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To Whom It May Concern
Philanthropy Inquiry Team
Productivity Commission

By website

Submission on Draft Report on Philanthropy

Background

[The Brisbane Dialogues Inc.](#) (The Brisbane Dialogues) is a wholly independent, neutral, non-partisan, intergenerational, volunteer-based, not-for-profit project to address polarisation and deteriorating discourse in Australia, which we see as the greatest problems the country faces, undermining our capacity to solve all the other problems we face.

Our mission is to demonstrate the possibility of genuine across-the-aisle dialogues in a variety of formats and support other organisations to conduct better discussions between people who disagree.

We conduct:

- a public dialogue series on major policy subjects (“Big Dialogues”)
- a schools program (“Dialogues @ School”) where schools conduct their own “mini-Big Dialogues”
- a monthly private discussion club

and are now developing a national network of organisations which want to collaborate to produce public dialogue events on our proven model (“[Australian Dialogues](#)”). From small beginnings in Brisbane four years ago, we are starting to have a modest national impact.

We take inspiration and know-how from the considerable genre of “civil discourse organisations” in America (e.g. [Braver Angels](#)) whose work is supported by tax deductibility almost as a matter of course.

The Brisbane Dialogues has been self-funded almost exclusively by about \$10,000 of seed capital from two founders and small surpluses from events, until a donation of \$50,000 from Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation last year, specifically for scaling our schools program. We believe this donation is the exception which proves the rule and it is unlikely other philanthropies will support our efforts without DGR status.

The same applies to smaller personal donations. Although we have garnered considerable in-kind support from supporters and volunteers from across the political spectrum who see great value in the work we are doing, we would undoubtedly be able to raise significant personal donations and do a lot more if we had DGR status.

Our perspective on the Productivity Commission inquiry

We welcome the Productivity Commission's inquiry into philanthropy. In particular, we are heartened by the terms of reference which note the role of charities to "build social capital and connectedness" and "to play a vital role in strengthening and reconnecting our communities", which is a way of expressing exactly what we are doing, on both a local and national scale.

The Brisbane Dialogues Inc. is a registered ACNC entity and have recently applied for specific listing under the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997 as we did not fit into any of the 52 DGR categories currently eligible for endorsement. The specific listing process is long and cumbersome with little nexus between the value of charities to a community and the likelihood of DGR status being obtained.

The 52 categories eligible for endorsement seem arbitrary, unnecessarily prescriptive and in some ways outdated, with little connection to whether those charities benefit Australia as a whole and bring our communities and country together.

Instead of offering endorsement for charities that fit into a particular category, we would propose that DGR status is granted to organisations based on a simple set of principles or criteria which flesh out those implied in the terms of reference. They might include, inter alia, that charities should operate for the benefit of the Australian community in general; and that any benefit they provide to specific groups is not to the detriment of other citizens or groups.

Others with far greater policy experience than we have could help articulate clear principles to replace the present outdated and cumbersome prescriptive system.

We thank the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to make a submission.

Murray Hancock

Convenor