

Senate Estimates, 9 November 2022

Opening statement: Deborah Jenkins

Acting Commissioner

Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission

I have had the privilege to lead the ACNC as Acting Commissioner from 1 August this year, until the permanent Commissioner is appointed.

I would like to take this opportunity to outline for the new Committee the scope of the ACNC's work and the scale of the sector it oversees.

We are a small agency, with just over 100 staff, regulating more than 60,000 charities. Despite our name, we do not regulate not-for-profits.

We oversee a sector that generates over \$176 billion, including \$12 billion in donations, and which employs over 10% of Australians – that's more than 1.3 million people.

Volunteers still power the sector. More than three million volunteers contribute to charities, and more than half of all charities operate without any paid staff.

Charities range from small volunteer-based groups to large scale organisations. They operate across a multitude of industries and causes. The sector is extremely diverse.

Most Australian charities are small - 31% turnover less than \$50,000 a year while 20% have revenue between \$50,000 and \$250,000.

Charities report to us annually and we share key details from those Annual Information Statements on our Charity Register, which is a publicly available list of all the registered charities in Australia.

Our Register has grown in importance and just this year we launched enhancements that bring more charity data to the public.

The information available by program, beneficiary and location facilitates giving by donors, grant makers and philanthropists. Charities can use the Register to collaborate and understand their operating environment. Would-be volunteers can search for charities that serve causes they believe in.

Register searches show that it is a valuable resource for millions. There were more than five and half million searches of the Register last financial year.

In December, the ACNC will celebrate 10 years. Although our objects remain the same, our work has evolved.

Along with the website, webinars and podcasts, we have this year added free online learning courses to further support charities.

Over 10 years we have worked with the states and territories to reduce red tape and harmonise reporting. Reducing red tape is one of our objects.

We worked closely with the Australian Government to implement changes to charity size thresholds, meaning red tape cuts for around 5,000 Australian charities.

Other red tape cuts will result from work that culminated this year with the removal of duplicated reporting requirements for charities that fundraise in New South Wales, and from our work to streamline processes with the Australian Taxation Office on Deductible Gift Recipient reforms.

We continue to map the sector – its size and contribution - through our annual Australian Charities Report. This is in addition to the information provided about 60,000 charities on our Register, which includes information about nearly 90,000 charity programs.

We now register more than 2,500 charities each year as well as identifying and assisting those who are no longer operating. We work with charities to ensure they retain their entitlement to registration.

We provide direct advice to charities daily –we responded to over 20,000 phone calls and 13,000 emails last year.

As we approach our 10-year anniversary, this is a good point in time to reflect on our achievements and performance, and to engage with the sector and other interested parties on the future direction of the ACNC.

While we have formal mechanisms such as our Advisor and Sector Forums through which we seek advice, we have recently introduced a Consultation Panel and we open matters to broader consultation to seek the expertise of the sector, when required. Engaging with the sector continues to be key to the success of the ACNC.

I am proud to lead a committed staff working to support a robust and vibrant charity sector that makes a critical contribution to the Australian community.