



**Equal Opportunity
Tasmania**

Equal Opportunity Tasmania

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MEDIA RELEASE / STATEMENT

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Human Rights Day – 10 December 2021

Today is Human Rights Day, which marks the anniversary of the United Nations adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights set out for the first time fundamental human rights for all people. Sadly, in the more than seventy years since the Declaration was introduced there is no shortage of examples that illustrate the fragility of human rights. Globally, millions if not billions of people have their basic human rights violated or ignored every day.

For those of us lucky enough to live in Tasmania our basic human rights are protected to a far greater extent than those fleeing oppression, persecution and violence in other parts of the world. However, Tasmania and Australia still has some way to go before everybody can live their life comfortable in the fact that all their human rights are protected.

It is timely that we reflect locally on current challenges to human rights, and also on some moments of brightness, in a year that has again been dominated by the vagaries of COVID-19.

Australia's attorneys-general have agreed to support raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12 years of age. The United Nation's Committee on the Rights of the Child said the minimum age of criminal responsibility should be 14 years of age. I endorse that position and am of the view that raising the age to 12 does not do enough to protect the human rights of children in Tasmania and the rest of Australia, particularly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, who are disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system. I hope that Australia's attorneys-general reconsider their position and raise the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years of age.

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The Federal government's *Religious Discrimination Bill* continues to attract much debate. There is no doubt that everybody should be protected from discrimination on the basis of religious belief, as they are in Tasmania under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1998* (Tas). However, in my view the *Religious Discrimination Bill* goes too far in overriding existing anti-discrimination legislation to allow people to make 'statements of belief'. It will allow people to make offensive comments about women, people of other religious faiths, people with disability and LGBTQIA+ people. I shall continue to provide submissions to all federal Members of Parliament urging them make sure that people's existing rights to be safe and free from discrimination and offensive behaviour are not overridden.

On a brighter note, the Tasmanian government commissioned the Pathway to Truth-Telling and Treaty report, which has now been tabled in Parliament. The authors of the report, Professor Kate Warner and Professor Tim McCormack, consulted with the Tasmanian Aboriginal people and set out recommendations for a forward path towards reconciliation. I look forward to hearing the Government's response to the recommendations in the New Year.

Following on from the Australian Human Rights Commission's Respect@Work report, positive changes have been made at a federal level to allow the Fair Work Commissioner to make orders to stop sexual harassment. It is now clear that engaging in sexual harassment at work is a valid reason for a person to be dismissed from their job.

I am also heartened that human rights and discrimination issues are more and more becoming topics of everyday conversations for people at work, at home, and out in the community.

What is clear to me is that protecting human rights continues to be incredibly important. There will continue to be challenges to human rights, and there will continue to be good and bad responses from governments, workplaces, and communities. Some Australian states have enacted Human Rights Acts to help governments take human rights into account. Tasmania is not one.

Today, on Human Rights Day, I urge the Tasmanian government to take the next step and introduce a Human Rights Act to help protect, promote and create a culture that always considers people's human rights.

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