

Human
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Human Rights Law Centre
2025 Federal Election Platform

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In the lead up to the 2025 Australian federal election this May, the Human Rights Law Centre's federal election platform calls on all parties and independents to put human rights at the heart of government decision making and improve the dignity, equality, and fair access to justice for all people in Australia.

Working in partnership with people and communities, the Human Rights Law Centre challenges Australian laws and policies which stand in the way of justice and equity for all. Our work directly tackles human rights issues affecting communities across the country, and relates to people's fundamental rights to public participation and raises their voices against injustice. This includes justice for First Nations people, calling for a federal Human Rights Act, protecting democratic freedoms, ensuring corporate accountability, upholding the rights of refugees and migrants, and climate justice. In doing so, we want a shared future where every person can live free from discrimination, and can build a life with dignity, freedom and safety, with an adequate standard of living and a healthy environment.

We urge all candidates at the 2025 Federal Election to commit to supporting our recommendations below if they are elected to the next Parliament of Australia, as an important step towards ensuring human rights for all by addressing inequalities rooted in and reinforced by racial and socio-economic injustices.

Summary of Recommendations:

The Human Rights Law Centre calls on all parties and independents to commit to:

1. Raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years of age;
2. Implement effective and independent detention oversight mechanisms, as required under Australia's international law obligations;
3. Introduce an Australian Human Rights Act;
4. Introduce a digital duty of care;
5. Reform laws to protect whistleblowers across the public and private sectors, including the establishment of a Whistleblower Protection Authority;
6. End modern slavery in Australian supply chains;
7. Ban goods made with forced labour;
8. Strengthen the visa protections pilot to include all migrant workers, irrespective of visa status, and remove work restrictions for bridging visa holders;
9. Provide pathways to permanency for all those failed by the "Fast Track" asylum system, and people in Australia who were subjected to offshore processing; and
10. Protect the rights of communities on the front lines of the climate crisis by committing to a fast, fair and rights-respecting transition to net zero emissions and increasing funding for climate-safe social housing and support services for communities at risk from climate-fuelled disasters.

First Nations Justice:

We call on all candidates to commit to a fair legal system that is free from racial injustice and that upholds the principles of dignity, equality and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' right to self-determination.

1. Raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14.

Raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility from ten to at least 14 years old is one action that governments across the country can take right now that will give every child and family a brighter future.

Children belong in playgrounds and schools, never in prisons and police cells. In most jurisdictions across Australia, including federally, the minimum age of criminal responsibility in Australia is just 10 years old. The medical evidence is clear that children under the age of 14, who are undergoing significant neurocognitive growth and development, do not have the required capacity to be held criminally responsible.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that the minimum age of criminal responsibility should be at least 14, and Australia was [criticised](#) by 122 countries at the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2021 for locking up children as young as 10 behind bars.

Engagement with criminal legal processes – from early contact with police, arrest, detention, the use of force, the use of handcuffs and other restraints, and being subjected to interrogation, searches and forensic sampling – immensely harms children, particularly First Nations children who are chronically over-represented in the criminal legal system. Criminalising children aged 10 to 13 years of age does not result in safer communities but instead increases the likelihood of entrenchment in the criminal legal system.

Ask: We call on all parties and independents to commit to introducing legislation to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years of age, without exception, and to use all available legislative, financial and policy levers to ensure that all states and territories do the same.

2. Implement effective and independent detention oversight mechanisms, as required under Australia's international law obligations.

Across Australia, people in prison and other places of detention are at risk of cruel and degrading practices, including solitary confinement, spit hooding and unnecessary strip searching.

The United Nations' Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT), requires governments to prevent cruel and degrading treatment through oversight and monitoring, including by designating independent bodies to inspect places of detention by way of a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM).

More than seven years since ratification, Australia remains in breach of its international human rights obligations under OPCAT. Only 6 of Australia's 9 jurisdictions have nominated NPMs, with none sufficiently funded or empowered to undertake their required functions. Due to a funding standoff with the Federal Government, the Victorian, New South Wales and Queensland governments have failed to even designate NPMs. This means across every jurisdiction in Australia, there is insufficient independent oversight or inspections to stop the human rights abuses and cruel and degrading treatment of people in places of detention.

Ask: We call on all parties and independents to commit to providing sufficient, ongoing funding to ensure effective and independent oversight of all places of detention across Australia.

Human Rights Foundations:

We call on all candidates to commit to an Australia where everyone, no matter who they are or where they are, understands their human rights, has them properly protected in our laws and has the power to take action to ensure they are upheld.

3. Introduce an Australian Human Rights Act.

The Human Rights Law Centre leads the national campaign to create an Australian Human Rights Act. We work with communities, a coalition of 130 civil society organisations, and legal and human rights experts to build support and momentum for a national Act. We have developed an online resource that shows [101 cases](#) of how Human Rights Acts or Charters that exist in the ACT, Victoria and Queensland are making people's lives better. These cases highlight the practical ways that an Australian Human Rights Act would make a real difference to people whose rights are otherwise not properly protected.

An Australian Human Rights Act will ensure that values we all share – like fairness, respect, dignity and compassion – are always at the heart of all government decisions, laws, and services on our health, housing, and education. It should also include our right to a safe, healthy and sustainable environment.

An Australian Human Rights Act will clearly articulate our human rights and freedoms so that everyone across our community can uphold their rights and stand up for what we value as a community. It will be a powerful tool for people to challenge injustice if their rights are violated.

The Human Rights Law Centre supports the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights' [recommendation](#) in its May 2024 inquiry into Australia's human rights framework that the Government should introduce an Australian Human Rights Act.

Ask: We call on all parties and independents to commit to introducing an Australian Human Rights Act.

Democratic Freedoms:

We call on all candidates to commit to a strong participatory democracy in which parliaments are representative, governments are held to account, and where the wellbeing and rights of people and the planet are at the heart of every government decision.

4. Introduce a digital duty of care.

The Human Rights Law Centre calls on the Parliament to introduce a digital duty of care, which would require social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X to take reasonable steps to protect users from foreseeable harm caused by their products and services, as an important first step to address the growing risks of online harm.

A broad duty of care to protect all people from online harm is a more balanced and effective way to ensure all people are safe online than other overly heavy-handed proposed measures, such as blanket bans on social media access for children and young people.

A duty of care for social media platforms was a key recommendation in the Human Rights Law Centre's *Rights First [report](#)*, which outlines principles for regulating online platforms in a way that protects fundamental rights.

For the duty of care to be effective, social media platforms must: uphold and protect the fundamental human rights of users, including the freedom of speech and the right to be free from discrimination; undertake comprehensive risk assessments to identify and analyse risks posed by their services; implement effective risk mitigation measures to address risks; and open their risk assessment and mitigation processes to independent scrutiny and verification.

Ask: We call on all parties and independents to introduce a digital duty of care.

5. Reform laws to protect whistleblowers across the public and private sectors, including the establishment of a Whistleblower Protection Authority.

Whistleblowers make Australia a better place. By speaking up about human rights abuses, government wrongdoing and corporate misdeeds, whistleblowers play an important role in our democracy. Currently, many whistleblowers are falling through the gaps in protection, and suffering harm for speaking up.

The Human Rights Law Centre is calling on the Parliament to strengthen whistleblower protections by reforming the Public Interest Disclosure Act to ensure public servants can safely and lawfully speak up about wrongdoing without fear of prosecution, and streamlining private sector protections into a single economy-wide whistleblower protection law for the private sector. We have also been calling for the establishment of a federal whistleblower protection authority to oversee and enforce

whistleblowing laws. It's time to fix our broken whistleblower protection laws to ensure that all whistleblowers, whichever their sector, are protected, not punished.

Ask: We call on all parties and independents to commit to fix whistleblowing laws, and to establish an independent Whistleblower Protection Authority.

Corporate Accountability:

There is no business in abuse. We call on all candidates to commit to a regulatory response which ensures Australian companies respect human rights wherever they operate and are held accountable if they fail to do so.

6. End modern slavery in Australian supply chains.

With an estimated 29 million people in the Asia-Pacific region and 41,000 people in Australia living in modern slavery, many Australian companies continue to turn a blind eye to exploitation and abuse in their supply chains. While the Human Rights Law Centre has welcomed proposed changes to strengthen Australia's modern slavery law including through the introduction of penalties, we continue to call on the Parliament to go further by introducing a legal requirement for companies to take action to prevent modern slavery.

Australia's regulatory response to modern slavery continues to lag behind international peers. The Government's response to the review of the Modern Slavery Act does not currently include the introduction of a due diligence obligation, which was a key recommendation of the McMillan review of the *Modern Slavery Act 2018*. A due diligence obligation would require companies covered by the law to actively identify and address modern slavery risks in their operations and supply chains, not just report on their efforts.

Ask: We call on all parties and independents to implement the recommendations from the 2023 McMillan review by introducing penalties for non-compliance and a modern slavery 'due diligence' obligation for reporting entities.

We are also calling for the Parliament to increase the budget and powers to support the effective enforcement of the Modern Slavery Act. The Human Rights Law Centre considers the modest budget of the Commissioner's office of \$8 million over four years insufficient to effectively meet stakeholder expectations and support the varied policy objectives for the office. This is substantially less than comparable roles such as the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner, the eSafety Commissioner, and Privacy Commissioner.

Ask: We call on all parties and independents to increase budget and powers of the National Anti-Slavery Commissioner.

7. Ban goods made with forced labour.

It is [estimated](#) that nearly \$30 billion dollars of goods at risk of being made with forced labour are imported into Australia. In 2022, Human Rights Law Centre's [research](#) also found that an alarming number of companies failed to identify obvious risks of forced labour in their supply chains or take necessary action to address them. Across the United States, Canada, Mexico and now the European Union, bans on goods made with forced labour have been enforced, and Australia is now increasingly at risk of becoming a dumping ground for goods made with forced labour without stronger customs controls in place.

Ask: We call on all parties and independents to introduce a forced labour import ban as a complementary measure to the Modern Slavery Act.

Migration Justice:

We call on all candidates to commit to an Australia where all migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum have equal rights to dignity, safety and a pathway to make Australia their permanent home.

8. Strengthen the visa protections pilot to include all migrant workers, irrespective of visa status, and remove work restrictions for Bridging visa holders.

Everyone who arrives in Australia – irrespective of visa status – deserves the same rights to basic healthcare, secure housing and dignity at work. But for decades, our laws have ensured that certain temporary migrants are treated like second-class citizens, by withdrawing basic rights and protections available to others. Strict visa conditions and migration laws have forced temporary migrants into unsafe and underpaid work, endangering their health, their lives and their family's future.

In 2024, the Human Rights Law Centre led a coalition of 40 unions, civil society, faith-based and migrant rights group to co-design a two-year pilot to increase protections for temporary migrant workers, including a guarantee against visa cancellation and a short-term Workplace Justice visa for exploited workers. While this is an important first step towards ensuring basic rights for all migrant workers, some temporary migrants, including those who hold Bridging visas and PALM Scheme workers from the Pacific, are currently excluded from the protections.

There is also an urgent need for all Bridging visa holders to be granted the right to work. Many Bridging visa holders, including people seeking asylum who have commenced proceedings in court, are issued Bridging E visas with mandatory “no work” conditions. This puts people at risk of labour exploitation for years, as people are forced to accept precarious jobs or face destitution.

It is unacceptable to subject people to years of destitution through the imposition of visa conditions prohibiting work.

Ask: We call on all parties and independents to extend the Workplace Justice Visa and visa protection guarantees to include all temporary migrants; and abolish restrictive ‘no work’ conditions that exclude people on Bridging visas from safe and decent work.

9. Provide pathways to permanency for all those failed by the “Fast Track” asylum system, and people in Australia who were subjected to offshore processing.

Despite arriving in Australia over a decade ago to seek refugee protection, there are 8,000 people who remain in limbo without permanent visas and no other resettlement pathway.

This includes:

- The 900 people who were subjected to offshore processing in Nauru and Papua New Guinea. The vast majority have been recognised as refugees, yet hold only temporary status in Australia. Two thirds have close family members, including children and spouses, who are Australian permanent residents or citizens. Australia is their home and it is time this was reflected in their visa status.
- The 7,000 people who were failed by the “Fast Track” process for assessing refugee claims. Despite the abolition of this flawed system in October 2024, families who have lived in Australia since 2012 are still waiting for resolution of their status. Some are unable to work, and children have limited access to higher education. There is an urgent need for a fair, consistent and transparent process to allow people failed by “Fast Track” to rebuild their lives.

Ask: We call on all parties and independents to commit to the immediate grant of permanent visas to all people in Australia who were subjected to offshore processing or failed by the “Fast Track” system.

Climate Justice:

The climate crisis is the biggest human rights challenge of our time. Without urgent action, climate impacts like extreme heat, bushfires, storm surges, and flooding will increasingly cause and exacerbate major human rights violations in Australia.

10. Protect the rights of communities on the front lines of the climate crisis by committing to a fast, fair and rights-respecting transition to net zero emissions and increasing funding for climate-safe social housing and support services for communities at risk from climate-fuelled disasters.

Climate-fuelled extreme events such as bushfires, heat waves, floods, and storm surges have become recurring features of the Australian experience. Those events frequently result in violations and limitations of people’s human rights, including the right to life. As climate change accelerates, the frequency and intensity of extreme events, and the resultant rights violations, will exponentially increase.

Ask: We call on all parties and independents to commit to advancing a fast, fair, and rights-respecting transition to net zero emissions and working with the communities most impacted by climate events to increase climate resilience and protection from climate-fuelled disasters. This should include investing heavily in local community resilience efforts, increasing essential support services to those impacted by disasters, and strengthening the capability of community sector organisations to assist in the response.

Climate-fuelled heat waves already kill more Australians than all other natural disasters combined. As global temperatures rise, the availability of energy efficient housing with affordable, clean sources of power will be critical both to supporting a just transition and ensuring that people and communities can protect themselves from the impacts of extreme heat.

Ask: We call on all parties and independents to commit to increasing funding for climate-appropriate social housing, particularly in remote First Nations communities where the current housing crisis is multiplying the health, economic, and social impacts of climate-fuelled extreme heat.

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