

WELCOME TO AMNESTY

All you need to know as a new group member



AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



Amnesty International Australia New Group Member Guide

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Cover: Byron Bay group take action for World Day Against the Death Penalty. October 2014. © AI

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Thank you for joining us!

A warm welcome from your fellow activists. You have made a human rights impact just by getting involved.

This guide will give you a rundown on what an action group is.

We are sure you will have plenty of questions, so please chat to us – your fellow group members and group convenor.

We look forward to getting to know you and standing with you to defend human rights.

ABOUT OUR ACTION GROUP

GROUP

Convenor

Contact

Meeting time

Meeting place

Past achievements

Future goals

AMNESTY 101

Amnesty International was founded in 1961 by London barrister Peter Benenson. He was outraged at reports of two Portuguese students being jailed for toasting freedom in a café. So he published a letter in *The Observer*, appealing for people he dubbed 'prisoners of conscience'. His letter called on people everywhere to join a mass letter-writing campaign to pressure governments to set such prisoners free.

Within months, groups of people sprang up in Australia and other countries, joining together to write letters. Amnesty International was born.

Today, Amnesty International is the world's largest human rights organisation – a global movement of over 4.6 million supporters in more than 150 countries. There are over 300,000 supporters in Australia.

We believe all people are entitled to the rights in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and we work to achieve and protect these rights for everyone, everywhere.

Traditionally Amnesty International has worked to defend civil and political rights, focusing on prisoners of conscience, torture and the death penalty. In later years we have responded to global changes in human rights and expanded our reach to defend economic, social and cultural rights as well.

We gather the facts through in-country research, we mobilise public support through activists and local groups such as ours, and we use this to pressure governments and decision-makers to uphold human rights.

Some things Amnesty International has campaigned on recently are Indigenous Peoples' rights, refugee rights, gender and sexuality-based rights, and crises work all over the world.

LED BY MEMBERS

Amnesty is a grassroots, activist-based organisation. We are governed by volunteers – seven regional branch committees and a national board – who help set our strategic direction and priorities. See page 4 for the activist organisation structure.

Amnesty International holds a branch annual general meeting (BAGM) and a national annual general meeting (NAGM) each year. All members*, activists and general supporters are most welcome to attend – please talk to us for more information.

Every now and then, action group activities will need input or budget from their branch committee. Group convenors can help you put together event proposals for the branch.

**A member is an Amnesty supporter with voting rights at BAGM. For more information on becoming member, please talk to us.*

Amnesty quick facts

- activism and advocacy to defend human rights.
- non-governmental organisation.
- More than 4.6 million supporters worldwide.

Check out www.amnesty.org.au for more information.



Amnesty members at the National Annual General Meeting (NAGM), Sydney, 2011. © Hamish Gregory/AI

WHAT IS AN ACTION GROUP?

We call our community volunteer groups 'action groups' and we are one of the best ways to make a difference for human rights.

Action groups are the community face of Amnesty. We roll out Amnesty campaigns within our local communities.

Action groups are very flexible, so no matter how much time you have or how much responsibility you want to take on, you can choose a level of involvement to suit you.

WHAT DO ACTION GROUPS DO?

Not all groups work in the same way, but being part of a group normally means you will participate in our current major campaigns. These campaigns are set by our national and global member base.

While letter writing is at the heart of what Amnesty International is all about, it is also vital to push the envelope (no pun intended!) and constantly seek out new and innovative ways to make positive human rights change.

Some things that action groups do:

- information stalls
- letter writing
- petitioning
- speaker nights
- vigils
- dinner parties
- film nights
- art exhibitions
- flash mobs
- fundraising events
- meet with local MPs and other decision-makers
- respond to Urgent Action requests
- 'adopt' an 'individual at risk' casefile

If you have ideas about new group activities, let us know!

Action group quick facts

- There are over 180 Amnesty action groups across Australia.
- Each year, action groups host over 700 community events, attracting tens of thousands of people and growing our movement and our impact.

"I had never been involved with an NGO previous to Amnesty, but soon became part of the hands on helpers... I've looked after an art exhibition for a day, worked a drink station at the Blackmores Sydney Running Festival and helped run information stalls at music festivals."

Karl Weaver, Newtown group member

ARE ACTION GROUPS EFFECTIVE?

Yes! Local activism is one of the most effective ways to promote human rights.

Your member of parliament is elected to listen to your concerns, so raising awareness in your community and fostering local relationships with MPs and Senators is essential.

While your action group will be gathering your local community's support, your impact is far-reaching. You are working in tandem with other action groups all over Australia. In turn, our Australian action groups are working with action groups all over the world.

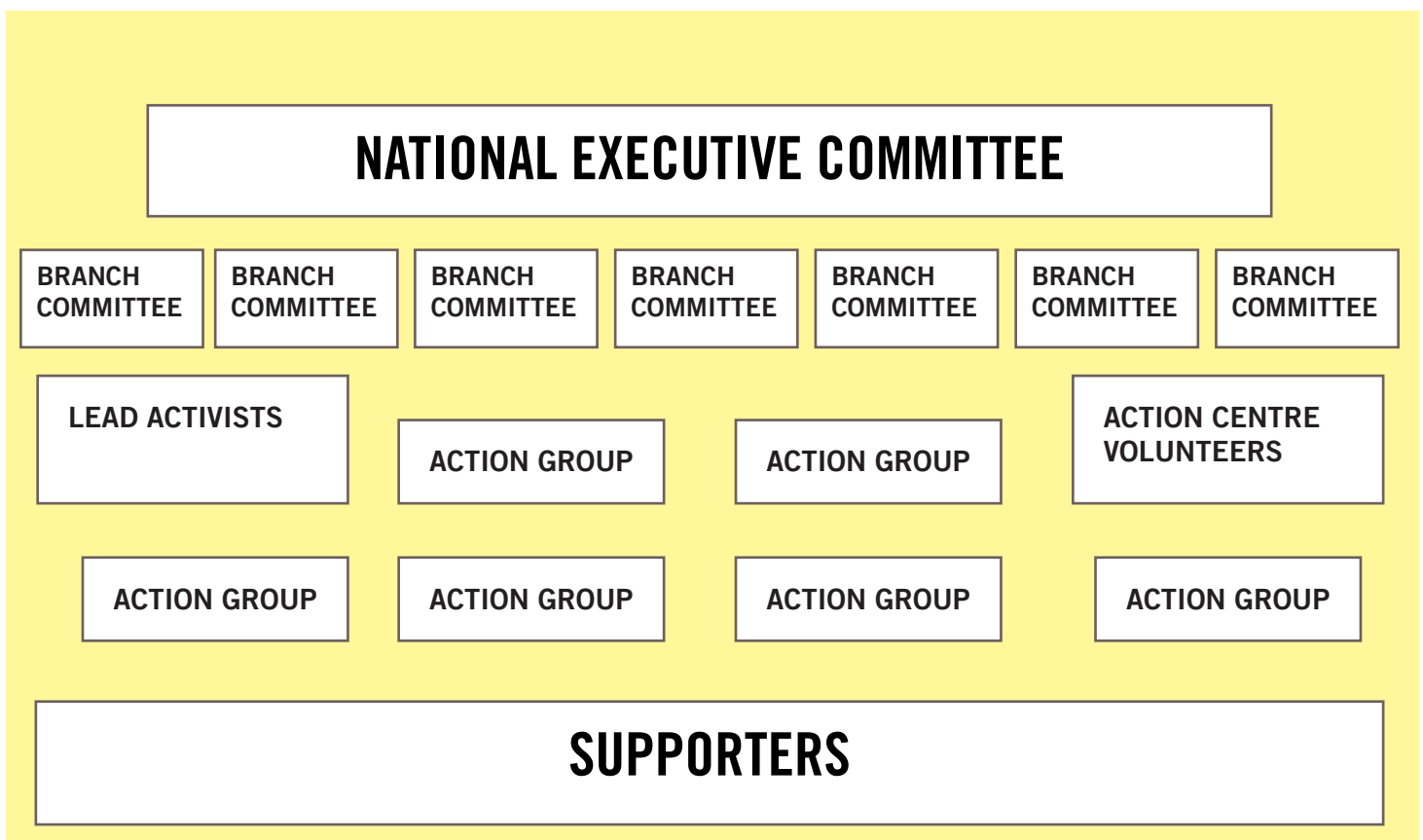
Organised people plus organised ideas equals power!

Group success story

The Fremantle group wanted to grow their members. They decided to partner with the Support Association for Women in Afghanistan (SAWA) and hold a book-reading event in May 2013, focusing on the personal stories of Afghan women. The Fremantle City Library supplied the venue, food and technical assistance free of charge.

Fifty-five people attended the book reading, the group collected 48 petition signatures, and nine people signed up to join the group. A local Afghan family came to the event, where they were introduced to other attendees, who then went on to organise a welcome dinner for the family. An Afghan woman who had fled Afghanistan also attended the night, and the group was able to recommend a local Amnesty group closer to her suburb, which she then joined!

ACTIVIST ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



WHAT DO YOU BRING TO THE GROUP?

Group members have a variety of skills, a lot of passion, a desire to know what is going on in the world, and a willingness to be part of the solution. All help is valuable and always appreciated.

Here are a few ways that every member adds value to their group.

HEADS

Action group members do more than just learn about campaigns (although this is important too). Members use their collective knowledge to develop strategies for campaigning in their community.

What do we have the time and resources to achieve? Collect signatures at the train station or host a film night? Or meet with your MP to discuss human rights issues? Which would impact your community more? Which would affect more change for the campaign?

Everyone has the opportunity to engage in group planning. Each group member's input is valuable, including yours.

HEARTS

Groups are a place where you can express your outrage at human rights violations and meet others who share the same values. Adding your passion for human rights to the group means that the group will stay energised and motivated.

Plus, being involved in a social group that gets to know one another keeps people happy and coming back.

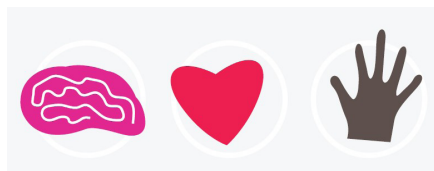
Inviting your friends along is another great way to multiply your group's impact.

HANDS

Being part of a group is more than just attending meetings. What 'hands-on' action can you help with? What skills do you have? And what do you want to learn?

You can do small things like write letters or sign petitions at each meeting, or join bigger group activities eg organising rallies, hosting an information stall or meeting with your MP.

You can also nominate for a specific position in the group, such as treasurer or social media coordinator. Many hands make light work!



The Tasmanian Urban action group hold a stall at Salamanca markets, to promote Afghan women's rights, 8 May 2013. © AI



ROLES

A healthy and sustainable group shares the workload among members. Many groups set up roles and then elect members to fill them. Other groups work more informally, with members nominating to undertake tasks when necessary. Either way it is important for all members to contribute.

BASIC ADMINISTRATION

Every group needs to do a few things to function well. Make sure the following happens regularly in your group:

- An updated group member list is maintained, and everyone knows about meetings and activities.
- Elections for group roles are held each year.
- Planning sessions are held once or twice a year.
- The group keeps in contact with the CO/GO/ASC and any changes to the group's contact details are passed along.
- Materials are ordered from the action centre in a timely manner.
- The Branch Committee is informed about events you are planning.
- Group members are invited to become financial members – which means they can vote at Branch Annual General Meetings (BAGMs) and be involved in governance decisions.

Delegating

The experience of other groups shows that the more responsibility is divided up, the more the group will retain members.

You can delegate small tasks on a monthly basis:

- Sharing or rotating the chairing, agenda-setting and minute-taking of each meeting.
- Appointing 'buddies' to new members.

You can ask for volunteers to look after particular group roles on an ongoing basis, or hold an informal election to choose people. The key roles are:

Convenor(s)

Coordinates the group as a whole. They plan activities, provide leadership, run meetings, and receive and digest the group's mail. You may choose to share this role between two people (co-convenors).

Treasurer

Responsible for all the finances, purchasing, posting letters, and all the money the group raises. They will ensure that all money goes straight to the action centre.

Secretary

Takes and distributes minutes of meetings and handles any correspondence.

There may be additional roles that the group wishes to establish, such as:

- publicity officer
- events coordinator
- letter-writing coordinator
- fundraising officer
- social media officer
- membership coordinator.

You can find examples of [role responsibilities](#) on the activist portal.

WHO WILL SUPPORT YOU?

If you ever need some guidance in defending human rights, there are heaps of people to give you a helping hand.

Your group convenor and fellow group members (volunteers)

We are just like you – human rights defenders who decided to get involved in our community. And we were once new group members too – so don't be afraid to ask us questions.

Some groups 'buddy' new people up with someone else for the first few months – if we buddy you up, make sure you swap contact details and stay in touch with any questions.

Most groups have specialist roles for members eg secretary, treasurer, event manager, media person. If you have a special interest to bring to the group, let us know.

All groups have at least one convenor, and sometimes co-convenors. Group convenors help keep the group running smoothly. This doesn't mean that they do everything for the group though – a group needs input and help from everyone.

Community organiser (staff)

Community organisers work directly with activists and groups to develop their community engagement skills. They support, facilitate, motivate and educate convenors and group members. Regular training sessions are run to develop convenor and group skills. Contact your action centre or community organiser if you would like to hear more about development opportunities.

Activism support coordinator (staff)

Activism support coordinators run the regional offices and support activists, interns and volunteers as required. They can assist you with materials, finance and activist recruitment. There is an activism support coordinator in each region – contact your action centre to get in touch.

Branch Committees (volunteers)

The seven branch committees consist of elected members of Amnesty International Australia. They are responsible for governing their regional branch.

Elections occur once a year at the branch annual general meetings (BAGMs). All Amnesty International Australia members are eligible to stand for election and to vote for the Branch Committee.

Branch Committee responsibilities include:

- Developing an annual plan and budget for their region.
- Approving events and campaign activities that groups and members wish to undertake.
- Representing their region within Amnesty International Australia and externally.
- Overseeing the use of regional resources.
- Communicating with the National Executive Committee about matters that affect their region or that are raised by local members.

Group organiser (volunteers)

Group organisers (GOs) are lead activists who work one-on-one with action groups. Each GO volunteer supports two or three action groups, assisting them to be effective human rights campaigners.

If your group would like to learn more about the GO Program or would like a GO, please contact your community organiser.

Activism team (staff)

The activism team is the link between campaigners and activists. They provide advice on tactical things your group can do to achieve our campaign targets. Contact the team at activism@amnesty.org.au

Media team (staff)

The Amnesty International media and public affairs team is based in Sydney. The team can assist you with any regional media work eg promoting an event or writing a media release. Email regional.media@amnesty.org.au

For regional media tips, see the [Regional Media Guide](#) on the Activist Portal.

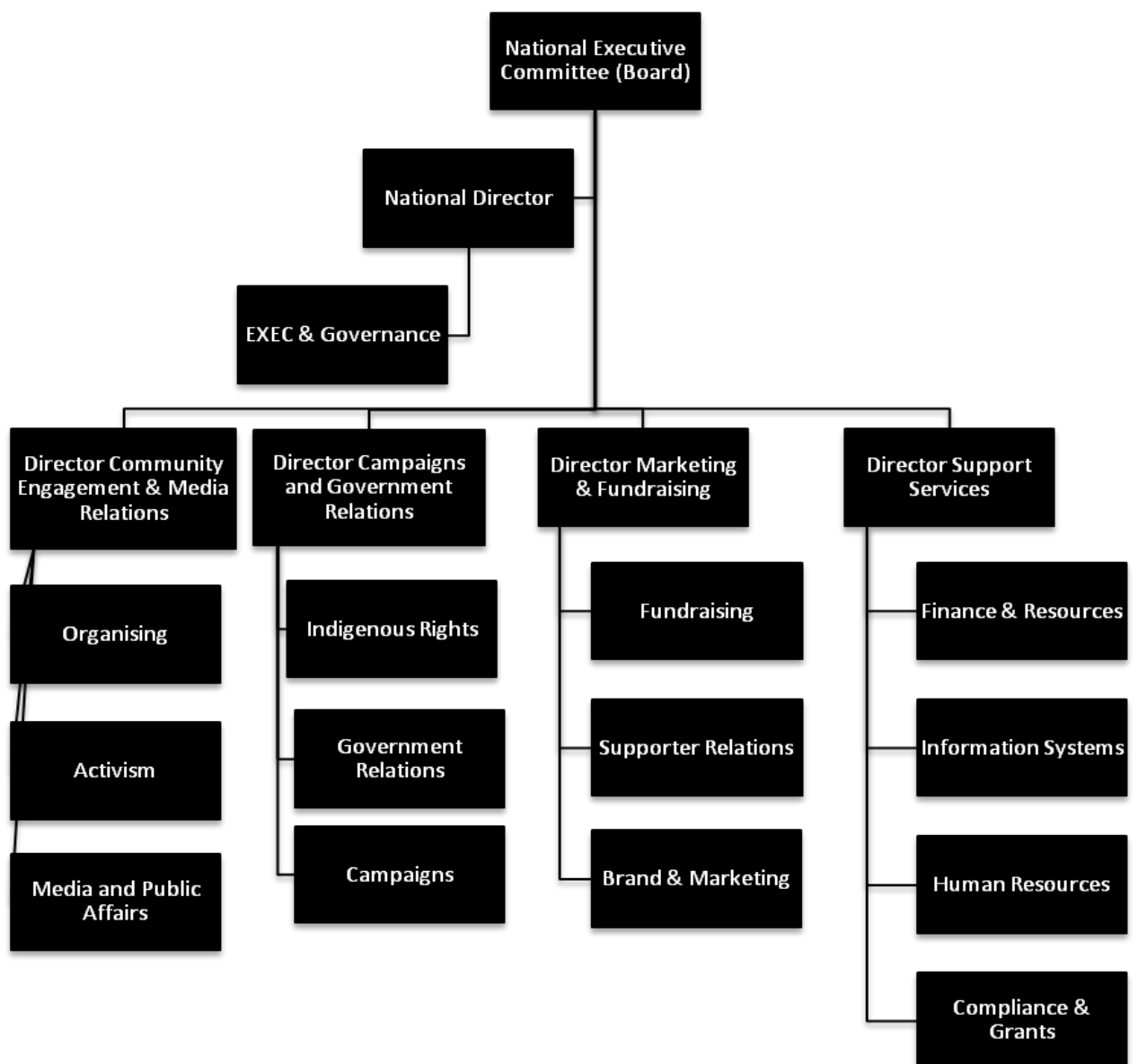
Government relations team (staff)

Amnesty International has a government relations team located in Sydney and Canberra. They can provide advice on regional advocacy matters eg meeting with your local member of parliament. Please contact your community organiser if you have any queries – they can put you in touch with our government relations team.

For regional advocacy tips, see the [Regional Advocacy Guide](#) on the Activist Portal.

If you would like to get in touch with any other staff teams, please contact your community organiser.

STAFF ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

<p>Your local action centre</p> <p>Our offices (or action centres) are at your disposal. You are welcome to use all of our facilities – meeting rooms, computers, copiers, campaign materials and more.</p> <p>Each state and territory has an action centre except the Northern Territory. Activists in the NT should contact the South Australian action centre.</p>	<p>Please contact your ASC to discuss what resources are available at your action centre or to book an office induction – contact details at the back of this guide.</p>
<p>Amnesty International Australia website and social media</p> <p>Our website and social media pages are the online face of Amnesty International Australia. They are packed with what we do, press releases, blogs, actions, news, fundraising option, and success stories.</p> <p>Some groups have their own facebook or twitter as well.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.amnesty.org.au • www.facebook.com/AmnestyOz • www.amnesty.org.au/get-involved/events_groups
<p>Activist portal</p> <p>This website houses resources and information for activists and groups.</p> <p>Trying to find tips on how to engage with your local MP, or how to write a media release? Looking for something campaign specific, like an activist toolkit? Need a flyer template? It's all on the activist portal.</p>	<p>www.amnesty.org.au/activist/existing-activists</p>
<p>Activist portal events page</p> <p>Is your group holding an event? Submit your events at the 'host an events' page on the portal.</p> <p>NB Submitting your event to the 'host an events' page is an important step for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insurance purposes • funding (if needed) • communicating your plans to Amnesty International • advertising your event on the Amnesty website. 	<p>www.amnesty.org.au/activist/host-an-event</p>

<p>Leader Bulletin</p> <p>The <i>Amnesty Leader Bulletin</i> (the Leader) is a fortnightly email bulletin for Amnesty group convenors and highly-engaged activists.</p> <p>It has campaign updates, activist hook-up dates, governance updates and opportunities, action groups' successes, new resources and toolkits.</p> <p>For send dates and submission guidelines, check the activist portal's 'general resources' page.</p>	<p>Subscribe at amnesty.leader@amnesty.org.au</p>
<p>Activism calendar</p> <p>An online calendar that outlines key campaign dates. Use it to help plan your activism throughout the year.</p>	<p>www.amnesty.org.au/activist/activism-calendar</p>
<p>Face-to-face and videoconference training</p> <p>Campaigns generally focus on a specific issue and require specific training. From time to time, your community organiser or group organiser might come and meet with you to train you on a new campaign, so you can confidently talk about it in your community.</p> <p>We also hold training by videoconference when we have to roll out training to lots of groups.</p>	<p>Check out training dates at www.amnesty.org.au/activist/skill-up</p>
<p>Activist hook-ups</p> <p>The staff activism team and campaign coordinators run phone conferences with activists across Australia on a regular basis. These hook-ups are usually about a current campaign that activists are working on, and are a place to discuss ideas with other activists.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added to the activism calendar as they are scheduled. • Advertised through the <i>Leader Bulletin</i>.
<p>Activist campaign toolkits</p> <p>These outline what activists can do to support campaigns.</p> <p>Toolkits include key facts and information, background reading, activism and event ideas, and important dates such as global campaign days and when petition signatures are being presented to governments.</p> <p>Toolkits also share ideas and success stories from action groups. Send group success stories to activism@amnesty.org.au</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.amnesty.org.au/activist/campaign-news-and-resources • Advertised through the <i>Leader Bulletin</i> as they are released.

ACTION CENTRES

Your action centre is here to assist you in defending human rights, whether you need to use a computer, pick up some resources, book a meeting space or speak to a staff member.

ACT / Southern NSW

P: 02 6202 7500 F: 02 6202 7508
actaia@amnesty.org.au
Lower Ground Floor, 33-35 Ainslie Place
Canberra City ACT 2600
PO Box 1028, Civic Square, Canberra ACT 2608

New South Wales

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aiansw@amnesty.org.au
Level 1, 79 Myrtle Street Chippendale NSW 2008
Locked Bag 23, Broadway NSW 2007

Western Australia

P: 08 9476 4800 F: 08 9476 4801
waaia@amnesty.org.au
Suite 70, City West Centre, Plaistowe Mews,
West Perth 6005

Victoria

P: 03 9412 0700 F: 03 9412 0720
vicaia@amnesty.org.au
Suite 8, 134 Cambridge Street Collingwood VIC 3066
Locked Bag 7, Collingwood VIC 3066

Queensland / Northern NSW

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qldaia@amnesty.org.au
Level 1, 354 Brunswick Street, Fortitude Valley
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PO Box 1061, Fortitude Valley QLD 4006

South Australia / Northern Territory

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NT mail: GPO Box 228, Darwin NT 0801

Tasmania

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