



## **Tassie puts charter of rights on agenda**

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TASMANIANS have been urged to take part in one of the "most important discussions of the past few years" and further protect their human rights.

The State Government is considering a charter of rights to enshrine the human rights of Tasmanians, such as freedom of speech, in one place and one law. In Australia, only the ACT and Victoria have a bill of rights.

Attorney-General Steve Kons released a Tasmanian Law Reform Institute paper yesterday to prompt public discussion and gauge community support for a charter.

"The Government wants to test whether further safeguards are needed," he said.

"Australia is the only major common-law based country that does not have a comprehensive national human rights instrument such as a bill of rights."

Institute spokeswoman Terese Henning said federal laws such as the recent anti-terror laws had silently eroded human rights in Australia.

She said many Tasmanians did not know their rights, which were scattered like a patchwork through state, national and international law.

"They could work out what their rights were, and decide what action could be taken," she said.

Tasmanian Council of Social Services chief executive Mat Rowell said new state laws could be tested against a charter of rights.

"Any charter of rights in Tasmania should be about improving community awareness of human rights and dignity," he said.

Mr Rowell said the charter should include economic and social rights to entitle Tasmanians to basic levels of education, health and housing.

Mr Kons said the three- month consultation would provide answers that would guide Cabinet's decision on whether a charter of rights was needed.

Tasmanian Greens leader Peg Putt introduced legislation for a bill of rights in State Parliament in December but the Government and the Opposition knocked back the proposal.

The institute will consider the public response and then make a recommendation to the Government.

The issues paper is available at [www.law.utas.edu.au/reform](http://www.law.utas.edu.au/reform) , the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute web page.

The deadline for submissions is November 30.