

Handout: Rights Protected by Acts of Parliament

An Act of Parliament might include a human right as part of its content. For example, the Commonwealth's *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* establishes the right of people with physical disabilities to expect to be treated like other people and imposes an obligation on people (such as employers) to create conditions for that to happen.

Power of Acts of Parliament

An Act of Parliament can be used to adopt or accept in Australia the obligations set out in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and make them law. You will find the principles of the Declaration spread through several Commonwealth Acts of Parliament, such as the Sex Discrimination Act, the Racial Discrimination Act, the Disability Discrimination Act, the Privacy Act, and many others.

An Act of Parliament can also be used to create bodies which can help to enforce these rights, such as the Ombudsman or the Australian Human Rights Commission (formerly the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission). Look at how these bodies work.

Ombudsman

There is an Ombudsman in all Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, except the Northern Territory. The Ombudsman's main human rights role is to provide an independent and expert check on the actions taken by government departments, to make sure that they are legal and reasonable exercises of their powers toward individuals.

The Ombudsman reports to parliament, and makes recommendations about human rights situations which it has investigated.

Australian Human Rights Commission

The Australian Human Rights Commission is a body set up by the Commonwealth Parliament to promote respect for and observance of the human rights of all people in Australia and their access to equal opportunity.

It operates in a variety of human rights areas, such as Aboriginal social justice, equal opportunity, gender discrimination, disability discrimination, and privacy.