

11 April 2011

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Bills  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
By email: [scrutiny.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:scrutiny.sen@aph.gov.au)

To the Committee Secretary,

**VCOSS Submission: Inquiry into the future directions and role of the Scrutiny of Bills Committee**

VCOSS welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Bills Inquiry into the future directions and role of the Committee.

VCOSS is the peak body for the community sector in Victoria, and works to ensure that all Victorians have access to and a fair share of the community's resources and services, through advocating for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society. VCOSS members reflect a wide diversity, with members ranging from large charities, sector peak organisations, small community services, advocacy groups and individuals involved in social policy debates.

VCOSS is committed to promoting the understanding, engagement, and protection of human rights in Victoria, with a focus on community sector organisations and the broader community – particularly those who experience disadvantage. VCOSS has incorporated a human rights framework explicitly into its policy advocacy work since 2001. In doing so, VCOSS has sought to link domestic policy advocacy discussions to the various international human rights conventions. VCOSS has continued to build on the range of significant work undertaken over this period to strengthen the awareness and understanding of human rights within the Victorian community sector.

VCOSS wishes to endorse the submission of the Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC) to the Inquiry, and the overarching recommendations of the HRLC submission that:

- ❑ the Scrutiny of Bills Committee's powers, processes and terms of reference remain appropriate and that the Scrutiny of Bills Committee should continue to consider human rights issues where they are relevant to the Scrutiny of Bills Committee's work;
- ❑ the proposed Joint Human Rights Committee will have a separate and distinct role to the Scrutiny of Bills Committee but will complement its work; and
- ❑ the Joint Human Rights Committee should be established as soon as possible.

More specifically, VCOSS strongly supports the view of the HRLC that parliamentary committees should play a more significant role in the promotion and protection of human rights in Australia, and the recommendation that this should occur in two primary ways:

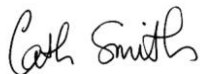
1. the mandates of all relevant parliamentary committees should require that the committee give proper consideration to the Commonwealth's human rights obligations, including Australia's obligations under all international human rights treaties to which it is party; and
2. the Parliament should establish a Joint Committee on Human Rights to lead parliamentary engagement with and understanding of human rights issues.

VCOSS also supports the recommendation of the HRLC that the proposed Joint Committee on Human Rights be mandated to:

- ❑ scrutinise all Bills and subordinate legislation for compatibility with human rights;
- ❑ conduct thematic inquiries into human rights issues;
- ❑ monitor and report on the implementation of the Concluding Observations, Recommendations and Views of UN treaty bodies and the Recommendations of the
- ❑ Special Procedures and the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council; and
- ❑ monitor and report on government responses to Declarations of Incompatibility (under any Australian Human Rights Act) and other relevant court and tribunal decisions and judgments.

Please contact Carolyn Atkins, Deputy Director, for any questions regarding this submission.

Yours sincerely,



Cath Smith  
Chief Executive Officer