



Submission to the NSW Parliament Committee inquiry into the Human Rights Bill 2025 made by the Youth Justice Coalition's Working Group on Proactive Policing and Surveillance.

Youth Justice Coalition

The Youth Justice Coalition (**YJC**) advocates for justice for young people and their fair treatment by police and within the criminal legal system.

The YJC was formed in 1987 as a network of youth workers, children's lawyers, policy workers and academics working to promote the rights of children and young people in NSW.

Since 2025 the YJC has been convened by Mounity Aboriginal Youth & Community Services and the Justice and Equity Centre, with a youth- and community-led agenda for change.

This submission has been prepared by the Youth Justice Coalition's Working Group on Proactive Policing and Surveillance, comprised of the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited, Just Reinvest NSW, Justice and Equity Centre, Mounity Aboriginal Youth & Community Services, and Redfern Legal Centre. Our organisations work with and represent clients from across NSW, including in regional towns like Moree.

This submission is also endorsed by these organisations:

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights

Centre for Criminology Law and Justice

Community Legal Centres NSW

Community Restorative Centre

First Nations Response

Grata Fund

Humanity Matters

Inner City Legal Centre

Justice Reform Initiative

Social Determinants of Justice Research Hub
Division of Societal Impact, Equity, and Engagement
UNSW, Sydney

The Shopfront Youth Legal Centre

Waminda

Western NSW Community Legal Centre

Youth Action

Youth Law Australia

Our Submission

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to an inquiry into the Human Rights Bill 2025.

We support NSW enacting a comprehensive Human Rights Act to protect equality, dignity, freedom, and security for people in NSW.

Our submission focuses on the NSW Police drone pilot in Moree. This is a recent and troubling example of why we need a Human Rights Act to better protect rights, including the rights of children and young people, in NSW.

Police drones have been operating in Moree since January this year. Despite having significant implications for human rights, this pilot was initiated without any prior consultation with the community. NSW Police have provided limited information to the community about their use.

Community members are concerned about the pilot. Police use of drones could significantly interfere with rights, including rights to privacy, equality before the law, freedom from discrimination, rights within the criminal legal system and First Nations collective rights.

A NSW Human Rights Act could provide for better protection of these rights by imposing clearer limits on how this technology can be used by police and other government agencies, and communities would have a more readily identifiable basis to challenge invasive government action.

NSW Police drone pilot in Moree

In January 2026, the NSW Police PolAir Remote drone trial was introduced in Moree.

Police installed two drones on the rooftop of Moree police station, to be operated remotely by pilots based at Aviation Command headquarters in Bankstown.

YJC members understand that these drones now fly regularly over the Moree area, recording video and live streaming to police on the ground at Moree.

Michael Porter, a proud Gomeroi man from Moree, reflects:

'My family and I grew up on Mehi Crescent on the bottom mission in town.

I was only made aware of the drone program being launched in Moree when I saw it on the news. This was very concerning and disappointing to me as there had clearly not been any effective community engagement or consultation prior to its launch.

Since the program has begun, I have sighted the drones a couple of times. In my view, they have been more patrolling than responding to a specific event or call out. I have had several family members also report to me that they have heard the drone at low altitude and have sighted it watching their backyards on numerous occasions.

This is not policing, this is harassment. This is not safety, this is an invasion of privacy.

I don't think the drone program has contributed to any sense of improved community wellbeing or safety. If anything, it has further escalated a wider sense of anxiety and fear. Any future reviews or meetings regarding the drone program should be more inclusive of the wider community allowing for more voices to be heard and listened to.'

The 6-month trial is due to end in July 2026. However, NSW Police have signalled an intention to continue the program in Moree and expand it to other places in NSW, namely Kempsey and Tamworth.¹

The YJC has significant concerns about the use and potential expansion of police drones, particularly in relation to the surveillance of Aboriginal communities and young people, and the impact on human rights.

Proud Gomeroi man, Moree community member, and Community Data Manager at Just Reinvest NSW, Ian Brown describes the impact on his community:

'The use of drones in our community is being experienced as harassment and intimidation through surveillance technology. Rather than building community safety, the Drone Pilot Program is contributing to the ongoing over-surveillance of Aboriginal communities in Moree.'

This is deeply concerning in a community already impacted by disproportionate policing and systemic racism. The targeted use of surveillance technology in residential areas where high numbers of Aboriginal people live raises serious concerns about racial discrimination, privacy, and the unequal application of police powers.'

The YJC Working Group's broad concerns about the trial are:

1. **There was no meaningful community consultation prior to the trial, or as part of the 3-month review of the trial.** This lack of consultation is particularly concerning given the choice of Moree as the test location, where a large First Nations community has historically experienced, and continues to experience, high levels of police involvement. The introduction of drone surveillance without clear community engagement risks deepening existing mistrust and damaging the relationship between police and community.
2. **There has been limited and inconsistent public information about how the drones are being used.** While some statements suggest the drones are limited to emergency response and locating missing persons, statements in March 2026 suggest they may be used to conduct proactive surveillance of public spaces.²
3. **It is unclear whether existing laws properly regulate the use of police drones.** Existing surveillance, privacy and police powers laws predate modern drone technology and do not directly address its scale, capabilities, risk or the daily impact on Moree residents. The use of drones and interaction of the *Surveillance Devices Act 2007* (NSW), the *Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act 2002* (NSW), the *Civil Aviation Safety Regulations*, and

¹ NSW Legislative Council, Budget Estimates 2025-2026, Corrected Transcript (Portfolio Committee No. 5 – Justice and Communities, 27 February 2026) 36.

² NSW Legislative Council, Budget Estimates 2025-2026, Answers to Supplementary Questions (Portfolio Committee No. 5 – Justice and Communities, 26 March 2026) 62.

privacy law is convoluted. We are concerned that these laws may not effectively regulate or limit the impact of the drones on the community, or constrain this largely untested technology. Communities should not be required to navigate a highly complex patchwork of regulation to understand their rights.

Ian Brown continues:

'Our community in Moree has once again been subject to an imposed government pilot program, without meaningful or substantial consultation with the Moree Aboriginal community.'

This stands in direct contradiction to the principles set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly the requirement that governments engage with Indigenous peoples through their own representative institutions and obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting measures that may affect them.

The reality on the ground is that the Moree Drone Pilot Program is not being experienced as a response to active police incidents. Rather, it is being experienced as a proactive surveillance measure targeting residential areas where high numbers of Aboriginal community members live.

This raises serious human rights concerns, particularly in relation to the rights to self-determination, privacy, equality and non-discrimination, and the need for government decision-making to be transparent, accountable and grounded in genuine consultation with affected Aboriginal communities.'

We hold significant concerns about the disproportionate impacts of the trial on Aboriginal community members in Moree, and the inevitability that there will continue to be disproportionate impacts on Aboriginal people if the trial is expanded to other locations – especially to other locations with significant Aboriginal populations, like Kempsey and Tamworth.

We note that the drones are liable to impact all NSW community members, should police use of drones for proactive patrolling become a widespread police practice across the state.

We need a Human Rights Act

A Human Rights Act could have provided safeguards to ensure the use of drones and the drone trial was developed consistently with the rights of the community and properly considered community views. Human Rights Acts support government departments and agencies to make better policy and program decisions, and improve outcomes for communities. This is particularly important in a context where government agencies are increasingly deploying, or looking to deploy, new and emerging technologies that may interfere with human rights.

Legislative reform is not keeping pace with technological advancements and the potential impact on people's privacy. For example, privacy law in NSW does not clearly regulate police use of drones. Communities should not be required to grapple with an incomplete and outdated regulatory framework to protect their privacy. A Human Rights Act could safeguard people's right to privacy, and other rights, at a basic level where the law has not yet been adapted to address these technological developments.

Under the proposed Human Rights Bill, NSW Police would have had to consider the impact of the drone trial on human rights and ensure the participation of First Nations peoples in decisions about the trial, given the risk the drones would directly or disproportionately affect the First Nations community. Further, the proposed Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights could have examined the drone trial, either prior to its commencement or after the 6-month trial concluded, and made recommendations to protect and promote human rights.

A Human Rights Act would also provide the community a clearer basis to challenge government action, if a right protected by the Human Rights Act could be said to have been infringed (e.g. by making a complaint to the proposed NSW Human Rights Commission).

Our Recommendation

Legislate a Human Rights Act in NSW: A Human Rights Act would provide a clearer statement of rights for communities in NSW, ensure that communities' voices are heard in decisions that affect them and protect people from government action that is inconsistent with human rights.

Michael Porter and the working group are available to participate in any further consultation and to answer any questions about this submission, should that be of assistance to the Committee.

We thank you for considering our Submission. For any inquiries about this submission, please contact Kate Sinclair at ksinclair@jec.org.au or +61 2 8898 6500.