

News

Call for human rights charter

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SPECIAL REPORT

A FORMER Labor MP has called for a charter of human rights to be introduced to protect Queenslanders from draconian State Government legislation.

Jim Fouras, who retired at last year's election, said such a charter was needed to prevent the Government introducing more laws that impinged on a person's rights.

Mr Fouras said the charter should include a ban on the Queensland practise of allowing 17 year olds to be jailed in adult prisons.

He slammed the State Government, saying its excuses for allowing this practise to continue were no longer plausible.

"It is unacceptable in a resource-rich state for the Minister of Police to argue there has not been enough money for it," he said.

Mr Fouras said he had argued in Labor's caucus meetings against legislation that encroached on basic rights -- such as the 2005 Anti-Terrorism Bill -- but chose not to vote against them.

"You don't cross the floor because that is against the party's rules," he said.

But Mr Fouras' call for a charter of human rights has the backing of senior Labor backbencher Dean Wells.

In a recent speech to Amnesty International, the former Attorney-General dismissed claims a charter would take power out of the hands of elected officials and hand it to judges.

Mr Wells said Victoria had introduced a charter which forced the Government to produce a "statement of compatibility" to human rights.

"It focuses public attention not only on any breach of human rights, which needs to be the subject of public debate, but it even focuses public debate on technical breaches of human rights," he said.

Mr Wells said a similar charter could be introduced in Queensland.

"To legislate a charter of human rights in Queensland would only be one small step for this parliament but it would be a significant advance for the people of Queensland," he said.