

Dear Productivity Commission,

My name is Oscar, I am an AI governance researcher focused on mitigating extreme risks from advanced systems (think AI powered bioweapons creation or massive cyberhacking). My academic background is in biology, and I have worked on several projects focusing on biosecurity and pandemic preparedness previously, and was recently at the Biological Weapons Convention discussing DNA synthesis security. My interest in charity work and philanthropy can be traced back to my childhood in India, where my parents were development workers. Their dedication to poverty alleviation and global equality has deeply influenced my perspectives.

I am writing in response to your invitation for submissions following the release of the draft report. I appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the motivations behind philanthropic giving in Australia, and the potential for its growth.

In my previous submission, I emphasised the importance of expanding Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, especially for charities working on preventative issues such as animal suffering and catastrophic risk prevention. I am thrilled to see the Commission's agreement on expanding DGR status to include a broader range of charities working in these fields. However, I am concerned that well-funded incumbent organisations may exploit any ambiguities in the draft report to hinder its implementation.

I support the draft report's finding that the current DGR system requires reform. The proposal to extend DGR status to animal welfare charities is particularly commendable. This inclusion is crucial, as many such charities currently excluded from the DGR status are involved in significant policy and advocacy work aimed at large-scale improvement in animal welfare.

Extending DGR status to all animal welfare charities will ensure equal support for all donors, enabling them to prioritise preventative activities over immediate animal care if they so choose. This will allow more funding to be directed towards high-impact activities that could improve the lives of animals in underfunded areas such as farmed animals, aquatic animals, wildlife, and animals in research.

The draft report indicates that public interest journalism should be eligible for DGR status. I concur with this recommendation and believe that a detailed justification for this expansion in the final report will reinforce its merit. Public interest journalism plays a crucial role in our democratic society by providing accurate, independent information, acting as a watchdog against corruption, and promoting fairness by focusing on marginalised communities or neglected issues.

I was delighted to read about the proposed DGR extension to policy advocacy organisations. I believe this change could greatly deepen the engagement of individuals in our democracy, making a significant difference in addressing pressing issues. However, the final report should clarify that the DGR extension covers not only advocacy activities but also related work such as policy development and community engagement. This would ensure that all related efforts undertaken by advocacy charities to develop and advocate for evidence-based policies are duly recognised.

Finally, I note that currently disqualifying activities include those that are “contrary to public policy” and think this is an unhelpful limitation that may be misinterpreted. For instance, consider a charity doing policy advocacy (which under these reforms may get DGR status) on trying to change Australia’s tobacco policies. By definition if they are lobbying for changes, it is going against the existing ‘public policy’. So I think a better rephrasing would be that entities pursuing objectives ‘contrary to public interest’ should be disqualified.

Thank you for considering my feedback. I am confident that these recommendations, if implemented, will significantly enhance the philanthropic landscape in Australia.

Regards,
Oscar Delaney