

LEADER

GENERAL

**Censorship on human rights a contradiction <> Football's heroes not always on the field**

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Surely one of the most basic of human rights in a democracy is the right to know. People are entitled to know what their governments and the agencies they run are up to.

Yet the Government-appointed committee set up to investigate plans for a human rights Act is building a wall of secrecy around the information it is to consider in making its recommendations. It has refused a request by this newspaper for access to the submissions of public agencies, including the police and government departments.

Surely committee chairman Fred Chaney, former deputy president of the National Native Title Tribunal, should be able to see the irony of this - and the glaring self-contradiction. Here is a piece of legislation that, if the rhetoric is to be believed, is to enshrine principles of human rights being conceived in a bureaucratic black hole, remote from the people whose rights are supposedly to be upheld.

Such legislation, if it is to be dinkum, would have to include the right of people to information on how they are governed and on public policy that affects them. Yet from the outset, they are to be denied knowledge of what various government agencies think of the proposed legislation, what they say should or shouldn't be in it and what problems or benefits they see in the proposal.

There has been official endorsement of the need for wide-ranging debate on this. However, the public debate will be impoverished, if not stifled, by the refusal to reveal official information, which would be released as a matter of course in a political environment where there was a true commitment to human rights, regardless of whether they were specifically protected in legislation.

There is evidence that the committee saw a need for openness in its public consultation. Its website has warned people that submissions to it would become public documents that could be viewed by others. There has obviously been a change of mind.

Mr Chaney and the committee failed to give valid reasons for, in effect, acting as censors of public information. If their work is to be taken seriously, it must be fully open to public scrutiny.

Football's heroes not always on the field

Football's headlines this year have been dominated by the bad behaviour of players, the sacking of coaches and boardroom conflict, leading some supporters to wonder whether the game has become a victim of its own corporate success.

What is not always obvious is simple passion for and dedication to the sport itself, embodied by the contribution of two dedicated West Coast Eagles servants who are retiring when the season ends, perhaps after the match tonight against Collingwood.

Head trainer Bill Sutherland joined the club at its inception 21 years ago. He has never missed a game, anywhere. Now in his mid-70s, the snowy-haired Mr Sutherland's familiar presence on the

boundary line will be missed by football fans everywhere. Property manager Hank Gloede, who was with the club at its first game, also is retiring.

Their loyalty to the club and its players is admirable and is also a timely reminder that on-field success depends on more than a strong playing list.