



News

Bill of rights to create star chamber

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A BILL of rights would give the judiciary too much power, the Coalition said yesterday as it denounced the Government's plans for a human rights charter.

Shadow attorney-general George Brandis said it was "unwise" to give the judiciary further power because they were not elected by the people.

A bill of rights is a law spelling out specific rights that is either part of the constitution of the country or state, or is a law by itself.

Speaking at the James Cook University law school in Townsville, Senator Brandis outlined the Opposition's stand on a bill of rights. The Government allocated \$2.8 million over two years in the Budget to "facilitate national public consultations about the recognition and protection of human rights through a bill or charter of rights".

But Senator Brandis said he was sceptical of the Government's motive.

"I fear that it will only be used to assist to make the case for a bill of rights, and the case against a bill of rights will fail to receive the public attention that it deserves," he said.

He said two sides to the debate needed to be heard and drew on recent opposition by former NSW ALP premier Bob Carr and Attorney-General John Hatzistergos.

"Australia does not need a bill or charter of rights and . . . any attempt to impose one upon us would be, at best, wholly unnecessary, and potentially may result in unintended and much more dangerous consequences.

"The rights which we Australian enjoy are to be found in many sources of our law (and a bill of rights) in its operation (could be) potentially dangerous to those very democratic rights and liberties it would seek to secure. In the first place, as has often been pointed out, by defining rights, one limits them . . . parliaments are the proper institutions under our system to decide what rights should be further developed or qualified by competing interests," he said.