

Productivity Commission: Philanthropy inquiry

Introduction and context:

My name is Sandra Haddad and I am part of a community that is concerned about the abuse and cruelty happening to animals every day under Australian laws. To give you some examples, I am distressed to learn:

- Koalas are on the path to extinction due to the logging of native forests by the NSW Forestry Corporation
- the government provides approved quotas for duck shooting for entertainment in Victoria
- the NSW government uses taxpayer money to fund greyhound racing, an industry that has been exposed multiple times for systematic animal abuse.
- 85% of pigs are killed with carbon dioxide gassing – causing immense suffering and terror to these intelligent animals.
- Cattle used for beef can be dehorned, branded, castrated, and artificially inseminated without anaesthesia.

The above examples are a subset of the suffering and pain animals endure every day in Australia. Animal abuse unfortunately thrives in Australia because industries that use animals for profit benefit from weak (or lack of!) animal protection laws. There is a major conflict of interest, as these industries also control the standards on how we use animals and have immense political lobbying power and receive government grants and tax subsidies. To make matters worse, there is little to no credible representation of animal protection voices in Australian laws and government. Any reform to animal protection laws has been a direct result of the work of animal charities who campaign the government and public to drive awareness of animal cruelty. Due to this systematic gap, there is a growing trend supporting animal charities who advocate for political policy changes for animals.

Current obstacles: animal charities working on policy changes do not have DGR status

Currently the narrow DGR classes block many charity subtypes from getting DGR, creating an asymmetry in our democracy. DGR status is only granted to animal charities who directly run physical sanctuaries or care directly for animals. In a simple example, a charity may have DGR status if directly caring for injured greyhounds that are rescued from the cruel greyhound industry, but a charity who is campaigning to change laws to reduce injury and suffering in greyhound racing would not receive DGR status. We are creating obstacles for solving the issue at its core and reducing suffering for animals. This is why DGR status is important for charities who are running policy campaigns for animal protection.

The phrasing of the charitable purpose regarding animals in the Charities Act makes sense. “Preventing or relieving the suffering of animals” is a clear and laudable concept. However, the way that 4.1.6 of the Tax Act narrows that down to organisations whose principal activity is “providing short-term direct care to animals (but not only native wildlife) that have been lost, mistreated or are without owners” or “rehabilitating orphaned, sick or injured animals (but not only native wildlife) that have been lost, mistreated or are without owners” is obviously unreasonable.

Solution: Provide DGR status to animal charities who are driving policy changes and so support the concerns of Australians

I am asking for a reform in charity laws to allow charities that work on policy advocacy to receive DGR status. Animal charities who campaign and run investigations to drive public awareness and policy changes to animal protection laws play an extremely important role for the Australian public and off course for animals. Keeping in mind there is ministerial voice for animal protection in the political system, and that the animal agriculture industry heavily lobby government and receive tax subsidies, we need to reduce the imbalance of power that favours the continue abuse and suffering of animals in Australia. This work is solely done by animal charities, and Australians should be able to support these charities and receive DGR status to help support their kind and important causes.