



Local

Public servants key to human rights charter

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11 December 2007

[Hobart Mercury](#)

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PUBLIC servants should not regard a human rights charter as a threat, a leading academic says.

Professor Hilary Charlesworth was chair of the ACT Government's inquiry into its Human Rights Act 2004 and is visiting Tasmania to discuss the legislation.

Prof Charlesworth said she was surprised that the main obstacle in passing the laws was politicking from within the ACT public service.

``They felt it would impose more levels of accountability on them," she said.

``Senior public servants advised their ministers against supporting it."

The Tasmanian Government is considering adopting similar legislation to that in the ACT.

The Tasmanian Law Reform Institute has handed its final report on a charter of human rights to Attorney General Steve Kons who will make a submission to Cabinet next year.

Prof Charlesworth, from the Australian National University, said the commitment of ACT chief minister Jon Stanhope was critical to getting the laws passed.

``He simply believed this would make for a better society," she said.

Since its introduction, Prof Charlesworth said it had not been the ``lawyer's picnic" that opponents had predicted.

``There's been remarkably little litigation," she said.

For the Tasmanian laws to succeed, public servants must be fully informed, she said.

``They need to get inside instead of seeing it as a threat," she said.

The Tasmanian Law Reform Institute recommended a charter that, like the ACT, is not entrenched but is ordinary legislation.

It recommends provisions for citizens to take Supreme Court action if their rights are breached and the protection of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

MER-20071211-1-015-389615