

Tim Wilson

Human Rights Commissioner
Australian Human Rights Commission



Tim Wilson was appointed Australia's Human Rights Commissioner in February 2014.

Dubbed the "Freedom Commissioner", Tim is a proud and passionate defender of universal, individual human rights. As Commissioner he is focused on promoting and advancing traditional human rights and freedoms, including free speech, freedom of association, worship and movement and property rights.

Prior to his appointment Tim was a public policy analyst and a policy director at the world's oldest free market think tank, the Institute of Public Affairs. He has also worked in trade and communication consulting, international aid and development, as well as politics. He has served as a Board member of Monash University's Council and on the Victorian Board of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. Tim is a Director of Alfred Health.

He has extensive experience in public debate and has had many regular radio and television commitments, with both commercial and public broadcasters. *The Australian* newspaper recognised Tim as one of the ten emerging leaders of Australian society. He has written extensively for newspapers, journals and books. He recently co-edited the book *Turning Left or Right: Values in Modern Politics*.

Tim graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Policy) and a Masters of Diplomacy and Trade (International Trade) from Monash University. He has also completed executive education at Geneva's Institut de Hautes Etudes Internationales et du Développement and the World Intellectual Property Organisation's Worldwide Academy.

Civil Liberties as Essential Part of Social Cohesion

Ensuring all Australians have, and are able to exercise, their civil liberties is essential to social cohesion and formal equality. However, exercising civil liberties can be a friend and foe of social cohesion. These issues are particularly important in Australian culture where individual rights and civil liberties enjoy widespread support, but not in isolation. Australian culture equally places importance on other values, including concepts of 'fairness' and 'justice'.

Similarly, the accommodation of religious freedom and secular values can create social tensions about the limits of civil liberties. There is an increasing push to prioritise secular values above religious freedom.

Freedom of speech and association can involve protestors organising to promote policies of inclusion and tolerance, but also the reverse. The tension between free speech and social cohesion was demonstrated amply in the ongoing debate surrounding the operation of the Racial Discrimination Act and its limitations on acts that "offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate".

These debates include many lessons for anyone interested in advancing individual rights and social cohesion in 21st Century Australia. This panel session will explore the contribution and limitation of civil liberties to social cohesion and the legal, social and cultural mechanisms we use to ensure that we protect both in Australia's unique cultural context.