

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021
Parliament House

Via: em@aph.gov.au

Re: JSCEM Electoral Reform Supplementary Submission

To whom it may concern:

Volunteering Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide a supplementary submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters on the amended Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017.

We are supportive of the amendments proposed by the Committee and pleased that recommendations proposed by the charitable and not-for-profits sector have been considered in relation to the Bill. In our view, the amended text strengthens the Bill significantly, to ensure that charities are still able to effectively advocate for their constituents without being classed as political campaigners.

To further strengthen the Bill and ensure that charities do not fall foul in the legislation, Volunteering Australia recommends an additional amendment to articulate between *partisan* political activities and political activities.

This is particularly important as many organisations in the charitable sector are engaged in issues-based advocacy, as opposed to *partisan* political activities. The ability of charities to tackle injustice and social, economic and environmental inequalities is crucial in holding Governments to account and to maintaining our democracy.

The exposure draft defines 'Electoral matter' as:

"Electoral matter means matter communicated or intended to be communicated for the dominant purpose of influencing the way electors vote in an election (a federal election)..."ⁱⁱ

Without a clear distinction between *non-partisan* political activities with *partisan* political activities, charities could be dissuaded from advocating on behalf of their constituents for fear of falling foul of the legislation and their activities being classed as political.

While the broader definition of political activities in the Bill could be deliberate, Volunteering Australia highlights that the *Australian Charities Act 2013*ⁱⁱ also has a significant role in defining what is a charitable purpose, with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission (ACNC) already having the power to disqualify an entity if they pursue a purpose outside of the scope of a charitable activity.

Advocacy and influencing public policy is a key tenant for Volunteering Australia, in our role as the national peak body for volunteering. Communicating and advocating on the behalf of the sector in the lead up to, and during elections, is also an important function. However, Volunteering Australia is *non-partisan*, with our mandate calling for the encouragement and facilitation of public interest and participation in volunteering, and advocacy on behalf of the volunteering sector.

As abovementioned, we recommend the tightening of what constitutes a political activity to target *partisan* political activities. Volunteering Australia also endorses the recommendations outlined by the Community Council for Australia and is a supporter of the Hands Off Our Charities collaboration.

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering working to advance volunteering in the Australian community. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, promote and celebrate volunteering in Australia. We work collectively with the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies to deliver national, state and local volunteering programs and initiatives in accordance with the Government's priorities.

Volunteering Australia is happy to provide further information on the matters raised above. To discuss this further please contact Ms Lavanya Kala, Policy Manager at Volunteering Australia at

Yours sincerely

Ms Adrienne Picone
Chief Executive Officer
Volunteering Australia

ⁱ EFDR amendment exposure draft

ⁱⁱ Australian Government (2018), Charities Act 2013, Federal Register of Legislation, <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2013A00100>

