

Day One of Public Hearings

Session: An overview of those who miss out and fall through the cracks of a fair go for all

Summary of presentation from Jacqueline Phillips, Policy Officer, Australian Council of Social Service

In our presentation to the public hearing, the Councils of Social Service highlighted the inadequacy of existing rights protections and indicated strong support for a national human rights act which includes economic, social and cultural rights.

In our presentation to the public hearing, we addressed three questions:

1. What are the essentials to ensuring a fair go for all Australians?
2. Who is missing out?
3. What difference would a national human rights act make?

In doing so, we argued that Australians place a high value on the 'fair go for all' and there is a high degree of community consensus about what constitute the essentials of a 'fair go'. Despite this, there are about 2 million Australians living in poverty with a number of groups at high risk of hardship and deprivation, including Indigenous Australians, sole parents and the unemployed.

Poverty, deprivation, housing stress and homelessness are not just equity or social justice issues. They are also human rights issues. The Councils of Social Service believe that a national human rights act would produce better outcomes for low income and disadvantaged Australians through improved and more accountable decision-making. We acknowledged that the law is just the beginning of human rights protection and that broader social, institutional and cultural change must be the ultimate goal. However, we argued that such changes are unlikely to occur until human rights principles are vested with legal and moral authority by legislation.