

28 January 2024

Submission to Australian Government Productivity Commission Draft report: Future foundations for giving

Dear report officers,

I write as publisher of The Pineapple, a digital magazine of public interest journalism, creative writing and human interest content. The Pineapple Association Incorporated is a not for profit organisation and a charity registered with the ACNC. We are a start-up, and went live in March 2023. We currently have 8500 readers and growing rapidly. We focus on news about Queenslanders, by Queenslanders with a local news focus on Gympie and Sunshine Coast Local Government Areas. We are a news oriented charity and operate within a public interest journalism framework.

The Pineapple is designed to have a small amount of advertising, so news is given priority over ads and advertorial. This differentiates us from many of the local news publications available in our area where the majority of space is given to ads with filler articles and advertorial taking the rest of the editorial space. The Pineapple's prioritising of properly researched, ethically produced and balanced news over ads means philanthropic support is crucial to our ongoing operations.

Here are a few examples of public interest journalism The Pineapple published last year:

<https://thepineapple.net.au/2023/10/12/mary-valley-locals-call-for-more-details-on-impact-of-borumba-pumped-hydro/>

<https://thepineapple.net.au/2023/11/25/no-one-wants-to-live-here-as-a-queer-person>

<https://thepineapple.net.au/2023/11/29/first-nations-families-split-by-child-safety-called-to-register-interest-in-class-action/>

The Pineapple supports the submission by the Public Interest Journalism Initiative (PIJI) which noted that most news-oriented charities do not fall within a DGR endorsement category and we are an example of this. Currently The Pineapple has not monetised, though plans to raise funding through donations, philanthropy and advertisements will be implemented this year, now we have the readership to justify this strategy. Our business plan is focused on philanthropy and while we have had offers of

donations, we have been advised that an application for Deductible Gift Recipient status would likely be unsuccessful under the current regulatory framework. Clearly this would restrict our donations.

The Pineapple supports the recommendation of the Draft Report into Future Foundations of Giving that DGR status be extended to public interest journalism organisations and the Commission's preliminary conclusion that:

'Most classes of charitable activities would be in scope for DGR status, including activities that have been largely excluded from the DGR system to date, such as advocacy in furtherance of another charitable purpose, public interest journalism, smaller social welfare charities that do not meet the criteria to be a public benevolent institution, and a more diverse range of animal welfare and health promotion charities.'

It is a matter of public knowledge that the mainstream media's essential role as The Fourth Estate in a functioning democracy has been eroded by the failure of the old business model based on print advertising and that this occurred partly as a result of the digital media revolution taking large proportions of advertising revenue from the legacy media.

In addition, public trust in the legacy media (principally News Limited and other large commercial media organisations) has been eroded by the breach of trust those organisations committed with readers by failing to fulfil its role as The Fourth Estate, instead engaging in activities such as those revealed in the News International phone hacking scandal.

There have been many other instances where News Limited and other large commercial media companies have been shown to be acting in the interests of private profit rather than public interest. The Australian public has largely lost faith in the mainstream media as a result. This is a crisis for Australian democracy which depends on informed citizens voting on the basis of accurate, unbiased, evidence-based, reliable news.

Research by The Public Interest Journalism Initiative (PIJI), the Local and Independent News Association (LINA) and other organisations overseas have found that the public's trust in hyper-local, not for profit, public interest journalism organisations (such as The Pineapple) is higher than public trust in the legacy media.

In order to continue to work in the public interest, journalism initiatives such as The Pineapple will depend on philanthropy and eligibility for DGR status is essential for philanthropy to make a meaningful contribution to the future of journalism. The Pineapple submits to the Commission that

unless DGR status is extended to public interest journalism organisations such as ours, we may find it difficult to operate on the smaller amounts of donations a lack of DGR status would allow.

Extending eligibility for DGR status for public interest journalism organisations would be an essential resource supporting recovery of the news media in Australia and by extension, recovery of public trust in The Fourth Estate.

It's important that the definition of public interest journalism charities eligible for DGR status not be so narrow as to exclude media organisations like The Pineapple which mixes public interest journalism with articles of human interest and creative writing to engage the public.

We welcome the Commission's Draft Report and the preliminary conclusion that DGR status should be extended to public interest journalism organisations or media orientated charities and we argue the future healthy functioning of Australia's democracy is partly dependent on this reform.

We thank the Commission for this draft report and for all the work that has been done to inform it. If the Commission should require any more input from The Pineapple we would be happy to assist.

Sincerely,



Vivienne Wynter

Publisher

The Pineapple digital magazine



www.thepineapple.net.au