50 events across the state – more than double the number we took part in in 2021-22 – including:

- MOSAIC Multicultural Festival
- Brisbane and Cairns Pride Fair Days
- Rockhampton's all abilities Beach Day Out
- NAIDOC parades, fairs and Deadly Day Out in Townsville, Cairns, Rockhampton and Brisbane
- QCROSS conference in Brisbane
- Islamic Society of Central Queensland's first Youth Conference
- Townsville citizenship ceremonies
- Iftar dinners in Brisbane, Mareeba and Cairns
- Human Rights Week community conversation days across southeast Queensland
- Townsville International Women's Day
- Market days and Orientation Week events at James Cook University's Townsville and Cairns campuses and Central Queensland University.

Training for public entities

In addition to human rights complaint handling functions, the Commission provides education and training to government and functional public entities (as well as private and not-for-profit sectors), and in the financial year delivered 56 *Introduction to the Human Rights Act* sessions. The Commission delivered 10 sessions on *Human Rights Act for community advocates* and 3 sessions on *Human Rights Act for legal advocates*.

Face-to-face training is complemented by the Commission's online learning modules, which have been increasing in popularity in last 3 years.

¹¹⁸ *Human Rights Act 2019* s 61(d)–(f).

¹¹⁹ *Human Rights Act 2019* s 3.

The online *Introduction to the Human Rights Act* module was completed by 1813 people and 5740 people completed the *Public entities and the Queensland Human Rights Act* module.

In addition to the publicly-available modules, a tailored 'Public entities and the *Queensland Human Rights Act 2019*' module was developed for the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs. This module was completed by an 1,103 people.

Human Rights Week

As part of our objective to provide education and awareness about human rights to the community, the Commission runs an annual Human Rights Week campaign starting on 1 December and culminating on Human Rights Day on 10 December.

As with other events this year, more face-to-face activity was possible in 2022-23 than the preceding years and we were able to augment our online awareness activities with more in-person events.

This fit well with our theme for Human Rights Week 2022, 'Close to Home'. Close to Home aimed to focus on human rights at a local level, helping people and their communities to know the Act, to share it, and to use it.

Human Rights Week opened with a forum on the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (often referred to simply as OPCAT). OPCAT is an international agreement aiming to prevent the mistreatment of people in detention. We co-convened the forum with the Public Advocate and Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion on 1 December in Brisbane, and over 120 participants gathered to call on state government to prioritise the commencement of independent oversight of prisons, youth detention centres, locked mental health wards, and state-run aged care centres.

In keeping with the 'Close to Home' theme, we held several community conversation days across southeast Queensland during Human Rights Week, which provided an opportunity for people to come together to discuss human rights and discrimination, and to find out about or connect with services or campaigns happening in their local community. These events incorporated free human rights training for community advocates, which we also offered online during Human Rights Week for people who weren't able to make it to a face-to-face event.

We also ran free introductory human rights training in Townsville, a pop-up information stall in Cairns, and free webinars on Queensland's Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Acts. Daily spotlights on our website and across our socials highlighted key human rights issues in Queensland, including accessibility, climate change, housing, and First Nations Justice.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement

The role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement unit includes promoting and protecting the rights of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This year, training sessions on the Human Rights Act were conducted with staff from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare service provider.

In April the engagement unit had the opportunity to speak about the role of the Commission and the Human Rights Act to representatives from 17 First Nations councils at a Local Government Association Queensland forum in Cairns.

Website

The Commission's website remained a key source of information for the community about their rights. General information on human rights law, the 'right to recognition and equality before the law', 'right to life' and 'right to liberty and security of person' pages were in the top ten most accessed pages on the site in the reporting period.

Consultation and engagement

The Commission continues to facilitate consultation groups to contribute towards building a culture of human rights in the legal and academic sectors:

- Queensland Academics Human Rights Group: academics undertaking research and sharing information to support Queensland's developing human rights culture
- Queensland Human Rights Advocates Group: lawyers and advocates who work in discrimination and human rights law.

Community attitudes to human rights

Between July and August 2021, researchers from Griffith University conducted a community survey to identify attitudes to human rights in Queensland, the adequacy of Queensland's human rights performance, and to gauge levels of support for the then new Human Rights Act.

Their findings included that there is great support for human rights, general confidence that rights are well protected in Queensland, but there were particular concerns about certain sectors including aged care facilities and prisons. Of most importance to 2021 participants were the rights of children, the elderly and in healthcare. The researchers concluded that more work needed to be done to

develop public knowledge of the legislation and the free complaints process offered by the Commission.¹²⁰

In late June 2023, the survey was conducted once again, marking approximately two years since the initial survey. Although a comprehensive analysis of the survey results is pending, the Commission has taken a keen interest in a few preliminary findings:

- Consistent with 2 years ago, the community continues to consider that protection of human rights and dignity is both vital (92%) and relevant to them as individuals (85%)
- Knowledge of the existence of the Human Rights Act has had a marked uptick from 43% awareness in 2021 to 69% awareness in 2023.
- Conviction that the Human Rights Act makes a difference in protecting human rights has also substantially increased from 38% in 2021 to 58% in 2023.
- Confidence about how well human rights works for people in regional areas has decreased from 42% in 2021 down to 34% in 2023.
- Approval of the way in which Queenslanders' human rights were protected during COVID-19 was also down from a 62% positive response in 2021 to 52% in 2023.

The key areas in which survey respondents considered that human rights were in need of protection were fairly stable between 2021 and 2023, with child protection, health and aged care remaining the top priorities.

These results are positive affirmation that human rights are of enduring importance to the Queensland community, and that the public perceives the Human Rights Act to have a significant role in protecting and promoting these rights. The Commission looks forward to sharing comprehensive insights about the survey in the coming months.

¹²⁰ Sarah Joseph, Susan Harris Rimmer and Chris Lane, 'What Did Queenslanders Think of Human Rights in 2021? An Attitudinal Survey' (2022) 41(3) *The University of Queensland Law Journal* 363.