

Operating environment: analysis of opportunities, challenges, and risks, covering the period to 2023

The Commission operates in a complex social and political environment with multiple factors that can affect how and how well we achieve our goals and purpose. Each year we examine our external and internal environment to assess and manage the risks/challenges and opportunities that may have an impact on our work.

This document provides further detail of the environmental analysis summarised in the main body of the Corporate Plan.

External factors and management


Factor	In full control	In partial control	Beyond control	Analysis and risk management
External opportunities				
Leading a national conversation on human rights	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The <i>Free and equal in dignity and rights: An Australian conversation on human rights</i> is a flagship multi-year initiative that embodies our NHRI leadership role and will demonstrate the Commission’s independence and human rights expertise. ▪ Delivering a consensus-led national reform agenda for human rights, the project has the ability to shape human rights priorities over the next 5–10 years at the federal level. ▪ This year the project provides a high profile-high reach vehicle for building ‘rights-mindedness’, and to promote our mandated human rights education role. ▪ If accepted, the realisation of the reform agenda will provide a long-term stage for this work, increasing the reach and relevance of our education and awareness programs to the broader community.
National and international focus on violence/harassment issues continues		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We can expect that the national and international momentum on these issues will enable the Commission to continue to utilise its functions to drive positive change. ▪ International focus through the #MeToo and #TimesUp movement contributing to significant national focus on sexual harassment in the year that the Sex Discrimination Commissioner will release the report of the national inquiry into workplace sexual harassment. ▪ The United Nations’ global campaign on violence against children provides international context to work in Australia that is responding to the Royal Commission into institutional abuse of children, and to other forms of violence against children. ▪ Establishment of Royal Commissions into institutional abuse of persons with disabilities and aged care provides an opportunity to advance human rights protections and a safeguarding focus for vulnerable groups and people.

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External opportunities				
Reputational consolidation and growth		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In the context of the national conversation project, agenda-leading Commissioner programs, and the opportunities outlined, we can continue to promote our distinct value and role as Australia's National Human Rights Institution. ▪ Commission maintains track record of being sought out for expertise and advice across government portfolios and departments.
International and Universal Periodic Review engagement		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Australia's place on the United Nations Human Rights Council and multiple treaty body appearances in the next two years and the global focus on Sustainable Development Goals are timely agents for change in this period. ▪ Australia's election to the United Nations Human Rights Council for 2018–2020 places greater prominence on engagement through Human Rights Council processes and human rights more generally. ▪ Australia's Universal Periodic Review appearance in 2020 provides opportunity for focused discussion on implementation of human rights. ▪ Appearance before Convention on the Rights of the Child (September 2019), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (September 2019) and Convention Against Torture (due 2020). ▪ Each of the above provides opportunities to build awareness of international-domestic human rights compliance and to seek voluntary commitments to implementation by the Australian government. ▪ A new paradigm shift in international processes is centred on the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. International and technical cooperation opportunities may become increasingly dependent on specialist knowledge of Sustainable Development Goals and how to apply them. b. Sustainable Development Goals are relevant to almost every aspect of the Commission's work program. As a minimum, we must continue to build internal knowledge and specialisation on Sustainable Development Goals and other key human rights issues will be an ongoing priority and to map our own work to the SDGs.

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External challenges				
2019 Federal election			✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Election commitments (especially about funding) could affect the Commission and priority areas in which we focus our work. ▪ In developing the National Conversation project, we have developed relationships across the political spectrum and have framed the project in a bipartisan manner that is 'above politics' and anchored in the terms of reference. ▪ We need to ensure our program of work is flexible to respond to changing government priorities that have key human rights impacts.
High profile debates relating to Commission functions and legislation		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We can expect public scrutiny of our functions and legislation to continue, particularly in relation to harassment and vilification.
Constrained funding environment		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fiscal restraint across government means continued constraints on appropriations, despite increases in Commission Executive. Additionally, the impact of efficiency dividends on small agencies continues to drive tight internal budgeting. ▪ Changing whole-of-government approaches to shared services places some uncertainty on our continued shared service arrangements. ▪ While we have begun to access increased funding for specific projects, achieving changes to our appropriated budget remains a challenge. This requires a whole-of-Commission approach to identifying organisational priorities. In addition to a) further coordination and improvements to business development and sourcing external funding, b) refocusing our educational activities on diversity and inclusion and business/sectoral engagement, including fee for service training and technical advisory capacity.
Paris Principles compliance (Principles Relating to the Status of National Human Rights Institutions)		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Paris Principles provide an internationally agreed basis for assessing the independence and effectiveness of national human rights institutions. ▪ We need to ensure that the Commission as Australia's National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) retains our 'A status' accreditation ahead of Australia's next review, due in 2021. ▪ The Commission will work with the Government to ensure efforts are made to address compliance issues ahead of Australia's next accreditation review in 2021.

Internal and capability factors and management

Factor	In full control	In partial control	Beyond control	Analysis and risk management
Building partnerships and financial support to expand our work program		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reliance upon external partnerships and fund-raising to support achievement of the Commission's overall workplan (currently approx. 50% of the policy program is externally funded). ▪ Need for agility to be able to identify opportunities as they arise and be proactive. ▪ Recognising that some work areas are less attractive to external funding arrangements—we need to ensure support through core budget for such activities to ensure that the Commission maintains a balanced work program across all commissioners and areas of responsibility. ▪ A partnership strategy ensures agreed principles and a strategic decision-making process applied to seeking and implementing partnership opportunities.
Ensuring national coverage of our work		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The single base of our organisation and resources can create challenges for ensuring engagement with regional, rural and remote Australia. ▪ We will manage this through regular and more innovative consideration of how we reach such stakeholders and include building engagement in different locations into Commissioner programs and key project activities. ▪ This will be our second year of monitoring and publicly reporting data on the national coverage of our work.
Managing an increasingly more mobile workforce	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff turnover in an increasingly mobile workforce environment continues to present a capability risk from loss of key staff and organisational knowledge in an uncertain core-funding environment. Contingency planning includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Harnessing personnel engagement via 'for now-not forever' approaches. b. Investing in the development and support of managerial staff to support retention and improve stability at more senior levels. c. Encouragement of a creative, entrepreneurial spirit in new activities/projects/working arrangements. ▪ Retention of effective, workforce supply pipelines and maintenance of reputation as an employer of choice. ▪ Investment in leadership capacity to manage a more agile workforce and to realise our stakeholder ambitions without compromise of quality. ▪ Additional funding from externally supported projects provides an opportunity to refresh and renew Commission staffing structures.

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Building digital capability and communication systems				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Building capability in these areas with the limited resourcing of a small agency is an ongoing challenge for the organisation. ▪ Significant advances in our internal digital capacity with scheduled developments such as implementation of new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system and progress in an AI-enabled eDRMS should help ensure that we meet the requirements of the Digital 20/20 policy. ▪ The ERP will also increase operational capability to deliver an efficient corporate finance and services function that remains competitive in a shared services environment and supports internal staff and shared service stakeholders. ▪ A key external communication tool is our website. It is the hub for all information disseminated to general audiences and for the Commission's range of social media sites. A recent move to a more modern and visually engaging website should ensure a more user and mobile friendly experience for our users. ▪ In the coming year the finalisation of an online Learning Management System will advance internally and externally focussed education programs. ▪ Upgrading our intranet remains a challenge.