



27 September 2018

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

The University of Melbourne welcomes the opportunity to respond to the proposed amendments made to the *Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017* (the Bill).

The University of Melbourne, along with other Australian universities and higher education peak body associations, expressed concern that the provisions of previous draft legislation would inadvertently constrain legitimate university activity. The previous draft Bill did so by significantly increasing regulatory and compliance burden and/or by creating a disincentive for philanthropists to make much needed donations to support vital research activity.

As a public-spirited institution, participation in public policy debates across a range of issues forms a central part of academic discourse. Academic freedom, open intellectual inquiry and debate is essential to the advancement of learning and innovation, and to the sector's contributions to Australia's social and economic progress.

Helping to support this effort is Australia's growing philanthropic culture. Organisations across Australia are fortunate to have been the recipient of generous donations from foreign philanthropists and foundations for many decades. None more so than Australia's leading biomedical institutions and universities, which have been beneficiaries of hundreds of millions of philanthropic dollars from overseas funders, supporting research and innovation with impact.

The decision to remove the problematic definition of 'political purposes' from the Bill is welcomed. For universities, the new defined term 'electoral matters' provides clarity to the sector by restricting the operation of the Bill to communications 'for the dominant purpose of influencing the way electors vote in an election'. Further, the specific exception for communications made for a 'dominant purpose that is satirical, academic, educative or artistic', provides the University with greater certainty when engaging in general issue-based advocacy as part of its teaching, learning and research activities. Given the narrowed scope of the new defined term 'electoral matters', universities will not be subjected to onerous political campaigner

reporting requirements. Importantly, philanthropic donations will not be captured, thus enabling the university to continue to receive these vital funds to advance its academic activities.

While the University acknowledges the importance of preserving the integrity of Australia's electoral system and supports the need to protect against foreign interference in Australia's political affairs, the University welcomes and supports the proposed changes to the Bill, and thanks the Australian Government for addressing the concerns raised by the sector.

For further information, or to discuss the submission, please contact Joseph McCarthy, Deputy General Counsel on