caha
Climate and Health Alliance

October 2026

QLD Human Rights submission

Climate and Health Alliance Submission



Recognition and Commitment
We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters across the region, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia, Māori in Aotearoa, and the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific. We recognise their enduring sovereignty, deep cultural knowledge, and continuing connection to place. We commit to listening, learning, and working in ways that honour and reflect Indigenous ways of being and knowing in our shared pursuit of health equity.

About CAHA

The Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) is a national health promotion charity and the peak body on climate change and health in Australia. CAHA is an alliance of organisations within the health sector working together to raise awareness about the health risks of climate change and the health benefits of emissions reductions. The membership of CAHA includes a broad cross-section of health sector stakeholders with over 100 member organisations, representing healthcare professionals from a range of disciplines, as well as healthcare service providers, institutions, academics, researchers and consumers.

Review of Queensland's human rights and anti-discrimination framework

Climate and Health Alliance Submission

Authors: Benjamin Brice, CAHA

Reviewers: Kent Getsinger, CAHA

Creative Commons CC BY-NC 4.0 ↗

You are free to **share** and **adapt** the material under the following terms:

- **Attribution** — You must give appropriate credit to the author.
- **NonCommercial** — You may not use the material for commercial purposes without express consent.

Introduction

Human rights are an approach to put forward public policy in the best interests of the people. They are missing for much of Australian society. However their introduction gives a new opportunity to enable policies that empower the government and civil society to look after the rights in a way that reflect our newer pressing challenges.

The Climate and Health Alliance sees the Queensland Human Rights Commission as that opportunity to create innovative rights that provide more protection against inequities and risks to set Queensland into a better future for the interests of every Queenslander.

Key growth in the role of the Queensland Human Rights Commission alongside new policies on intergenerational equity and revisiting previous policy advice can support the revision of Queensland's human rights.

Role of the QHRC, examining Acts and making submissions to public policy processes

A13. What should be the role of the QHRC in participating in public debate on policy and legislation development in Queensland?

Envisioned role of the Queensland Human Rights Commission

The Queensland Human Rights Commission should be an advocate on the idea that they are the guardians of the rights of all humans in Queensland. Setting the expectations of what human rights should entail and understand that they set the bar for civil society and government. An engaged Queensland Human Rights Commission can lead on its purpose and deal greater benefits to the government and civil society in this way.

The Queensland Human Rights Commission should seek to update and contribute to the concept of human rights in Australia. Which is a new (for Australia) concept and not employed in every Australian state and territory. Therefore leading the debate is critical for continuous improvement. Drawing on the work done internationally in human rights can benefit the Queensland Human Rights Commission to learn about challenges and opportunities seen overseas and to bring international debate on human rights to Australia which is so late and lacking in this space. Drawing upon the 40 years of work by the Australian Human Rights Commission can support leadership in this space. The Australian Human Rights Commission is a thought leader in the human rights space and produces recommendations for government and business on how to educate, inform and design additional rights of Australians.

Human rights in Queensland

B1 Should any human rights be expressed as absolute and not subject to any limitation?

Intergenerational equity as human rights

Intergenerational equity is important for the future Queenslanders, where the choices we make today impact those who come later.

Current generations feel the burden of previous decisions already made, including social issues such as discrimination against First Nations communities or economic issues such as the housing affordability crisis alongside environmental issues such as contributing to climate change. These issues are felt strongly in the Australian community and do not impact everyone in the same way. For example housing affordability is primarily impacting those already not owning a house but not exclusively.

If the government was empowered to include future generations in its decision making, the concept of making the decision with an expectation of its future impact would build trust with younger generations and those worried about the future. Many Australians are worried about the state of the world and we cannot use the same thinking that got us here to solve the challenges we face. Understanding across the spectrum of the impact our decisions for our economy, society and environment will have on future generations can lead to policies that think beyond the short term and set Queensland into a path where they can really lead in the human rights field.

Should there be additional human rights?

B2 Should any additional human rights be recognised in the HRA?

The Climate and Health Alliance believes as mentioned in the discussion paper that Professor Harris Rimmers rejected rights have a strong basis for inclusion being:

- The right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment
- Rights-based approaches to disasters

The right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

In a world heavily impacted from climate change human rights can be a strong measure to hold those polluting accountable. Mining is a key industry in Queensland and must be done in a way that prioritises the health of Queenslanders.

In coal mining, health concerns include:

- Declining air quality from coal dust and other air emissions.
- Exposure to toxic gases from explosive blast plumes, transport and combustion.
- Potential for water contamination.
- Noise and light pollution from mining operations.

- Social disruption and destruction of communities as mining companies buy out houses, farms, and small villages.
- Damage to fragile, remnant or threatened natural ecosystems.
- Aesthetic impacts from changes to the landscape.
- Health risks associated with climate change.

There is a considerable body of evidence on the adverse health impacts of outdoor air pollution. Risks relate predominantly to cardiovascular and respiratory health, lung cancer and premature death.

In addition LNG production, another significant industry in Queensland, causes significant human health impacts. LNG processing facilities in particular, emit volatile organic compounds (VOCs) including benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene (BTEX) which present significant risks to public health.

Based on continually emerging research evidence, CAHA member the Public Health Association of Australia has identified that living near shale gas wells, pipeline compressor stations and near petrochemical facilities and fossil fuel refineries has serious implications on a range of health issues. These implications include adverse birth outcomes (babies born lighter, earlier, with more complications and a higher risk of birth defects), associated with exposure to petrochemical air pollutants. They also include increased incidence of respiratory conditions and cancer rates in both children and adults from residences in close proximity to gas and petrochemical facilities; and increased risk of cardiovascular disease, due to air pollution containing heavy metals such as mercury, arsenic and chromium. Additionally, a 2020 systemic review found that populations living within 5km of petrochemical facilities had a 30% higher risk of developing leukaemia due to exposure to toxic and hazardous emissions.

Polluting industries needs to be held accountable for what impacts they have on the human rights of Queenslanders. By not acknowledging the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment there is a significant gap in human rights policy that ignores humans and places income over people.

Rights-based approaches to disasters

Our approach to natural disasters must change due to the impacts of climate change making natural disasters more intense and common. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction predicts that there will be 560 disasters a year by 2030, up from around 400 in 2015. The Insurance Council of Australia predicts that the financial cost of climate-related extreme weather events will reach $35.2 billion annually in Australia by 2050. Which will make it difficult to afford insurance in the near future for many. In addition Queensland is widely accepted as Australia's most disaster prone state facing disasters including:

- Bushfires.
- Tropical cyclones.
- Severe storms.
- Heatwaves.
- Marine heatwaves.
- Ocean acidification.

A human rights approach is an important way to safeguard Queenslanders into the future when humans are at risk. Humans rights in Queensland currently at risk from natural disasters include:

A right to life
Ignoring natural disasters and not supporting the community and business in disaster preparedness put considerable risk on the right to life where disasters are extreme.

Cultural rights - Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples
Natural disasters impact everyone in different ways and the impact of loss of cultural heritage places, knowledge and practices can be inferred by a natural disaster.

A Right to health services
In the event of a natural disaster access to healthcare is significantly reduced. Especially those with chronic conditions who rely on medication often not accessible. General healthcare including for mental health is of increased need during a natural disaster not just for those directly impacted but all who feel the impacts.

Considering the interconnectedness of rights-based approaches to disasters it is of the interest of the Queenslanders. Including that understanding the impacts of natural disasters impede their other human rights already in existence.

#climatehealth
caha.org.au

caha
Climate and Health Alliance