



Australian
Human Rights
Commission

everyone, everywhere, everyday

National Human Rights Consultation

.....
Australian Human Rights Commission
Supplementary Submission on Human Rights
Education

July 2009

Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	3
2	What is the Commission’s vision of human rights education in Australia?	3
2.1	<i>The Commission’s mission and strategic goals focus on making human rights part of everyday Australian life</i>	4
2.2	<i>What is the Commission’s strategic goal for human rights education?5</i>	5
(a)	<i>The Commission’s three-year targets on education.....</i>	<i>6</i>
(b)	<i>The Commission’s success measures on education</i>	<i>6</i>
(c)	<i>The Commission’s broad activities to help achieve its education targets .</i>	<i>7</i>
3	How could the Commission improve human rights education in Australia?	7
3.1	<i>Education activities focussing on schools.....</i>	9
3.2	<i>Education activities focussing on young people (outside of school) .</i>	10
3.3	<i>Education activities focussing on the needs of disadvantaged communities</i>	11
3.4	<i>Education activities focussing on the general community</i>	12
3.5	<i>Education activities focussing on government decision-makers.....</i>	13
3.6	<i>Education activities focussing on business.....</i>	14
3.7	<i>Education activities focussing on regional, rural and remote communities</i>	14
4	Conclusion	15

1 Introduction

1. The Australian Human Rights Commission (the Commission) made a detailed submission to the National Human Rights Consultation Committee (the Committee) in June 2009.
2. Subsequently, the Committee asked for some further specific information about the Commission's potential role in the delivery of human rights education.
3. In the international arena Australia has committed to a greater emphasis on human rights education under the World Program for Human Rights Education and within the program under the UN Second International Decade for the World's Indigenous People.
4. On a domestic level there is a clear need for a much greater national focus on human rights education. If Australia enacts a Human Rights Act then there will be a natural focus for that education. However, even in the absence of a Human Rights Act, Australia needs to improve the awareness and understanding of human rights in Australia.
5. Better human rights awareness will help facilitate the social inclusion of many of Australia's disadvantaged and at-risk communities. It will help all Australians understand what it means to respect the dignity of every person and it will provide a language for those people fighting to be treated with the respect that they deserve.
6. However, comprehensive human rights education in Australia cannot be achieved by any one section of society. It must be done through collaboration and partnership between government, civil society, business and individuals willing to share their story. The Commission is very practised in bringing these different communities together to identify needs and gaps in understanding and to find relevant and practical ways to address them.
7. This supplementary submission outlines how the Commission could help achieve better human rights education by focussing on a broad range of people in Australian society. The supplementary submission briefly sets out what the Commission would like to achieve through better human rights education in Australia. It gives examples of what the Commission currently does and what it could do to deliver human rights education in Australia given the appropriate funding.

2 What is the Commission's vision of human rights education in Australia?

8. In September 2008 the Commission launched its new Strategic Plan and vision for human rights in Australia.
9. The Commission's new vision is that human rights are enjoyed by everyone – no matter who they are or what their circumstances; everywhere – no matter

where they live; every day – all of the time. Hence our vision statement – *human rights: everyone, everywhere, everyday.*

10. This vision statement evolved out of the recognition that many Australians do not understand how human rights are relevant to their everyday lives. The Commission believes that it is our job to try and rectify this situation.
11. Human rights education – viewed in its broadest sense – is a fundamental tool for achieving this goal.

2.1 The Commission's mission and strategic goals focus on making human rights part of everyday Australian life

12. The Commission's mission is to lead the promotion and protection of human rights in Australia by:
 - making human rights values part of everyday life and language
 - empowering all people to understand and exercise their human rights
 - working with individuals, community, business and government to inspire action
 - keeping government accountable to national and international human rights standards
 - securing an Australian Human Rights Act.
13. To achieve our vision of human rights for *everyone, everywhere, everyday* and our mission, the Commission has identified five broad strategic goals.

Leadership

We exercise a leadership role in human rights in Australia by being visible, courageous and influential on human rights issues.

Empowerment

We support and inspire others to engage in meaningful activity on human rights.

Education

We assist all people in Australia to understand and exercise their rights and respect the rights of others.

Monitoring

We hold individuals, organisations and government responsible for their human rights obligations.

Innovation

We have a collaborative, innovative and supportive work culture that enhances the quality and impact of our work.

14. One of the Commission's strategic goals is specifically focused on education. However, in one sense or another, all five of the Commission's goals relate to education.
15. For example, as part of the Commission's *Leadership* goal the Commission seeks to influence government, business, courts, media and individuals to make human rights part of their lexicon.
16. A fundamental element of the Commission's *Empowerment* goal is to work closely with community organisations and leaders to engage those communities on human rights issues and work with them to spread the human rights message throughout their communities. The Commission used this strategy in the community workshops it held to encourage participation in the National Human Rights Consultation.
17. Further, part of the Commission's *Monitoring* goal is to identify areas where the government's human rights performance has fallen below the minimum standards and recommend to government how it can address those weaknesses.

2.2 What is the Commission's strategic goal for human rights education?

18. The Commission's *Education* strategic goal focuses on how the Commission could *assist all people in Australia to understand and exercise their rights and respect the rights of others*.
19. The Commission uses the term 'human rights education' broadly.
20. The Commission's use of the term definitely includes specific education on human rights in schools. The development of human rights materials tailored to high school curricula has been an area of great focus for the Commission, as discussed further in section 3.1 below.
21. However there are ways to reach young people other than through the school curriculum, including through social networking tools on the internet. The Commission has already started experimenting with these tools.
22. The Commission has also started developing materials specifically targeted to young people. For example, the Commission developed a specific guide to the National Human Rights Consultation for young people. We also worked very closely with youth communities around the country to make sure that young people had the opportunity to find out about the Consultation and participate in the process.
23. However human rights education should not be limited to schools or young people. It is very important that the general community – urban, regional,

rural and remote – has a better understanding of what human rights are, how human rights are relevant to their own lives and their community and what it would take to make sure that every person gives and receives respect for rights.

24. It is also important that communities which may be disproportionately subjected to human rights violations better understand the human rights that are relevant to their circumstances and the tools they can use to assert to their rights and entitlements.
25. The Commission is committed to taking a central role in developing and delivering broad human rights education initiatives throughout Australia.
26. In particular, the Commission wants to develop a state-of-the-art website that is accessible to all people in Australia. This means that the website must be simple to use, the language must be easy to understand and, most importantly, the topics covered must be relevant to all our communities.
27. The Commission is also committed to developing new strategies to reach audiences that would not typically visit the Commission's website nor seek the Commission's assistance in any other way.

(a) *The Commission's three-year targets on education*

28. The Commission has set itself a number of targets to achieve by 2011, including:
 - people from diverse sections of the Australian community come to the Commission's website when they want to learn about human rights
 - the Commission's human rights message regularly appears in mainstream and new media
 - the Commission's human rights message reaches and engages young people
 - the Commission's human rights message reaches the business and community sectors
 - people from diverse sections of the Australian community understand how the Commission's complaint process can be used to voice and resolve human rights disputes.

(b) *The Commission's success measures on education*

29. The Commission has also identified success measures to help identify whether we have reached those targets. For example:
 - an annual increase in the number of unique visitors to our website
 - an annual increase in the number of people signing up to our mailing lists and RSS feeds

- an annual increase in the number of people participating in our electronic forums
- the human rights issues important to the Commission are frequently discussed on commercial television and radio, major metropolitan newspapers, and new media
- the human rights issues important to the Commission are frequently discussed in electronic forums used by young people
- an increased understanding of the relevance of human rights in the business and community sectors
- national, state and territory curriculum frameworks include material about protection of human rights in Australia
- the Commission is a primary resource on human rights issues for educators in schools, universities and community groups
- there is increased knowledge and use of the Commission's complaint services across diverse sections of the Australian community.

(c) *The Commission's broad activities to help achieve its education targets*

30. In order to meet the Commission's three-year targets, the Commission has identified some broad activities to undertake in the future, including:

- promoting our website to groups and individuals we do not currently capture
- improving our website design, function and content so that it is accessible, interactive and appealing to all people
- developing and implementing new strategies to get our human rights message into mainstream and new media
- developing and implementing new strategies to target young people
- working with business and community sectors to develop effective education strategies
- developing new strategies to engage education stakeholders who can influence the content and delivery of curriculum frameworks
- developing and implementing strategies to ensure an accessible and effective complaint service.

31. The planning and delivery of many of these activities is already underway, as discussed in section 3 below.

3 How could the Commission improve human rights education in Australia?

32. Almost everything that the Commission does involves elements of human rights education.

33. The Commission raises awareness about human rights among the government and the general community through its core functions, including:

- developing teaching and learning activities for students and teachers
- undertaking national inquiries and reports to identify human rights problems, making recommendations on how to rectify those problems and discussing those problems in the media and community
- conducting conciliation and training to help prevent and resolve human rights and discrimination complaints
- engaging the community through media (media releases, speeches, editorial and opinion pieces, television and radio interviews and features)
- producing accessible, expert, credible and comprehensive human rights publications and resources
- inviting the community to celebrate the human rights achievements of individuals and organisations by hosting the annual Human Rights Medals and Awards
- inviting the community to learn about topical human rights issues through seminars
- delivering community programs (such as the National Indigenous Legal Advocacy Course discussed further below)
- making legal submissions to courts and policy submissions to parliamentary committees, to help inform courts and parliament about relevant human rights issues.

34. While the Commission intends to continue these activities, the Commission also wants to be highly creative in the way that it thinks about human rights education in Australia.

35. For example, with appropriate funding, the Commission would work with social marketing experts to help design and deliver education strategies that engage the general community beyond 'the usual suspects'.

36. The Commission also intends to work closely with community partners to develop new and innovative ways to:

- identify the most pressing human rights problems relevant to those communities, and
- design the best ways to help those communities understand the relevance of human rights to their lives and respect the rights of those around them.

37. The following sections include information about the range of education activities that the Commission is engaged in, and what the Commission would do to increase the impact and reach of these activities with appropriate funding. It also provides examples of further, innovative activities the Commission could undertake with the benefit of additional resources.

3.1 Education activities focussing on schools

38. In Australia, there is no cohesive approach by state and territory education departments to the delivery of human rights education at the primary and secondary levels, despite this being the focus of the first phase of the United Nations [World Programme for Human Rights Education](#) (WPHRE).
39. While 'human rights' does not exist as a discrete subject in any state or territory curricula, an understanding of rights and responsibilities – and their relevance to young people as active citizens – is an identified learning outcome in a range of secondary school subjects.
40. The Commission has a strong track record of working with Australia's state and territory education departments, non-government school systems, boards of studies, organisations and facilitators to promote an understanding of and commitment to human rights education.
41. The Commission also plays an ongoing lobbying role to ensure 'human rights' is covered within curricula and in school policies and programs.
42. The Commission's Human Rights Education Program includes a range of interactive, resource-rich, web-based learning modules for use in the classroom with students aged 10 - 17. The Commission has linked these core human rights education modules to curriculum frameworks from education departments across each Australian state and territory.
43. The program is guided by a clear set of [education principles and learning outcomes](#). The Commission's approach supports the goals and direction of the WPHRE.¹
44. The Commission has also established links between the activities and curriculum points in a range of key learning areas, such as Studies of Society and Environment (especially Aboriginal Studies and Australian Studies), English, Civics and Citizenship/Discovering Democracy, Geography, History and Drama.
45. The Commission has [online human rights education resources](#), which receive more than 1 million page views per annum.
46. The Commission also maintains ongoing communication with teachers, schools and education bodies through an e-mail distribution list with approximately 6,000 subscribers.
47. Many schools, principals and individual teachers have made concerted efforts to integrate the Commission's human rights education resources into their teaching practice, classroom activities and school communities.

¹ See Australian Human Rights Commission, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/education/training/programme.htm> (viewed 23 July 2009).

48. The Commission is currently revising and redeveloping its schools education activities and modules into one 'Human Rights Education Resource', which will provide high quality, informative human rights education resources for teachers and students. This resource will bring together the education materials developed by the Commission over the past 10 years. It will provide comprehensive and easy to use guidance for teachers and students on a variety of human issues like the stolen generations, refugees, multiculturalism, racism and other important discrimination and human rights issues.
49. Once finalised, the Human Rights Education Resource will be available in various accessible formats on a newly-updated 'teachers' section of the Commission's website.
50. The Commission also intends to produce a new CD/DVD which will be available free of charge so that all teachers or students around Australia can access the materials, irrespective of financial resources or internet access.
51. The Commission would like to expand the reach and impact of its school-focused human rights education work. For example, the Commission could print sufficient copies of the new CD/DVD to distribute to every primary and secondary school in Australia. The Commission could also market and promote the resource to schools, libraries, education centres and conferences.
52. The Commission would also like to revise and update the existing 'students' section of its website to include a range of new media and interactive options such as audio, video, games, and web links. This would make the Commission's education resources even more appealing and engaging for students.

3.2 *Education activities focussing on young people (outside of school)*

53. The Commission has recently commenced work on a range of strategies to engage young people outside of school.
54. These include the recent development of pages on *facebook* and *MySpace*, and a *YouTube* channel.
55. The Commission also facilitated online discussions and provided information relevant to the National Human Rights Consultation on youth portals such as [Heywire](#) and [JustAct](#). Commission staff also participated in discussions about human rights in the *e-festival of ideas*, an online youth conference run by Vibewire.
56. Further, the Commission facilitated the incorporation of information about the National Human Rights Consultation on websites such as *ActNow*, a social action project that is part of the Inspire Foundation.
57. The Commission produced a specific guide to support the participation of children and young people in the National Human Rights Consultation. The guide, titled [Let's Talk About Rights](#), supported a national series of

workshops with children and young people and their advocates to encourage them to participate in the Consultation.

58. The Commission would like to expand the reach and impact of its education activities for children and young people. In particular, the Commission could significantly expand its use of new media to reach children and young people.

3.3 Education activities focussing on the needs of disadvantaged communities

59. The Commission has experience in developing many specific human rights education initiatives to address the needs of communities facing particular human rights issues. The following are a very small sample of those activities.

60. In 2007 the Commission developed and delivered training aimed at preventing family violence in Indigenous communities. Information about this training is set out in section 23.3. of the Commission's main submission to the Consultation.

61. The Commission also maintains nationally accredited training courses (at the Cert III and IV and Diploma levels) on indigenous legal issues. The [National Indigenous Legal Advocacy Courses \(NILAC\)](#) aim to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with the competency and skills to work in a legal environment and to understand their human rights.

62. An important outcome of the NILAC program is to improve the legal skills, capacity and training opportunities for Indigenous people, in response to Recommendation 212 of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

63. The Commission has also developed resources focussed on making sure that buildings are accessible to people with physical disabilities. The resources provide information and guidance to designers, builders, planners, certifiers, building managers and access consultants about access to buildings and services for people with disabilities. These resources include:

- [The Good, the Bad and the Ugly](#), a look at 14 examples of the most common problems and misinterpretations in applying the Building Code of Australia in the area of access.
- [Guidelines on access to buildings and services](#), which help to identify possible barriers to buildings and services and direct people to resources and expertise to address those barriers.

64. The Commission has an [education and partnerships program](#) focussed on working with and for Muslim Communities. Just one of the projects within that program includes the recently launched English as a Second Language teaching resource – [Its your right!](#). The resources use human rights stories to help new migrants learn English.

65. The Commission's major inquiries and reports are always accompanied by community guides which focus on translating the detailed investigations into easily accessible information designed to educate both the affected communities and the community-at-large.
66. The Commission would like to further develop and tailor its education strategies to deliver the best possible programs in relation to the needs of disadvantaged communities as they evolve.

3.4 Education activities focussing on the general community

67. The Commission produces a range of educational resources for the general community. One of the Commission's most successful publications is [*Face the Facts*](#), which provides some questions and answers about Indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees and asylum seekers. This publication has been very widely distributed. For example, the NSW Fire Brigade has ordered bulk quantities of *Face the Facts* to distribute to fire stations throughout the state to educate their officers about myths and stereotypes around Indigenous peoples and migrants.
68. Sport provides an excellent vehicle to reach the broader community. The actions of sporting teams can help to establish norms of behaviour for the rest of society, and particularly for young people. The Commission has experience in working in partnership with sporting organisations to promote and act on messages concerning human rights.
69. In 2004, the Commission launched the [*Voices of Australia*](#) project in conjunction with the National Rugby League's (NRL). A selection of NRL stars shared their stories to encourage greater understanding and friendship between people of different backgrounds. The project included a poster which was distributed at all major NRL games. The [poster](#) is available online.
70. In 2007, the Commission produced a report titled: [*What's the Score? A survey of cultural diversity and racism in Australian sport*](#). The report provides a basis for governments and sporting organisations to consider future policy strategies aimed at addressing racism within sport, and promoting inclusive and non-discriminatory attitudes among players, supporters and the public.
71. The Commission is currently working with the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and the Play by the Rules (PBTR) initiative to provide resources and training for professional and community sporting organisations about discrimination and harassment in sport and how to investigate and manage these types of claims.
72. With adequate resources, the Commission could further pursue this connection between sport and community human rights education. It would also explore other similar ways to engage everyday Australians in a conversation about the relevance of human rights to their lives.
73. Compelling documentary films can also be a way to reach the general community with important human rights messages. The Commission has recently tried this strategy with the film *Yajilarra*.

74. In 2007 the Sex Discrimination Commissioner met a group of Aboriginal women at Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia. Their community had experienced 13 suicides in 13 months. Reports of family violence and child abuse were commonplace and alcohol consumption was rising at an alarming rate.
75. To support the leadership of the women of Fitzroy Crossing and elevate their voices, a partnership was established between the Marninwarntikura Womens' Resource Centre, the George Institute at the University of Sydney (medical research), and the Australian Human Rights Commission to create a short documentary recording the women's story.
76. The short film, *Yajilarra*, tells the story of the impact of alcohol on the community of Fitzroy Crossing. It details how, due to the efforts of the community and led by June Oscar and Emily Carter, the women were able to find their own solutions and forge a different future for their children.
77. The Commission and the Australian Government showcased the film on 4 March 2009 at a Side Event of the 53rd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York. This was the first time that Indigenous women had formally presented at the CSW.
78. The Commission would like to spread the message in this film to general communities by screening it around Australia to indigenous and non-indigenous communities.
79. With appropriate funding, the Commission could expand the reach of its current activities and engage in a range of new initiatives to raise the awareness of human rights issues across the Australian community.

3.5 Education activities focussing on government decision-makers

80. One of the Commission's core functions is to recommend how government can ensure the protection and promotion of human rights through improvements to legislation, policies and programs. As set out in section 24.6 of our main submission, currently there is no obligation on the government to respond to our recommendations contained in our reports to Parliament. The Commission has recommended that the Attorney-General should be required to table a response in Parliament within a fixed period indicating how the government intends to address the Commission's recommendations.
81. A requirement upon the government to respond to Commission recommendations would assist the Commission's efforts to educate government decision-makers about human rights concerns. It would encourage enhanced dialogue between the Commission and government about the protection of human rights in Australia.
82. Whether or not Australia adopts a Human Rights Act, the Commission is ideally placed to deliver training to public servants and government decision-makers about human rights and the specific responsibilities of public authorities.

3.6 Education activities focussing on business

83. The Commission is committed to educating the business sector about human rights. The Commission has developed four short fact sheets setting out five basic steps towards integrating human rights into everyday business practices. The [business and human rights fact sheets](#) explain how human rights are relevant to Australian companies and sets out the business case for integrating human rights. They include information specific to the Australian finance sector, the Australian mining and resources sector and the Australian retail and manufacturing sectors.

84. In December 2004, the Commission launched an information resource for employers, titled [Good Practice, Good Business](#). In response to feedback from employers, the Commission is currently updating the resource with new information and making existing content more relevant and accessible.

85. The updated *Good Practice, Good Business* resource will:

- provide employers with concise, easy-to-read information about their legal obligations to prevent discrimination and harassment in the workplace
- include information about specific workplace issues of concern to employers, such as accommodation of people with disability, sexual harassment, flexible working arrangements and criminal records
- integrate relevant information from a range of reports and publications on the Commission's website
- promote the link between good employment practices and improved risk management
- be available online and in CD-Rom format which will allow organisations to use these resources on their staff intranets.

86. The Commission has committed in its strategic plan to do further work on business and human rights. The Commission would like to more broadly market *Good Practice, Good Business* to business and use it as the launching pad for more comprehensive engagement with the corporate sector.

3.7 Education activities focussing on regional, rural and remote communities

87. The Commission would like to develop a human rights education program specifically targeted at rural, regional and remote areas. People from such communities are often more vulnerable to human rights problems because of their isolation from mainstream services. They are also less likely to receive assistance for those problems because of their isolation.

88. For example, with the appropriate funding, the Commission could create a specialist education team to deliver practical, accessible and relevant human

rights education resources and programs to regional, rural and remote communities.

89. The education program would help foster greater social inclusion by identifying those human rights factors which might exclude certain people from participating in local communities (like racial discrimination) and suggesting practical ways of resolving those problems.
90. Given the dispersed populations in these communities, this project would necessarily include using innovative electronic delivery mechanisms. This approach would link with the government's broadband access goals and support directions towards digital learning in education.
91. However, not all communities will have access to the internet. Further, the method of delivery should be designed to meet the specific learning needs of the receiving group, be they Indigenous peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities or other groups. Thus, the Commission would work in partnership with relevant community groups to tailor appropriate delivery mechanisms.
92. Further, the team would focus on working with curriculum boards, educators, community groups and local government to build long term human rights education capacity within the community. The team could also work with local councils to help them identify some of the human rights issues in the community and some long term strategies to address them.

4 Conclusion

93. Human rights awareness and understanding is a vital element to creating a human rights and socially inclusive community.
94. As Australia's national human rights institution, the Commission has the unique expertise and experience to develop and deliver the range of human rights education initiatives needed to meet the needs of different communities.
95. In particular, the Commission has the credibility and experience to bring together, and work with, different sectors of the community in order to design and deliver education programs which are most relevant to particular communities.
96. The Commission has identified human rights education as a key strategic goal, and the Commission is committed to developing innovative ways of expanding the reach and impact of its human rights education activities.
97. As a matter of financial reality, the Commission is somewhat constrained in the range of education activities it can practically pursue in the near future. However, with appropriate funding, the Commission would be in a position to quickly and significantly progress its human rights education activities with the scale and innovation required to help create a stronger and more vibrant human rights culture in Australia.