

# Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited

## MEDIA RELEASE



### **Victoria is not a utopia. Aboriginal Victorians need the Charter**

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The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) is calling on the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee (SARC) to put politics aside and consider their role in protecting vulnerable Victorians from human rights abuses through their Inquiry into the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006*.

VALS CEO, Wayne Muir, argues that the Charter is an instrument that should be afforded bipartisan support and must be elevated to a level beyond government politicking.

‘Human rights are not a privilege that government should be able to give and take away. Human rights are inherent and should be afforded to all people by virtue of being human. Any government that diminishes the Charter is doing so to the detriment of the most vulnerable people in the Victorian community.’

‘The *only* situation in which the Charter could ever be justifiably removed, or even diluted, is in a utopia where the human rights of all people in our community are fully realised and equally enjoyed. Victoria is no such place – far from it,’ said Mr Muir.

VALS argues that the existence of their organisation is testament to the great need for the ongoing protection of human rights for the most disadvantaged, marginalised and dispossessed people in Victoria.

‘The Charter gives us a mechanism to move forward by systemically addressing what lies between the realities of today and the equality we dream for tomorrow. Self-determination rights play a big part in this,’ said Mr Muir.

VALS gave evidence at SARC’s public hearing last Friday and called for the Charter to be strengthened to include additional human rights such as self-determination.

‘The Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community have been fighting for the statutory protection of their human rights for generations’ said Mr. Muir. ‘VALS remains hopeful that SARC and the Government will recognise not only the symbolic importance, but also the practical benefits of adopting self-determination rights in the Charter in addition to appointing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner for Victoria.’

VALS will deliver a supplementary submission to SARC today.