

Academics urge Territory to consider Bill of Rights

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THE Territory could suffer another stolen generation without a Bill of Rights, says a human rights expert.

Professor George Williams (pictured) said the Northern Territory was in a unique position to consider a Statutory Bill of Rights because of the Statehood movement.

He said Territorians were at greater risk of legislative violations of human rights than other states because Australia's Constitution only guaranteed most rights to those living in the states.

Prof Williams gave the example of a federal referendum, where a Territorian's vote is worth half that of a vote in the southern states.

He said a Bill of Rights would ensure politicians considered human rights when drafting and implementing laws.

But University of Queensland professor James Allan said a Bill of Rights handed difficult decisions to unelected judges, rather than politicians -- forcing them to make moral judgements instead of legal ones.

"Sure, there have been some politicians who have made bad decisions in the past, as there have been judges who have done the same," he said.

"The difference is you can fight to get someone else elected, but if you don't like what a judge decides, there's nothing you can do."

The academics debated the NT's future yesterday during Charles Darwin University's symposium on Statehood and a Bill of Rights.

The Statehood Steering Committee also released a discussion paper this week, debating what should be in the Territory's Constitution.

-- NICK CALACOURAS