

Productivity Commission Philanthropy Inquiry Submission

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My name is Dr. Belinda Oppenheimer, and I am a practicing veterinarian in the Greater Melbourne region with a decade of experience, notably working both employed by and alongside numerous animal welfare charities. I am also a passionate animal welfare advocate, and have seen the impact of advocacy work to produce lasting and effective change, often even in comparison to more direct ‘hands on’ welfare efforts. I would like to praise the draft report for its recognition of the current inequitable framework, and rectifying exclusion of preventative and advocacy charities from the Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) scheme. This choice should ultimately stand to allow charities with broad and far-reaching impact to not be unfairly disadvantaged in the charity environment, and will ultimately encourage further charitable giving in line with the Inquiry’s goals.

While, given my background in the animal welfare sector, the inclusion of animal suffering prevention and welfare policy advocacy groups in the DGR scheme is the most welcome, I also commend the specific inclusion of charities responsible for prevention of suffering in other areas, such as catastrophic events, and the inclusion of public interest journalism. The tenants of transparency and accountability should be commended in our society, alongside prevention of issues rather than working to correct issues already in place as is tackled by more traditional DGR charities. Advocacy efforts often facilitate direct positive impact on millions of individuals, and the effectiveness of advocacy charities is currently understated by the DGR framework.

My most notable concern with the current draft is the lack of commitment in providing more government-endorsed information about charity effectiveness and impact, especially given effectiveness is explicitly identified as being associated with increased giving. While there are already external bodies providing this service, the security of a government body-approved scheme would further increase confidence in charities, and help to ensure funds are driven towards charities which provide a high societal impact in their use of donated funds. The promotion and support of charities to evaluate and reflect on their own impact, and thus encourage better and more targeted use of funds, is strongly encouraged for holistic improvement to the sector.

Many thanks for your commitment to ensuring Australia continues to grow towards effective, far-reaching and highly impactful altruism. In the interest of disclosure, I am the current president of Animal-Free Science Advocacy, which is one such organisation which would stand to benefit from these reforms. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important Inquiry.

Dr. Belinda Oppenheimer