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SUBMISSION REGARDING THE AUSTRALIAN
CHARITIES AND NOT-FOR-PROFITS COMMISSION
(REPEAL) (NO. 1) BILL 2014

Dear Standing Committee members,

I write to voice my concern over the repeal of the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC). It is making unprecedented progress on open access to Australian not-for-profit sector data.

I am a believer in open data and the use of evidence when making decisions. The potential for research based on aggregated data or de-identified micro-data from the not-for-profit sector is huge. The knowledge arising from this research could be used by the sector and their stakeholders to improve services to the Australian population. Better data on the sector could help the Government identify trends related to people in need and respond more effectively. Jonathan Greenblatt, Special Assistant to President Barack Obama and Director of the Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation, likened the potential of not-for-profit data in the US to that of the National Weather Service, where an open data approach led to the development of an entire industry around the analysis and communication of weather information.

When it was regulating the sector, the Australian Taxation Office did not prioritise open data and given its purpose and scope, perhaps it shouldn't have. The arrival of the ACNC and its goal to improve access to not-for-profit data was welcomed by the research community. The ACNC research team convenes a regular teleconference with researchers from around the country, which helps us to collaborate and build a better body of research. I have found the ACNC to be open, consultative, rational and helpful. In my experience, their approach has consistently been one of listening to the sector and involving a cross-section of stakeholders in consultations and decision making. They have made consistent incremental progress and I believe they are heading in the right direction, particularly in relation to data access.

I have enjoyed the presence of the ACNC in the sector. I believe it is already a centre of excellence. I hope that the efforts it has made to work with the states to reduce red tape and make administrative data available for research will be continued, rather than halted.

Yours faithfully,

Emma Tomkinson