

PC – Philanthropy submission

The Commission's draft report contends that 'advocacy activities provide benefits by encouraging robust debate and enabling groups within the community to convey their perspectives on issues that affect them, facilitating their input into democratic processes and policy outcomes'. However, the draft report fails to consider that there may be diminishing or zero returns to advocacy after a certain point. There is already an enormous amount of advocacy work undertaken in Australia, and there are already considerable numbers of advocacy groups that already operate - see the draft report's figures. For the Commission to argue that DGR status should be granted, it needs to demonstrate with empirical evidence that there is an under provision of advocacy services at present. If there is to be maximising net benefits, it needs to demonstrate empirically that there are positive marginal returns greater than other alternatives. Absent such evidence, the Commission is recommending a policy change based purely on its own hunches and intuition - far from making a principles or evidence-based decision.

The Commission fails to consider the considerable net benefits for the whole community driven by the advancement of religion and religious education. Religious people who practice their faith are more likely to undertake philanthropic and charitable activities. They are likely to have more children (at a time when Australia's fertility rate has fallen to ~1.6) and have marriages that are more likely to stay intact (avoiding more of the devastating broader societal costs of family breakdown). These are not private benefits alone. Anecdotal evidence of this can be seen in the work of historical figures such as Caroline Chisholm and Mary MacKillop, or in the volunteers at organisations such as the Salvation Army or St Vincent de Paul. These benefits are not purely a correlation with religious practice but are very much a fruit of religious education and formation by institutes which advance religion. Some sources on this topic for the Commission's consideration are listed below.

To make such a drastic recommendation as to remove the advancement of religion and religious education from DGR status, the Commission needs to provide empirical evidence that the benefits arising from these activities are purely or largely private benefits. The current recommendation appears to be based purely on assertion and intuition.

Deloitte Access Economics, 'Economic value of donating and volunteering behaviour associated with religiosity' (SEIROS, 2017).

Justice Sarah Derrington, 'Faith, Hope, and Charity - Religion as a Public Benefit in Modern Australia' (2019 CLANZ Annual Public Lecture, 29 November 2019)

<https://www.fedcourt.gov.au/digital-law-library/judges-speeches/justice-s-derrington/s-derrington-j-20191129>

Patrick Fagan, 'Why Religion Matters: The Impact of Religious Practice on Social Stability' (Heritage Foundation, 1996)

Rodney Stark, 'America's Blessings: How Religion Benefits Everyone, Including Atheists', (Templeton Press, 2013)

Bruce Sheiman, 'An Atheist Defends Religion: Why Humanity is Better Off with Religion Than Without It' (Alpha Books, 2009)