

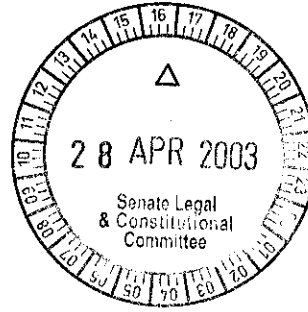


youth affairs network qld

ABN 28 205 281 339

23 April, 2003

The Senate Legal and Constitutional
Legislation Committee,
The Senate,
Federal Parliament
CANBERRA ACT 2600



ATTN: Louise Gell, A/g Secretary

Re: Legislative Amendments to HREOC Role

YANQ is the Queensland peak organisation representing young people's interests and the youth sector generally. We are gravely concerned about proposed legislative changes to the independence of the HREOC, and view these changes as unproductive, and in fact actively harmful to the interests of young people seeking to exercise their rights under Australian law.

It is our understanding that proposed legislation would mean HREOC would require the permission of the Attorney-General to exercise its intervention powers in legal matters. This would be the case *even where the federal Government was a party to the legal matter in question.*

This seems to YANQ to constitute a blatant conflict of interest, and a totally unreasonable imposition upon the operations of a transparent, independent and neutral HREOC. The Commission has been constituted as an independent body, responsible for monitoring and promoting human rights in Australia. As such it plays a vital role in modern Australian democratic society. The federal Government's attempt to remove HREOC's independent voice and its ability to intervene in defence of human rights, is a profoundly anti-democratic and retrograde move. In effect the changes would allow the Attorney-General to exercise political control over HREOC, depriving it of its ability to fully defend the human rights of young people and other marginalised people in Australia.

YANQ does not support the legislative amendments, considers them retrograde steps, and urges the review committee to reject them. The integrity and independence of HREOC must be maintained in order to protect the human rights of all Australians, including young people. In view of the absence of an Australian Bill of Rights, it is even more critical to support the work of HREOC in giving a voice to those fighting discrimination in Australia.

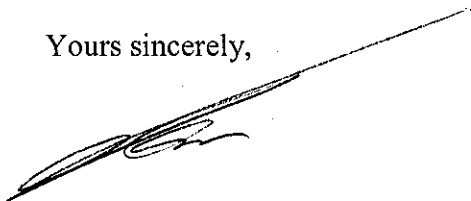
We note that the committee is not proposing to consult outside Sydney and Canberra on the amendments. We would further urge the Inquiry, as a matter of urgency, to institute public

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hearings in Queensland where an informed debate over these important amendments can take place. YANQ would also like to be able to give further comment to the committee on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Siyavash Doostkah', written over a long, thin horizontal line.

Siyavash Doostkah
Director,
Youth Affairs Network Queensland