

The Hon. Tony Abbott, MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Wednesday 19 March 2014

RE: Civil Society Support for Independent Regulator

Dear Prime Minister

We want to make it very clear to the Commonwealth Government and wider community that like most charities across Australia, we value the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission, and we want to see it continue its impressive work.

Charities and the broader not-for-profit sector are at the heart of Australian communities. They are there in the good times and bad. They provide support to the most vulnerable; lift our sights and our hearts through culture, sport, education, welfare, support for the aged or the unwell; promote our spirituality; protect our animals and our environment; play our part internationally, and ensure those less able can still participate.

The not-for-profit sector also makes a major economic contribution, employing approximately one million Australians and turning over close to \$100 billion each year. In tight economic times, this sector needs to be both productive and effective, regardless of whether it is supported by tax payer funds, self-generated income, public donations or the efforts of our many volunteers. Governments all know we need a strong not-for-profit sector in this country if we are to be both economically strong, and enjoy healthy fulfilling lives.

The establishment of an independent national charities regulator was first seriously proposed through a Howard Government review of the definition of charity in 2001, and has since been supported by many, including the Productivity Commission, the Henry Review and Senate Inquiries involving hundreds of submissions and numerous public hearings.

The launch of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission in 2012 was a major step forward in creating a regulatory environment that works for the not-for-profit sector rather than against it. In little over one year of operation, the ACNC has built a strong positive reputation by establishing the first public national register of charities, registering more than 2,600 new charities, responding to over 70,000 requests for information from charities and the broader community, investigating and resolving over 200 complaints against charities, and monitoring the extent of red tape and level of public trust and confidence in our charities. The ACNC has done what few new regulators achieve – gained widespread support across the sector it is regulating.

Governments in Ireland and Jamaica are the latest to set up new charity regulators as part of a world-wide push to improve public transparency of the charities sector, increase giving, cut compliance costs and reduce red tape.

The Australian Government intends to shut down the ACNC as soon as it can, and in the meantime, cut its funding and capacity. It is planning to return the key role of determining charitable status to the Australian Taxation Office, re-creating a conflict of interest. This approach is, at best, an unfortunate policy for charities across Australia and our community. Red tape will continue to grow, the size of the bureaucracy will grow, and services to the sector and the public will be reduced.

The vital work of the ACNC must be maintained, for the benefit of charities, not-for-profits and the many communities they serve.

Signatories

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e.motion.21

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Chris Voll, Chair
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