

2 February 2012

Assistant Secretary
International Human Rights and Anti Discrimination Branch
Attorney General's Department
Robert Garran Offices
3-5 national Circuit
BARTON ACT 2600

Email: antidiscrimination@ag.gov.au

Dear Sir / Madam

RE: CONSOLIDATION OF COMMONWEALTH ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAWS

Hume City Council is pleased to provide a response to the Australian Government's *Consolidation of Commonwealth Anti-Discrimination Laws Discussion Paper*, released on 22 September 2011.

Hume City Council's commitment to social justice and human rights has been well-documented, and most clearly stated in the Hume City Social Justice Charter 2001. This charter has guided the work of Council, including the development of a Citizens' Bill of Rights in 2004.

Hume City Council was the first local government in Australia to develop a Citizens' Bill of Rights, which has been incorporated in the Social Justice Charter (2007). The Charter was developed after extensive community consultation and consideration of *The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic).

This letter responds to the overall principles outlined in the Discussion Paper, rather than addressing specific questions. Council fully supports any changes to legislation that make it easier for community members to understand their rights under the law. Council is pleased that the Australian Government is taking seriously the need to reduce the uncertainties and legal complexity of the current anti-discrimination laws.

A crucial statement is in the Executive Summary, point 10: 'The Government has made it clear that this exercise will not lead to a reduction in existing protections in federal anti-discrimination legislation' Council fully supports this review and consolidation of the legislation, with this statement as a proviso.

In consolidating these pieces of legislation, consideration should be made to standardise protection against discrimination by matching the highest standards of protection in the existing legislations.

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Statements from Hume City Council's Social Justice Charter outline Council's approach to equality and human rights:

'Australians rightly expect full access to our 'human rights', often without the understanding that our rights are not generally outlined, nor specifically protected, under law. The Hume City Council Charter defines 'social justice' in an endeavour to improve the experience of citizens and visitors, particularly those experiencing disadvantage.

'Every citizen of Hume City is free and equal in dignity and in rights and is entitled to aspire to the quality of life that allows them to freely realise their potential.

'Hume City Council affirms that each and every one of our citizens and people who work or visit Hume City, have universal, inalienable human rights. These rights are recognised under international, Australian and Victorian law, to varying degrees, including those rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.'¹

Council thanks the Australian Government for the opportunity to provide a response to the *Consolidation of Commonwealth Anti-Discrimination Laws Discussion Paper*. In line with Hume City Council's position on Social Justice and Human Rights, Council supports the principles in the review with the aim of bringing about greater clarity for the community. This legislation is crucial for vulnerable community members to ensure their rights are protected, especially when and if they experience discrimination. Council looks forward to seeing the outcomes of the review and how it will provide additional benefits for the Australian community.

Yours sincerely

MARGARITA CADDICK
DIRECTOR CITY COMMUNITIES

¹ Hume City Council Social Justice Charter (updated 2007)