

# Rudd Labor 'inconsistent' on human rights: report

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Civil libertarians gave the Rudd Government a B+ on human rights and praise for its efforts on whistleblowing and privacy, but have strongly criticised it for continuing the Howard government's sedition laws.

On the day Attorney-General Robert McClelland said the Government had put Australia "back in business" on human rights, Civil Liberties Australia's chief executive Bill Rowlings hailed the efforts of three ministers but maintained reservations about sedition and government moves towards a Bill of Rights.

The ministers were Mr McClelland, who had made strong efforts on alternative dispute resolution and mediation, Home Affairs Minister Bob Debus, for convening the recent criminal justice forum, and Special Minister of State John Faulkner, who had been "outstanding" on privacy but had yet to match this performance on freedom of information and governance.

Mr Rowlings praised the "excellent" work of new Labor MP Mark Dreyfus, QC, who has headed the parliamentary committee investigating changes to whistleblowing legislation.

Mr McClelland was "doing well" in laying out in speeches where the Government was planning to go, but work toward a Bill of Rights had been too slow.

"It's 12 months in, and they haven't launched their consultation on the charter of rights and responsibilities," Mr Rowlings said, noting that it was due for launch on December 10, Human Rights Day.

Civil Liberties remained concerned about whether the Government would appoint an independent reviewer of terrorism laws, "an urgent priority", and Mr Rowlings said the inaction on sedition was the Government's biggest failing.

Almost every MP had supported the Australian Law Reform Commission's "clear, unequivocal" report on dismantling the sedition regime.

## SCORECARD

*Civil Liberties Australia chief Bill Rowlings's views on the cabinet:*

- Attorney-General Robert McClelland won praise for moving to engage more with the United Nations, and for his work on same-sex, disability, age and gender discrimination. He made good progress on alternative dispute resolution and mediation.
- Special Minister of State John Faulkner's privacy reforms were "outstanding". Rowlings looks forward to his moves on freedom of information and governance.
- Home Affairs Minister Bob Debus was praised for convening a criminal justice forum.
- Labor MP Mark Dreyfus was lauded for his "excellent work" chairing the committee overseeing whistleblowing laws.

"All they've got to do is enact it," he said. "It's a simple process and they haven't done it. That is unforgivable."

Mr McClelland told the Protecting Human Rights Conference in Melbourne yesterday that the Rudd Government would consult widely on whether a Charter of Bill of Rights was necessary.

"I want to emphasise that the consultation will not presuppose any outcome," he said.

The new government had worked hard to restore "Australia's reputation as a good international citizen with a demonstrable commitment to human rights."

He nominated its efforts on same-sex couples, people with a disability, age and gender discrimination, and engagement with the United Nations, particularly on torture.

Mr McClelland said that the previous government had opposed the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention Against Torture, which establishes a sub-committee visit places of detention, including prisons and immigration detention centres.