

Technology

Emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and neurotechnology are reshaping our world. They offer both powerful opportunities and challenges to human rights.

The 2025 National AI Plan will guide the development and deployment of AI in Australia. The Australian Government consulted on a prospective AI Act providing for risk-based regulation of AI tools, which would provide clear baseline protections for human rights particularly across high-risk AI uses. The announced plan, however, shifts away from mandatory guardrails to reliance on existing legal frameworks.

The Australian Government has announced creation of an Australian Artificial Intelligence Safety Institute and committed to legislating a Digital Duty of Care under the *Online Safety Act 2021* (Cth). These two critical developments have potential to promote human rights centred AI. However, whether these measures support the beneficial use of new technologies will depend on how they are designed and implemented.

Democratic freedoms

Recent human rights advances

In 2025, the Australian Government released voluntary guidelines for safe and responsible Artificial Intelligence (AI) governance and a National AI plan, with a goal of keeping Australians safe through existing and evolving legislative and regulatory frameworks to mitigate AI harms.

Human rights and technology recommendations

Democratic freedoms

Other priority human rights issues

There are limited safeguards to protect human rights, including privacy, in the development of emerging new technologies such as neurotechnology.

Technologies must be developed and deployed in a human rights-centred way. The Australian Human Rights Commission's [Final report: human rights and technology](#) (2021) outlines a roadmap for ethical innovation, emphasising the need for robust safeguards to ensure technology aligns with human rights.

As Australia's AI regulatory framework is developing, it is essential to embed strong human rights protections including mandatory risk based guardrails, adequately resourced oversight and systemic transparency and accountability. A digital duty of care should address system-design. A multifaceted policy response is required.

The Commission's [Neurotech report](#) highlights the unique risks posed by neurotechnology which charts a pathway towards human rights compliant development of the technology.

The measures proposed by the Commission include:

- establishment of an AI Commissioner (which may to some extent be implemented by Government through the AI Safety Institute)
- development of a national strategy on emerging technologies and
- regulatory frameworks for neurotechnology.

The Commission welcomes initial steps taken to ensure AI is adopted ethically. Similar regulatory attention must also be given to the field of neurotechnology. Without these measures, Australia risks falling behind in protecting human rights in the digital age.

It is widely reported that AI systems contribute to climate impacts through energy and water-intensive data centres, whose high electricity and cooling demands can drive increased emissions when reliant on fossil-fuel power. Evidence points to the need to better capture, assess and inform responses to environmental impacts of AI infrastructure.

Priority action

The Australian government should implement the recommendations of the Commission’s reports on Human Rights and Technology and Neurotechnology and Human Rights.

Information integrity

Misinformation and disinformation undermine social cohesion and confidence in democratic institutions in Australia. To address this, Australia primarily relies on voluntary industry codes overseen by the Australian Communications and Media Authority, alongside targeted interventions by public institutions such as the Australian Electoral Commission ([disinformation register](#)). While these measures have supported awareness and some transparency, they have also highlighted clear structural limits. Recent attempts to introduce stronger [legislative reforms did not proceed](#).

Strengthening information integrity requires a shift away from reliance on voluntary compliance towards a more durable regulatory approach that places responsibility on platforms for system design and governance while safeguarding freedom of expression. Key next steps include strengthening regulatory oversight of systemic risks created by platform design and improving transparency around how content is prioritised and distributed. These reforms should be supported by sustained investment in digital literacy initiatives and measures that improve access to credible information across the community. The [United Nations Global Principles for Information Integrity](#) provide a relevant reference point, offering a human-rights-based framework to guide action focused on strengthening information environments’.

Democratic freedoms

Recent human rights advances

The Australian Government has introduced the Online Safety Act, stage 1 privacy reforms that include a statutory tort for serious invasion of privacy and a Children's Privacy Code. It has committed to introduce a digital duty of care as part of the Online Safety Act to incentivise harm prevention.

Misinformation and disinformation are amplified through social media recommender systems that prioritise engagement over accuracy. Existing voluntary and self-regulatory approaches have not kept pace with these risks. In this context, further consideration of a Digital Duty of Care targeted at system-level drivers of harm (such as recommender systems), rather than solely focusing on individual content, is required to address foreseeable harms while protecting freedom of expression.

Democratic freedoms

Other priority human rights issues

Support for public broadcasting and an independent media sector remain critical in an environment of declining information integrity, particularly in online environments.

There is growing recognition that Australia's response should be aligned with emerging international frameworks on information integrity. The United Nations Global Principles on Information Integrity provide a rights-based foundation for strengthening information environments. The Principles are:

- Societal trust and resilience
- Healthy incentives
- Public empowerment
- Independent, pluralistic and free media
- Transparency and research access.