



Human Rights Law Centre

January 2020

2030 Strategic Plan

Human
Rights
Law
Centre.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and live and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We recognise that this land always was and always will be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land because sovereignty has never been ceded. We also acknowledge the role of the legal system in establishing, entrenching and continuing the oppression and injustice experienced by First Nations peoples.



David Burke - Legal
Director and Josephine
Langbien - Senior Lawyer



Introduction

Our lives are better when we all treat each other with respect. No matter who we are or where we come from, we should all be treated fairly and with dignity.

As a community, we are at our best when our laws and our actions reflect and protect the values – like fairness, equality and compassion – that we all share.

Strong, principled human rights laws help to ensure that people are treated fairly. They strengthen our vibrant and diverse communities by promoting better laws, policies and services. They give people and communities the power to ensure accountability and redress if their human rights are violated.

But laws alone are not enough. We need our communities to not only understand and respect human rights, but to take a stand when they need defending.

Together, working in partnership, we must protect and promote everyone's human rights at every turn because when we let one person's rights be violated, it diminishes all of us.

This is why the Human Rights Law Centre exists. We exist to defend the rights of people in need. We exist to work with communities to stand up for human rights. We exist to transform laws and policies to protect human rights. We exist to ensure that governments and parliaments promote human rights. We exist to ensure accountability and redress when people's rights are violated.

We are proud to present this strategic plan which outlines how we will achieve a fairer, more compassionate Australia over the next ten years.

Our Vision

Our vision is an Australia where everyone is free to lead a decent, dignified life; where our laws, policies and institutions promote fairness and equality; and where people and communities have the power to address inequality and injustice and ensure that governments always act in the public interest ●

Our Mission

The Human Rights Law Centre uses strategic legal action, policy solutions and advocacy to support people and communities to eliminate inequality and injustice and build a fairer, more compassionate Australia.

Our Values

Strategic: Our mind

We carefully consider how to best use our tools, resources and expertise to improve the lives of people in need.

Fairness: Our compass

We believe that all people should be treated fairly and with dignity and respect.

Equality: Our aim

We believe that the human rights of all people should be respected, protected and promoted without discrimination.

Integrity: Our character

Our values guide every aspect of our work.

Passion: Our spirit

We fight tenaciously for positive human rights change.

Courage: Our heart

We stand up for what we believe in.

Our Tools

We achieve our goals using a strategic combination of legal action, policy solutions and advocacy.

Legal action

We take strategic legal action to secure redress for people and communities in need, to ensure accountability, to establish precedents that protect human rights and to prompt law and policy change.

Policy solutions

We conduct analysis, consultation and research to develop policy solutions to change laws and policies to advance human rights.

Advocacy

We advocate with decision makers, in the media and through UN accountability mechanisms to secure law and policy reforms to advance human rights and to defeat policy proposals that would undermine human rights.



Daniel Webb,
Legal Director



Partnerships

In undertaking our work, we help people and communities understand their rights and take action to defend their rights and the rights of others. We work alongside people and communities affected by human rights violations and place their voices and interests at the heart of our work.

We recognise that our goals can only be achieved by working collaboratively. That's why strong, respectful partnerships are central to all of our work.

We partner with other not-for-profit organisations to advance shared goals and achieve collective impact.

We partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations, working alongside them to address systemic injustices facing their communities, guided by partnership principles which support self-determination.

We partner with law firms and barristers whose professional commitment to human rights, access to justice and the rule of law brings significant expert pro bono resources to support our work.

We build communities of action on the issues we work on, connecting people and communities whose human rights are at risk with our staff, donors, philanthropic funders, volunteers, not-for-profit and pro bono partners and with other people and communities who are committed to defending rights.

Our Geographic Focus

We are a national organisation committed to building a fair and compassionate Australia. We work on human rights issues in Australia and that relate to the actions of Australian governments and corporations overseas.

How this plan is structured

This plan sets out the Human Rights Law Centre's strategy over the next ten years. It guides how we work and the resources we seek to achieve our goals. The plan is separated into four sections:

- Overarching aims to guide our work over the next ten years.
- Our focus areas over the next three years.
- New areas we will scope for future work.
- Our internal organisational goals.

Professor Robynne Quiggin, Chair of the Human Rights Law Centre Board



Our aims for 2030

1. Support people and communities to defend human rights

Australians understand that human rights belong to us all, believe we can be a country that protects the rights of all and stand up to demand an end to human rights abuses whenever they occur.

What we will do

- Work alongside people and communities whose human rights are at risk and amplify their voices so they are central to mobilising change.
- Deploy advanced media and communications strategies to power our human rights advocacy.
- Develop and participate in coalitions of organisations to advance shared human rights goals and achieve collective impact.
- Build informed and engaged communities of action to support human rights and champion change.
- Undertake campaigns to promote and build community support for human rights.

2. Transform laws, policies and practices to advance human rights

Australian laws, policies and practices protect the human rights of all, and particularly those whose human rights are most at risk.

What we will do

- Develop and promote policy solutions to change laws, policies and practices to advance human rights.
- Advocate with politicians and key decision makers for laws, policies and practices that advance human rights, and oppose laws and policies that would harm human rights.
- Take legal action to establish court precedents that strengthen human rights protection.
- Use UN and other mechanisms to prompt action to ensure our laws, policies and practices comply with international human rights standards.
- Campaign for a legal framework of rights in Australia with strong and effective national and state Charters of Human Rights and modern anti-discrimination laws.

3. Ensure governments, parliaments and businesses respect human rights

Australian governments, parliaments and businesses understand and respect human rights.

What we will do

- Build relationships, promote policy solutions and advocate so that decision makers in governments, parliaments and business promote and defend human rights.
- Promote democracy reforms so that our political systems respond to the needs of the people, not to vested interests.
- Advocate for Australia to be a global human rights leader through its participation in UN human rights mechanisms.
- Advocate for properly resourced and mandated human rights institutions at the international, national and state and territory level to ensure independent scrutiny of government and corporate action.

4. Ensure accountability for human rights violations

When Australian governments or businesses violate human rights at home or abroad, their actions are exposed and challenged.

What we will do

- Investigate and expose violations of human rights through advocacy and legal action.
- Undertake legal action to secure redress for people whose human rights are violated.
- Highlight Australia's failures to comply with international human rights standards through UN and other international and national mechanisms.

Gillian Triggs, Former President of the Australian Human Rights Commission and Teela Reid, proud Wiradjuri and Wailwan woman and lawyer.



Our Impact Areas over the next three years

There are many human rights issues that affect people and communities in Australia. The Human Rights Law Centre regularly assesses where we should direct our resources to achieve impact for people in need. We focus our work on areas where there is the greatest need, where there is potential for impact and where the Human Rights Law Centre has capacity to achieve change.

Over the next three years, we will work to achieve change in the focus areas set out below. These areas are not static. We are agile, recognising that the environment for legal and policy change can shift dramatically. We review our focus areas at least annually taking into account the need to prioritise resources and pivot to respond to new challenges or opportunities.

We also recognise that human rights issues intersect and that this can compound injustice. In undertaking work in these focus areas, we will carefully consider intersecting human rights issues and the need for tailored, specialised responses across all of our work. In particular, we will address women's rights as a priority within each of these focus areas.

1: Strengthening Australia's human rights foundations

What we will do

- Campaign for an Australian Charter of Human Rights.
- Support efforts to create new, and strengthen existing, state and territory Charters of Human Rights.
- Advocate for stronger, modern anti-discrimination laws that are consistent with international human rights standards.
- Develop and share communication strategies to strengthen support for human rights.
- Advocate for Australia to be a global leader on human rights through its participation in UN human rights mechanisms.

2: Safeguarding our democracy

What we will do

- Build trust in our democracy by working to remove the distorting impact of money in politics, so that politicians are focused squarely on the public interest and the needs of the people.
- Champion protection for whistleblowers so that all people are empowered and encouraged to expose misconduct, corruption and human rights abuses within government.
- Challenge mass surveillance to ensure that charities, journalists, lawyers and activists can freely undertake their work without risks of interference and reprisals.
- Defend protest rights to ensure that Australians are free to gather together and speak out on things that they care about.
- Defend civil society advocacy so that public policy and debate is informed by the lived experience of vulnerable and marginalised communities.
- Advocate and take legal action to ensure the right to vote is a reality for people with a disability, people behind bars and young people.

● “The health of our democracy impacts so many of the issues we’re passionate about. By strengthening our democracy, we can unlock greater potential for change.”

– Alice Drury, Senior Lawyer



3: Ensuring Australian businesses uphold human rights wherever they operate

● “Communities need their children to be able to walk to school without wading through treacherous areas of quicksand created by the mine waste. This is what remediation means in real terms for the people living with the impacts of Rio Tinto’s Panguna mine.”

— Keren Adams, Legal Director

What we will do

- Advocate to ensure that communities harmed by Australian corporate activity overseas can access justice in Australia and support them to take action to protect their rights.
- Challenge corporate involvement in Australia’s harmful refugee policies and hold companies that profit from abuse to account.
- Strengthen laws and policies to eradicate modern slavery and other serious human rights abuses in the supply chains of Australian companies.



4: Justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

What we will do

- Work to end the mass-imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and advocate for a legal system that is fair and free from racial discrimination.
- Champion a fair and compassionate youth legal system that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to reach their full potential, supported by their families and in their communities.
- Challenge excessive police powers so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not unfairly targeted or locked up and call for independent investigations of police misconduct.
- Confront the politics of fear and division that fuel punitive and harmful criminal laws and that unfairly target people living in poverty.
- Work to end the oppressive targeting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the social security system and advocate for a fair social safety net so that all people can live a dignified life.

5: Defending the rights of refugees and people seeking asylum

What we will do

- Advocate and take legal action to ensure that everyone currently held by the Australian Government on Manus or Nauru is transferred to Australia or a suitable third country.
- Work to ensure that people seeking protection in Australia have pathways to permanent protection and are treated humanely.
- Advocate and take legal action to prevent the Australian Government from sending to Nauru and Manus people who arrive by boat seeking asylum.
- Advocate for a permanent end to offshore detention by pushing for truth-telling and accountability mechanisms that highlight the abuses suffered by people held there.

6: Promoting women's reproductive freedom

What we will do

- Advocate to end the criminalisation of abortion across Australia and push for laws that promote the right of every woman to make decisions about their bodies.
- Ensure all states and territories have safe access zone laws to end intimidation, abuse and harassment of women outside abortion clinics.
- Advocate to ensure reproductive healthcare is accessible across Australia.



7: Ensuring dignity for people in prison

What we will do

- Advocate and take legal action to stop inhumane treatment of people in prisons.
- Ensure greater oversight and transparency to prevent abuse and ensure prison operators and governments are held to account for mistreatment within prisons.
- Advocate against privatisation of prisons and for governments to work towards closing rather than opening prisons.



Scoping New Impact Areas

The world is changing rapidly and new, significant human rights issues are confronting us. After carefully considering where there is the greatest need, where there is potential for impact and where the Human Rights Law Centre has capacity to achieve change, we have identified the following new priority areas that we will scope over the next three years:

- The impact of climate change on human rights.
- The impact of new technology on human rights.
- How we can build on our existing work to promote the rights of people with disability.

We are already doing significant work on each of these issues. For example:

- We are defending environmental organisations against repeated efforts by governments to harm their ability to advocate, litigate and fundraise. We are also defending protest rights which are critical to efforts to spur action on climate change.
- We are addressing the impacts of new technology on human rights in the areas of mass surveillance, media freedom and whistleblowers.
- We are advocating for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disabilities in prison and we are pushing for reforms to voting laws to ensure that people with cognitive disabilities can participate in elections.

Our scoping will explore how we can build on this work and strategically achieve greater impact. We will scope the significance of each issue, the role the Human Rights Law Centre could play, the role other organisations in Australia and overseas play and how we could sustainably resource the work. We will consult with specialist organisations and develop a plan of action on each of these areas.

Ruth Barson,
Legal Director



Developing our Organisation

GOAL 1: Be a best practice employer

What we will do

- Continue to survey staff annually and act on the findings.
- Build on our work to strengthen diversity and cultural competency.
- Ensure sustainable workloads and promote staff wellbeing, taking into account the impact of human rights work on staff.
- Ensure terms and conditions of work that are consistent with our position as a leading human rights organisation.

GOAL 2: Increase our communications and campaigns capacity

What we will do

- Strengthen our communications and campaign infrastructure and tools to effect change, engage with supporters and build the support base for our work.
- Continue to draw on the best available research and expertise to ensure our communication and campaigns are effective.

GOAL 3: Ensure our financial sustainability

What we will do

- Continue to grow our income through donations and grants by strengthening the ways we engage with our supporters and by expanding our supporter base.
- Expand our bequest program.
- Over the longer term, develop a major investment fund to deliver a long term, sustainable income stream.

GOAL 4: Increase our staff capacity

What we will do

- Ensure we have the right staffing structure and skills to achieve our mission, including by increasing our communications and campaign staff resources, increasing our fundraising staff resources and investigating creating general manager and government relations roles.
- Increase work that intersects across our focus areas.
- Continue to strengthen and grow our Sydney office.
- Over the longer term, investigate establishing new offices in other Australian cities.

GOAL 5: Ensure that reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' self-determination are core to the way we work

What we will do

- Work in a genuinely collaborative and consultative way with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations consistent with our Partnership Principles.
- Prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as spokespeople on issues impacting their lives and communities and amplify their voices.
- Share knowledge and resources with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.
- Continue to develop and implement Reconciliation Action Plans.

● “When we stand together we can achieve real change. We can achieve freedom and safety for people fleeing persecution. We can build a healthy, open and accountable democracy. We can prevent inequality, mistreatment and prejudice.”

– Hugh de Kretser, Executive Director



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For more information, visit our website:

hrlc.org.au

The Human Rights Law Centre is an Australian registered charity with Deductible Gift Recipient Status. All donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible. Join our movement for positive change by becoming a supporter today.