



# ATTORNEY GENERAL MEDIA STATEMENT

Attention: News Editor/Chief of Staff

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## **Human rights on the agenda for WA.**

Many Western Australians are unaware that the basic human rights they often take for granted are not protected by law.

Attorney General Jim McGinty said a plan to develop a WA Human Rights Act would mean people's most fundamental human rights would be recognised and legally protected for the first time.

"A lot of people are shocked when they find out that in WA, basic human rights such as the right to a fair trial, freedom of expression, the right to protection from torture or degrading treatment and the right to privacy are not protected by law," Mr McGinty said.

"All too frequently we see on the evening TV news bulletin or in the newspapers, the basic human rights of people around the world being trampled on by governments.

"Many of these people live in societies which neither recognise nor respect human rights, but here in WA most people enjoy the basic political and civil human rights that our society allows.

"The creation of a WA Human Rights Act would mean that certain rights would have to be considered and observed by all levels of government.

"It would also foster a human rights culture throughout our community, encouraging awareness, respect and observance of human rights.

"I have asked a panel of independent people noted for their work with the community to consult Western Australians from all walks of life on how a WA Human Rights Act should operate and what rights it should protect."

Former Fraser Government Minister Fred Chaney, a director of Reconciliation Australia and former deputy president of the National Native Title Tribunal, will chair the group.

The other members of the committee are executive director of the WA Council of Social Service Lisa Baker; former Anglican Archbishop of Perth and Anglican Primate of Australia Dr Peter Carnley; and associate professor Colleen Hayward, manager of the Kulunga Research Network with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research.

Mr Chaney said the committee would seek views from the community and report back to the Government with a set of recommendations for the development of a WA Human Rights Act.

“This is an opportunity for the people of WA to have their say on how human rights should be protected in this State,” he said.

“The four members of the consultation committee are committed to providing the people of WA with a voice in this important process.

“We are a group of independent individuals with extensive experience in working with the community and in particular, those people who are most vulnerable to breaches of basic human rights.”

The committee will consider:

- what human rights should be recognised in a WA Human Rights Act;
- what form the Act would take and how human rights should be taken into account when new laws are made in Parliament;
- how a Human Rights Act could create greater understanding and respect for human rights within Government departments and agencies;
- what role courts and the judiciary would play in enforcing observance of a Human Rights Act; and
- whether members of the community and private sector should be made to comply with a WA Human Rights Act or just Government departments and agencies.

The Attorney General said a key aim of the new legislation would be to encourage the growth of a human rights culture in Parliament and across Government departments and agencies.

“Governments are frequently required to deal with difficult issues and balance competing interests on behalf of the people they serve,” he said.

“However, it is important that their actions and decisions respect human rights.”

Australia is the only common law country in the world without a national bill of rights.

Mr Chaney said that over the coming months the committee would visit communities throughout the State to meet local people and ask for input for the plan.

The committee will make its recommendation to the Attorney General by mid-November.

Information on the proposed Human Rights Act is available online at <http://www.humanrights.wa.gov.au> or from the Department of the Attorney General on 9264 1712.

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