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If it ain't broke, we don't need to fix it

I QUESTION Justice Michael Kirby's advocacy of a new Australian charter of human rights (Comment & Debate, 23/8).

Australia is already a top country for peace, prosperity and pluralism. But we should not delude ourselves that our good fortune is simply the fruit of our own cleverness.

The alchemy that produced modern Australia involves Aborigines, convicts, the English language, immigrant cultures, open spaces, mineral treasures and who knows what else. A charter of rights may sound as sweet as motherhood and apple pie - until you wonder why we've done so well without it.

Kirby bemoans Australia's injustices against women, Aborigines, Asians, homosexuals and religious minorities. But, in reality, you must compare us with the rest of humanity. Without a human rights charter, we have moved ahead of the vast majority.

The reality is that public opinion decides when the time has come for a right to be defended in law.

Perhaps a charter would move the evolution of rights away from the public arena into a lawyer-driven industry. More lawyers, more "rights" for those who can afford them, and the law moving dangerously away from its cultural base.

If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Philip O'Carroll, North Fitzroy