



# AUSTRALIAN LAWYERS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

## President's Report 2025/2026

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### Acknowledgement

ALHR acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the lands, rivers and seas on which we work, live and travel across Australia as the first people of this country. We recognise that the land belonging to these peoples was never ceded. We pay our deep respect to Elders past and present. We recognise First Nations peoples' cultural authority and rights to self-determination. We also recognise that when First Nations people and communities receive the respect and support they deserve, they have a proud history of designing and implementing robust, holistic and culturally safe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led solutions.

### Executive Summary

It is my honour and privilege to present this President's Report for Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (**ALHR**) in 2026. Since my election to the presidency in 2024, I have endeavoured to build upon the extraordinary foundations laid by my predecessors to advance ALHR's standing as Australia's foremost network of lawyers committed to the promotion and protection of international human rights standards in Australia.

Globally, we have witnessed a troubling erosion of multilateralism and an emboldening of anti-rights forces. Here at home, Australia's human rights record has faced international scrutiny, most notably through our Universal Periodic Review before the United Nations Human Rights Council.

I am deeply proud of what ALHR has accomplished responding to human rights issues in our society. ALHR continues to accept no funding from governments or political organisations. Everything we do rests on the generosity, expertise, and commitment of our members and the goodwill of those who believe in our mission. This independence is not merely a structural feature of ALHR, it is our strength. Our breakfast fundraisers have become an important annual event to highlight our work and raise the voices of people devoted to specialist areas of human rights. I discuss our last fundraiser later in this report.

Here at ALHR we are all very troubled by far right anti-human rights narratives that seek to divide our communities and wind back human rights standards. We are committed to standing up for human rights and the rule of law, steadfast in the belief that human rights provide the guardrails to unite our communities behind shared values like dignity and compassion.

### The International Context

2025 and 2026 have been years of heightened international significance for human rights. Australia's Universal Periodic Review (**UPR**) at the United Nations Human Rights Council saw more than 120 countries call upon the Australian Government to better protect the rights of First Nations people, children and refugees, to implement a Human Rights Act, and to take stronger action on gender-based violence.

ALHR contributed to the Joint UPR Report submitted to the UN in July 2025 on behalf of the Australian NGO Coalition, a group of 170 organisations coordinated by the Human Rights Law Centre, Kingsford Legal Centre, Indigenous Peoples Organisation Australia, and Community Legal Centres Australia. We were grateful for the opportunity to be one of several lead authors of the Constitutional, Legislative and Institutional Framework and Democratic Freedoms Sections of the Report and to contribute to the section on Women.

ALHR's Women and Girls' Rights Committee also submitted a UPR shadow report focused on providing further depth on a number of key women's and girls' human rights issues in Australia. ALHR's Women and Girls' Rights shadow report recommendations were cited numerous times in the summary report prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ahead of Australia's UPR appearance.

The UPR outcome validated the concerns raised by ALHR and over 170 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, human rights, legal, disability, refugee, LGBTIQ+ and climate organisations.

Australia also appeared before the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) on 17 February 2026 in Geneva to review its sixth periodic report on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The committee recommended increasing social security payments to ensure an adequate standard of living and called on Australia to adopt a human rights-based approach to ensure access to adequate, affordable, and culturally appropriate housing, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The committee recommended that Australia develop a national strategy to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are genuinely consulted and able to participate in decisions affecting them.

There is much work to be done following these two major reviews of Australia's human rights performance.

In January 2026, the UN Committee against Torture delivered a landmark ruling holding that Australia had breached its obligations under the Convention Against Torture by failing to protect an Iranian asylum seeker from torture and ill-treatment during prolonged offshore detention in Papua New Guinea and subsequent onshore detention.

Globally, human rights observers are concerned by predatory attacks on multilateralism, international law and civil society. ALHR stands firm against this tide. Australia's participation in the international human rights system is non-negotiable.

## **Advocacy Highlights**

### **Human Rights Acts**

The campaign for comprehensive human rights legislation across Australia has never carried greater momentum, and ALHR has been at the forefront of this historic movement.

ALHR is proud to contribute to the campaign for a National Human Rights Act as a member of the Advisory Committee and we commend the Human Rights Law Centre's work leading this campaign.

ALHR is also proud to co-convene campaigns across three states for the introduction of Human Rights Acts, co-founded by ALHR's past President and current Vice President Kerry Weste.



## **Human Rights Act for NSW Alliance**

NSW is lagging significantly behind its neighbours in Victoria, the ACT and Queensland where Human Rights Acts have been operating for many years.

Established in 2015, the Human Rights Act for NSW Alliance (HRA4NSW), co-convened by ALHR and the NSW Council for Civil Liberties, is now supported by 130 legal and community organisations, faith bodies and trade unions, with a steering committee chaired by ALHR and consisting of 18 leading NSW organisations.

Over the past 12 months the HRA4NSW campaign has seen significant joint civil society co-ordination, including a set of Key principles for a Human Rights Act for NSW endorsed by more than 33 legal, human rights, disability, faith bodies and community organisations.

23 October 2025, Member for Newtown Jenny Leong MP introduced the Human Rights Bill 2025 as a private member's bill. The HRA4NSW Alliance has undertaken considerable advocacy calling for the Bill to refer to an inquiry for comprehensive community consultation. On behalf of the HRA4NSW Alliance ALHR led an open letter calling for an inquiry which was signed by 117 organisations and experts, an International Women's Day statement endorsed by 21 organisations, led delegations to meet with members of the NSW Parliament, held community and Union briefings, co-hosted a school student forum and supported members of the NSW community to write to their local members to call for an inquiry.

In March 2026, the HRA4NSW Alliance celebrated a significant campaign win with the Human Rights Bill 2025 referred to the NSW Parliament's Community Services Committee for inquiry. The Alliance is now hard at work preparing materials to support as many organisations and individuals as possible to submit to the inquiry.

This consultation, with the entire NSW community, offers us a chance to come together and have a very unifying conversation about returning dignity and power to everyday people, and helping government officials to make fair and caring decisions.

It will help NSW to face big challenges like the cost-of-living crisis, housing crisis, domestic violence, equitable timely access to healthcare and inclusive education for all children in a way that leaves no one behind.

I commend the tireless work of my Vice President Kerry Weste for her leadership on this front which has been instrumental in achieving . Her work led to a the NSW parliamentary inquiry into a Human Rights Act



### **Western Australia for a Human Rights Act Coalition**

ALHR is similarly proud to co-convene and auspice the joint civil society campaign for a Human Rights Act in Western Australia (WA4HRA) together with the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia Ltd. The Coalition is now supported by 38 organisations working across Western Australia. The campaign has held several significant events and developed key resources for community and political engagement over the past twelve months and is moving from strength to strength thanks to the generous and committed work of organisations involved in its steering committee and working groups. ALHR particularly acknowledges and thanks Chloe Wood, Manager of the Civil and Human Rights Unit at the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia (ALSWA) for her immense contributions to the WA4HRA Coalition and similarly thanks Dr Jackie Mapulanga, ALHR's WA Convenor, for her contributions.



### **Human Rights Act for South Australia Alliance**

ALHR is extremely fortunate to work with the Rights Resource Network SA and the South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) in a joint civil society campaign for a Human Rights Act for South Australia (HRA4SA).. The campaign celebrated a significant win with the establishment of a Social Development Committee Inquiry into the Potential for a Human Rights Act for South Australia. Following a 16 month inquiry the Committee delivered its report in April 2025 recommending that South Australia introduce a comprehensive Human Rights Act. Since that time there has been an election in South SAustralia which has seen the Government returned and the focus of the campaign has now shifted to calling on the Parliament to take steps to implement the Social Development Committee's recommendations. ALHR extends particular thanks to Associate Professor Sarah Moulds, professor Matthew Stubs and Ross Womersley for their collaboration on this advocacy.

Looking ahead, ALHR is also very excited to be cementing plans for contributions to the Democracy Innovation Festival in Adelaide in August 2026.

### **Australian Capital Territory**

In the Australian Capital Territory, ALHR strongly supported the Human Rights (Housing) Amendment Bill 2025, the passage of which saw the ACT lead the nation as the first jurisdiction to recognise the right to adequate housing in its Human Rights Act. Claudia Robinson, Co-Chair of ALHR's Human Rights Act Committee, said that recognising the right to housing would unify and reinforce existing ACT policy and legislative frameworks. ALHR also continues to call on the ACT parliament to deliver in full on our calls for reform as part of the No Rights Without Remedy Campaign. This joint civil society campaign with ACTCOSS, the Australian Council for Civil Liberties, Canberra Community Law and the Human Rights Law Centre, was led by the late Sophie Trevitt. While we celebrated a major win with the ACT Government implementing a confidential conciliation mechanism through the Human Rights Commission, there is still work to be done. The Government is yet to introduce the

second, vital step of the campaign: referring unresolved complaints to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT). We continue to advocate for this vital reform.

## **Victoria**

In Victoria, ALHR wrote to the Premier, Attorney-General and members of the Legislative Council calling on them to support the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (Right to Housing) Bill 2025 (Vic), strongly endorsing the full incorporation of the right to adequate housing into Victoria's human rights framework. Unfortunately the amendment was not passed by the Parliament but ALHR will continue to call for reforms to strengthen the human rights protections and improve access to remedies under the Charter, particularly as it celebrates a milestone 20th anniversary this year.

## **Disability Rights**

### **Welcoming Disability Campaign**



ALHR is proud to continue its work leading the Welcoming Disability Campaign in partnership with Down Syndrome Australia. Established in 2020, the Welcoming Disability campaign responds to ongoing discrimination faced by people with disabilities or health issues applying to come to Australia as temporary or permanent residents. It is now supported by more than 100 organisations across Australia,

Welcoming Disability continues to lead an important national conversation on the way prospective migrants and visitors to Australia who have health or disability-related issues are treated. The Migration Health Requirement (MHR) is based on outmoded, stigmatising and arbitrary assumptions that people with disabilities or health conditions, and their families, are only a cost burden to Australian society, rather than a net asset to our communities, schools and workplaces. Welcoming Disability believes it's time to end discrimination against people with disabilities and health conditions in Australia's migration practices.

In October 2025 Welcoming Disability lodged submission to the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department review of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), as recommended by the Disability Royal Commission. addressing the current discriminatory exemption of the Migration Act and Regulations from the DDA. Our submission included seven key recommendations and was endorsed by 88 organisations.

We are concerned that the federal government's review of the Disability Discrimination Act and implementation of Disability Royal Commission recommendations directly relevant to the MHR appears to have stalled. Welcoming Disability continues to advocate strongly for reform.

The Campaign has also recently worked with FORE who have produced an updated policy brief.

ALHR thanks Darryl Steff CEO of Down Syndrome Australia and Dr Jan Gothhard the Welcoming Disability Campaign Migration Policy Advisor for the ongoing work and collaboration with ALHR on this important call for human rights reform.

### **Attorney-General's Department Review of the Disability Discrimination Act (Cth)**

ALHR's Disability Rights Committee also led a comprehensive ALHR submission to the Attorney-General's Department Review of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). The DDA

was a landmark piece of legislation, but it introduced a formal equality approach that has, over time, proven inadequate and has, as noted in General Comment No. 6 of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, entrenched inequality for different groups of people with disability.

ALHR's submission outlines a comprehensive roadmap for reforming the DDA to shift its foundation from formal to substantive equality. Achieving this requires a fundamental modernisation of the Act's core mechanisms and principles. Central to this transformation is shifting toward a more modern and intersectional understanding of disability discrimination. The law must recognise that people experience discrimination in unique and compounded ways based on the intersection of multiple disabilities ('internal intersectionality') or the combination of disability with other protected attributes such as race, sex, or Indigeneity ('external intersectionality'). By expressly providing for claims based on these intersecting identities, the DDA can move beyond a one-size-fits-all model and deliver justice that reflects lived experience. A key function of modern discrimination law is its role in promoting the attitudinal change needed to achieve substantive equality. The current reactive, complaints-based model places the entire burden of enforcement on individuals who have already suffered harm, doing little to shift the culture of organisations or prevent discrimination from occurring. The reforms proposed by ALHR are designed to use the law as a lever for this essential cultural shift. This involves replacing the outdated comparator test for direct discrimination with a 'detriment test' that centres the complainant's lived experience, and amending the burden of proof to rectify the profound information asymmetry that currently favours respondents. Crucial to this endeavour is promoting a human rights-based culture through positive duties. This transformation also demands a critical review of the DDA's exemption framework.

ALHR is deeply troubled by proposed NDIS reforms which will significantly impact the human rights of people with disability across Australia. We stand ready to support the advocacy of disability-led organisations as we face this significant challenge.

I thank Giancarlo de Vera and Harry Rutner for their contributions leading ALHR's Disability Rights Committee.

### **Women and Girls Rights Highlights**

In April and May 2026, ALHR was honoured to host a panel, "Rights by Design: Building a Regional Movement for Human Rights Acts in Oceania," at the Women Deliver 2026 Conference (WD2026), a major global gender equality summit held in Narrm (Melbourne). This event brought together experts from across Oceania to discuss the intersection of feminist advocacy and statutory human rights protection. I was honoured to attend Women Deliver on behalf of ALHR, and chair the Rights by Design panel. I thank our Women and Girls Subcommittee for their enormous work over the last year, particularly in bringing this session to Women Deliver. Thank you Dr Amira Aftab, Dr Jane Alver, Dr Tania Penovic and Helen Dalley Fisher AM, and your wider subcommittee.

### **Freedom of Assembly, Expression and Anti-Protest Laws Highlights**

ALHR's work on protest rights and freedom of assembly has been among the most visible and urgent of the period. The trend toward draconian anti-protest legislation across Australian jurisdictions is one that ALHR has tracked with growing alarm. ALHR has worked closely to support the work of organisations like Democracy Network Australia, signing a number of open letters.

In July 2025 ALHR joined with over 60 groups who have signed a letter to the NSW Premier calling for the government to facilitate the March for Humanity.

In February 2026, ALHR expressed deep concern at credible allegations of excessive use of force by police against peaceful protesters in Sydney, calling for immediate, transparent and

independent investigations. ALHR published a detailed explainer on the right to peaceful assembly and the binding human rights obligations of governments across Australia, reiterating that an assembly does not lose its peaceful character merely because it involves disruption or civil disobedience, and that isolated acts of violence by some participants cannot be attributed to the assembly as a whole.

## First Nations Rights Highlights

The Universal Periodic Review has shone a powerful international spotlight on Australia's treatment of First Nations people. ALHR's UPR shadow report specifically addressed First Nations rights, and we welcomed the more than 120 nations that called on Australia to improve protections for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

On 26 January 2026, ALHR supported the calls of First Nations organisations and leaders for the potential mass casualty event in Boorloo (Perth) to be independently investigated as a potential terrorist act and as a hate crime. During the incident, a man is alleged to have thrown an improvised explosive device at First Nations people gathered for the Invasion Day rally. ALHR affirmed that First Nations people have the right to gather, organise, and peacefully protest free from violence, and that any racially motivated attack on people exercising those rights must be treated with the full seriousness that hate crime law demands.

## Children's Rights Highlights

On 11 September, ALHR and the Centre for Law and and Social Justice at the University of Newcastle hosted our fourth annual Youth Forum. This year we brought the event to NSW Parliament with a focus on a Human Rights Act for NSW.

More than 60 students in years 9 – 11 from both regional NSW and the Sydney area attended the all-day forum. Their participation was supported by a number of volunteers from ALHR, the Australian Human Rights Commission, Community Legal Centres NSW and the University of Newcastle. Students heard from an amazing group of speakers including Graig Foster AM, Dr Leanne Smith, CEO Australian Human Rights Commission, Sarah Marland, Executive Director, Community Legal Centres NSW, Timothy Roberts, President, NSW Council for Civil Liberties, Daney Faddould, Campaign Director, Human Rights law Centre and Professor Amy Maguire, Director, Centre for Law and and Social Justice at the University of Newcastle and Kerry Weste, Vice President ALHR.

The students produced a powerful student-led statement on a Human Rights Act and ALHR and the Centre for Law and and Social Justice are making plans for launch events at NSW Parliament and in Newcastle.

ALHR also made a submission to the NSW Review of the operation of *doli incapax* in NSW for children under 14. ALHR strenuously opposed any reform to weaken the presumption of *doli incapax* and called on NSW to raise the age of criminal responsibility. We are concerned that the NSW Government's subsequent *doli incapax* reforms codified under the Children (Criminal Proceedings) and Young Offenders Legislation Amendment Act 2025 (NSW) and will continue to advocate and support the Raise the Age campaign in NSW and across Australia. I thank Kerry Weste, Kate Gauld and Dr Katherine Fallah for their work on *doli incapax*. ALHR also engaged in advocacy highlighting our alarm at data released by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOSCAR) showing a 34% increase in the number of young people in custody since June 2023. First Nations children now account for 60% of children in detention, despite making up just 8% of young people in NSW. This marks an alarming 36% increase in the jailing of First Nations children over the past two

years. ALHR also urged the Northern Territory Government not to introduce dangerously regressive measures to reintroduce the use of spit hoods on children.

ALHR has continued its important relationship with the Diplomacy Training Program at UNSW with a further series of children's rights webinars currently in the final stages of planning.

I thank Kerry Weste for her work leading this advocacy.

## **Modern Slavery Highlights**

In August 2025, ALHR made a detailed submission to the Attorney-General's Department consultation on options to strengthen the transparency framework, simplify and improve reporting, and target non-compliance with the Modern Slavery Act 2018 (Cth). Our submission addressed all 37 questions in the consultation and presented concrete recommendations. Modern slavery exists within Australian supply chains and communities, and ALHR's Business and Human Rights Subcommittee has ensured that ALHR remains at the forefront of this advocacy. Thank you to Dr Natalia Szablewska and your team for your tireless advocacy in this area.

## **Environment and Human Rights Highlights**

### **Human Rights Day Breakfast - Climate Litigation and Human Rights**

On Human Rights Day, 10 December 2025, ALHR hosted its annual fundraising breakfast at Hall and Wilcox, Level 18, 347 Kent Street, Sydney. The event brought together distinguished panellists to discuss climate change and legal rights, with a particular focus on how a positive framing of human rights as everyday essentials can drive environmental protection and ensure justice for vulnerable communities.

Speakers explored notable climate litigation cases, the challenges and opportunities of using the law to address climate change, the implications of recent amendments to NSW protest laws, and the potential for human rights legislation to shape climate litigation and environmental decision-making. The breakfast reflected this year's Human Rights Day theme of re-engaging with human rights as positive, essential and attainable lived realities — present in the food we eat, the air we breathe, the words we speak, the protections that keep us safe, and the opportunities we pursue for current and future generations.

The breakfast is one of ALHR's signature annual events and an important source of funds for our entirely voluntary organisation. ALHR accepts no funding from governments or political organisations, and events such as this are vital to sustaining our work. I extend warm thanks to Hall and Wilcox for their generous hospitality and to all who attended and supported ALHR on this important day.

Thank you Grace Cameron-Lee, Sophie Leaver, Stephanie Lee and Kerry Weste for your enormous help putting together this event.

ALHR was also proud to join with 88 community sector organisations, led by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) calling on the Australian Government to aim for net zero emissions by 2035 to reduce the harmful impacts of Climate Change.

ALHR also continued its call for the protection of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, including by highlighting the Federal Court of Australia's dismissal of the landmark case brought by two Torres Strait community leaders. Uncle Pabai Pabai and Uncle Paul Kabai argued the Australian Government had a duty of care to protect the Torres Strait Islands from climate change, and that the government had breached that duty. ALHR Vice President and Chair of Children's Rights, Kerry Weste co-authored an op-ed for Right Now Magazine with Professor Amy Maguire, Director of the Centre for Law and Social

Justice at the University of Newcastle. They argued that, in the wake of the Federal Court's decision, it's time for the Albanese Government to walk its talk on protecting people from the climate crisis by legally protecting the right to a healthy environment.

Australia now finds itself a global outlier. More than 85 percent of UN Member States, 164 out of 193, have laws that expressly recognise the right to a healthy environment and 19 out of 27 EU countries have enshrined environmental rights protections in their constitutions.

### Review of the Anti-Discrimination Act NSW

ALHR's LGBTIQ+ Rights Committee was pleased to collaborate with our team of wonderful NSW Convenors and ALHR's other thematic subcommittees in drafting a submission to the next phase of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW) (ADA)* Review in relation to the NSW Law Reform Commission Consultation paper: Unlawful Conduct. The ADA has been in force for almost half a century. While it was progressive at the time of its enactment, it is now lagging seriously behind and requires significant amendment to better promote and protect evolved societal standards and values, and to comply with Australia's international human rights law obligations.

In its submission ALHR makes key recommendations to modernise the ADA, including that the ADA be restructured for clarity, eliminating redundancy, and improving accessibility. This should include consolidating protected attributes into a concise list with uniform discrimination provisions to enhance understanding and compliance.

ALHR is currently gearing up to respond to the next round of submissions as part of this comprehensive review process.

### Response to the Bondi Beach Terror Attack

On 15 December 2025, ALHR joined the Australian community in expressing profound grief following the devastating terror attack at Bondi Beach, which targeted Jewish Australians gathered to celebrate the first night of Hanukkah. We extended our deepest condolences to the victims, their families and all those affected by this horrific act. ALHR continues to affirm that everyone, of all faiths, cultures and backgrounds, should be safe in our communities. Antisemitism must be condemned. Violence, hate crimes and hate speech have no place in a democratic society. They are antithetical to the shared equal humanity from which we all derive our universal human rights to live with dignity and security, free from violence and discrimination.

The strength of Sydney and Australia lies in its multicultural fabric and collective commitment to the rule of law and the protection of shared values of respect, compassion and care for one another.

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## Executive and Governance

ALHR's National Committee has continued to grow in strength and diversity, from around the country all contributing to specific roles. The Executive Management Committee (**EMC**) has continued to function as an efficient vehicle for day-to-day governance, freeing our subcommittee chairs and state and territory convenors to focus on advocacy.

I am grateful to my colleagues on the ALHR Executive - our Vice President, Kerry Weste, Secretary Maria Kiourkas, and Treasurer Mel Ch'ng. Each bring extraordinary dedication to this entirely voluntary organisation, and the work they undertake behind the scenes makes everything else possible. I extend particular thanks to our Treasurer for maintaining the financial health of ALHR, and to our new Secretary for her work supporting our governance systems.

I also wish to acknowledge with sincere gratitude the work of all those members who have stepped down from roles during this period. Their service to ALHR has been invaluable and the organisation is stronger for their contributions.

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## Subcommittees

ALHR's specialist thematic subcommittees continue to be the engine room of our advocacy. The range and quality of work produced by our subcommittees across 2025 and 2026 has been extraordinary. Key areas of activity have included:

- Refugee Rights — responding to Australia's ongoing offshore detention regime and the landmark January 2026 UN Committee against Torture ruling
- LGBTIQ+ Rights — continuing to advocate for full legal equality and protection from discrimination across all Australian jurisdictions
- Indigenous Rights — engaging with UPR outcomes, the Boorloo/Perth January 26 attack, and the ongoing calls for stronger protections for First Nations people
- Human Rights Act(s) — leading the national push for statutory human rights protection in NSW and SA, and supporting the right-to-housing Bills in the ACT and Victoria
- Business and Human Rights — including our detailed submission on the Modern Slavery Act 2018 review
- Women and Girls' Rights — including our specific UPR shadow report on women's rights and participation in the Women Deliver 2026 Conference in Melbourne
- Disability Rights - protecting the vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged, urging the NSW Law Reform Commission to consider the importance of Australia's international human rights obligations in its review of the Anti-Discrimination Act, noting that a NSW Human Rights Act is the most appropriate way to ensure that NSW's laws are consistent with Australia's international obligations.
- Environment and Human Rights — engaging with the growing international discourse on the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the guidelines of the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders
- Children's Rights — contributing to UPR engagement and ongoing juvenile justice advocacy
- Freedoms — responding to the NSW Crimes Amendment (Places of Worship) Bill 2025, the Sydney February 2026 protest incidents, and anti-protest legislation nationally, including publication of an explainer on the right to peaceful assembly

## State and Territory Convenors

Our state and territory convenors provide ALHR with its vital local presence - engaging members on the ground, responding to state-based human rights developments, making submissions on local legislation, and serving as the public face of ALHR in their jurisdictions. I am enormously grateful to each of them.

2025 and 2026 has seen active engagement by convenors on issues including anti-protest legislation, state-based human rights reform, and the campaigns for Human Rights Acts in NSW and SA. I particularly acknowledge those convenors who led community engagement around the UPR, the right-to-housing Bills in the ACT and Victoria, and responses to the Boorloo attack and the Bondi Beach terror attack. ALHR is currently seeking expressions of

interest to strengthen our national presence with co-convenors in Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and I encourage any interested members to come forward.

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## **Media**

ALHR's media profile has continued to grow, with our commentary and advocacy reaching audiences across Australia and internationally. Through the expert work of our professional (pro bono) media managers, John Connolly & Partners, ALHR has been interviewed, quoted and published in a wide range of outlets on issues including the UN Committee against Torture's ruling on offshore detention, the Human Rights Bill in NSW, the right-to-housing Bills, the Modern Slavery Act review, the Crimes Amendment (Places of Worship) Bill, freedom of assembly, the Bondi Beach terror attack, the Boorloo Invasion Day attack, the UPR outcomes, and the Women Deliver 2026 Conference.

Our media engagement is central to our advocacy mission. It ensures that legal expertise and human rights principles are brought to bear in public debate, and amplifies the voice of those whose rights are most at risk. ALHR's ability to engage a professional media manager has been made possible by our paid membership model, and I commend the investment our membership has made in this crucial function.

We extend sincere thanks to the team at John Connolly & Partners and in particular thank Amber Plum for her help this past year.

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## **Conclusion**

I began my presidency committed to continuing the upward trajectory of ALHR's advocacy and governance. Looking back on 2025 I am proud of what we have achieved together.

Australia is at a pivotal moment in its human rights journey. More than 120 nations have told us we can do better. The UN Committee against Torture has told us we can do better. The South Australian parliamentary committee, the ACT Legislative Standing Committee, and over 117 civil society organisations calling for a Human Rights Act in NSW have all told us we can do better. ALHR's purpose is to ensure the law is brought to bear in service of that aspiration.

We are an association of lawyers who believe that human rights are not merely aspirational, they are binding, enforceable, and owed to every person in Australia and beyond our shores.

None of this would be possible without our membership. ALHR accepts no government or political funding. We depend entirely on the generosity, expertise and commitment of our members and supporters. On behalf of the Executive, I extend my most heartfelt thanks to every one of you.

I am honoured to nominate for a further term as President and to continue this work alongside Vice President Kerry Weste and so many talented, passionate and dedicated colleagues. Our upward trajectory must continue for the betterment of our communities, our society, and for all of our fellow Australians.

**Nicholas Stewart**

President, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights

May 2026