

## MEETING NOTES: ACNC CHARITY FORUM – MARCH 2026

Meeting date & time	31 March 2026, 10:00am – 1:30pm
Meeting location	Microsoft Teams [Virtual]

### WELCOME

ACNC Assistant Commissioner – Operations and Engagement, Nadine Clode, opened the meeting, sharing an Acknowledgement of Country. There were no conflicts declared.

### UPDATE FROM THE ACNC COMMISSIONER

The ACNC Commissioner, Sue Woodward AM, welcomed Forum members and reflected on the challenging operating environment – both domestically and internationally – for charities at present. This includes navigating economic, regulatory and geopolitical pressures that are prone to rapidly evolve.

In light of these challenges the ACNC continues to be grateful for the time Forum members set aside to engage with and assist the ACNC to fulfil its role in maintaining and protecting trust and confidence, and supporting and sustaining a robust and vibrant charity sector.

The Commissioner also provided an update on the ACNC's recent work, including:

- Her regular meetings with fellow heads of international charity regulators, and the commonality of key themes for regulators are addressing:
  - budgetary pressures
  - demand to assess growing numbers of applications for charity registration
  - transparency reforms, and
  - consideration of how AI and continuously evolving digital capability can be used effectively and responsibly.
- The first [authorised disclosure](#) of an investigation into a charity following amendments to the secrecy provisions set out in the ACNC Act
- Changes to how the ACNC communicates with applicants for charity registration to ensure there is greater clarity and clearer expectations on application processing times.

### UPDATE FROM THE ACNC'S LEADERSHIP TEAM

#### Key points:

- **Reporting, Red Tape Reduction and ACNC Corporate Services**
  - The ACNC was pleased to see 74% of charities required to submit an Annual Information Statement by 31 January did so on time, which represents a 2% increase on the previous year, and captures a substantial number of newly registered charities reporting for the first time.
  - There are no material changes planned to the form of the AIS for the 2026 reporting year.
  - The ACNC welcomed updates on reform to fundraising laws in Western Australia, New South Wales and Tasmania and was working with each of these states to implement changes.
  - Work previously discussed with the Forum to map the lifecycle of a charity in order to identify areas of unnecessary regulatory burden and red tape was progressing (for further update at future Forum meetings).

- Work is underway on the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the Australian Charities Report – including analysis of data from around 1,000 more charities than was included in the 11<sup>th</sup> edition (because of the growth in total number of registered charities between editions).
- **Advice Services, Education and Public Affairs**
  - With nearly 5,000 new charities on the register since last year, focused efforts to ensure charities are best placed to understand their obligations through mail-outs, engagement with peak bodies, webinars and other direct contact has been made. Strong on-time reporting in January shows us that these efforts are effective, and feedback to date has been positive.
  - On 12 May the ACNC will broadcast a 30-min webinar focused on record-keeping obligations. Details on how to join will be included in the April Edition of [The Charitable Purpose](#).
  - AusPayNet is leading [the phase out of cheques](#) as part of a government initiative to modernize payments and system infrastructure in Australia. The ACNC will continue to support ensuring messaging about this change is amplified to the sector.
  - Since the last Charity Forum, the ACNC has also published a substantial amount of new guidance and educational tools, including:
    - [De-identified registration decision summaries](#)
    - [Investing charity money for financial return](#)
    - [Charity governance tools](#)
    - [Updated Charity Portal terms of use](#)
    - [Operational Procedure: professional services agencies and shared portal access](#)
    - [Charity by number the volunteer effect](#).
- **Legal and Policy**
  - In February The ACNC made a [submission](#) to the Senate Standing Committee on Communications, the Arts and Sport’s inquiry into arts and cultural philanthropy.
  - In September 2025 the ACNC also made a [submission](#) to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Service’s inquiry into the provision, regulation and pricing of modern insurance products for small businesses.
- **Registration**
  - Because of the volume of applications, the ACNC is receiving for charity registration, as present it can take up to 9 weeks for the ACNC to start reviewing an application from the time it is submitted. The registration team continues to focus on finding ways to reduce the time for registration applications to be reviewed and completed. Up to date estimates on wait times can now be found on the ACNC’s [Service Commitment](#) webpage, and are included in automated emails to acknowledge receipt of new applications.
- **Compliance**
  - The ACNC hosted a subsector forum in April for small charities operating overseas. The forum included breakout sessions to allow attendees to discuss issues relevant to their operations and risks, working with partners and feedback on how additional regulatory support or focus on unnecessary red tape could assist. [Notes from the meeting](#) are available on the ACNC’s website.
  - Aligned to the [FY2025/26 Regulatory Focus Area](#) of supporting charities at risk of being misused to launder money or finance terrorism:
    - The ACNC issued a survey seeking to understand the banking experiences of charities working internationally. Around 250 responses were received identifying who charities engage with financial institutions and the challenges that can arise in accessing banking services to support charitable work. So far, high level feedback on the survey findings has been shared with those who participated, and the ACNC is now looking to engage stakeholders in the financial services sector to work through possible responses to those findings to help ensure the sector is supported to access effective services from banks.
    - Compliance reviews with 34 charities operating overseas, and mandatory self-audits for 247 charities have also recently been undertaken to review how well charities understand and meet their obligations to manage financial risks associated with operating overseas in different

contexts.

Overall, these reviews and self-audits showed that most charities operating overseas are proactive and risk-aware in their approach to managing the potential that their organisations could be misused to support non-charitable purposes, including money laundering and terrorism. A summary of these reviews will be published on the ACNC's website shortly, and the insights gained from this work will assist the ACNC to continue tailoring guidance and support for charities; this work also contributes to the mutual evaluation of Australia's compliance with the [Financial Action Task Force Recommendations](#).

- **Digital Services**

- The ACNC's Digital Services team is focusing on a multi-year strategy to ensure the ACNC is keeping up with technology changes and enabled to provide simple and effective ways for charities and citizens to access services they need from the ACNC.

## INTRODUCTION TO NEW CHARITY GOVERNANCE TOOLS

### Key points:

- To build on existing tools available on record keeping, conflicts of interest and related party transactions, the ACNC has recently added [governance tools](#) to its website focused on safeguarding and financial management. Each tool aims to help charities and their Responsible People to self-assess their understanding of and compliance with governance obligations. They are designed to help charities reflect on their current governance practices and identify issues or opportunities to strengthen their practices.

The tools are designed to be completed in a single sitting and do not involve the collection or retention of data – ACNC staff do not have access to any information or responses entered into the tools, and users are encouraged to use them without concern that responses could result in compliance action or enforcement powers being used.

## RECENT WORK FROM THE ACNC'S LEGAL AND POLICY TEAM

### Key points:

- In addition to the policy submissions noted in the update from the Leadership Team, an overview of the body of new [de-identified registration decision summaries](#) (and revised existing summaries) was shared. These decision summaries are intended to help advisers and applicants for charity registration understand how the ACNC considers various common themes or issues for applications in a range of contexts. The ACNC is grateful for feedback received on these, which has guided the development and improvement of these resources.
- [Consultation on an update to the Commissioner's Interpretation Statement on the provision of housing by charities](#) was extended at the request of a number of key stakeholders but has now closed. The substantial amount of feedback and advice received from those who engaged in the consultation is now being reviewed and worked through. This very technical work is expected to take another two to three months, but the ACNC is hopeful that the resulting updated statement will help charities, their advisers and the public clearly understand how the ACNC applies the law to the provision of housing.
- The ACNC has also been contributing a substantial amount of technical advice for the mutual evaluation of Australia's compliance with the Financial Action Taskforce Recommendation, which is a whole of government undertaking coordinated by the Department of Home Affairs.

## ACNC CHARITY FORUM MEMBER DISCUSSION

Charity Forum members discussed the following themes and issues during the open discussion.

### Key points:

- The use of AI in assessing charity applications. The ACNC does not use AI to evaluate applications for registration, and noted that details of use of AI at the ACNC can be reviewed on the [ACNC's Transparency Statement](#).
- A request to consider nomination of legal representative forms being incorporated into the ACNC's application for charity registration form was made.

- The Commissioner’s Interpretation Statement on the provision of housing by charities was discussed further to the update provided earlier in the meeting.
- Opportunities to reduce duplicative reporting requirements for charities regulated by the ACNC, NDIA and ASIC were discussed.
- Members reflected on pressures impacting charities including rising fuel costs, reduced volunteer availability or engagement, increasing community demand for support and services, the complexity of the regulatory landscape charities navigate and the need to manage the wellbeing and mental health of charity staff and volunteers in navigating a difficult operating environment.
- The latest edition of the [AICD’s Annual Not-for-Profit Governance and Performance Study \(2024-25\)](#) was shared.

#### UPDATE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Representing the Department of the Treasury, Pete Robjent provided an update to Charity Forum members.

##### Key points:

- On the morning of the meeting, the government was seeking to make a temporary reduction to fuel excise in order to reduce economic pressure across the Country.
- In February 2026 the government [announced](#) changes to the minimum distribution rate for giving funds, and the declaration of 34 new community charities.
- The government also intended to remove the existing condition that a gift to a deductible gift recipient be valued at \$2 or more before the donor may claim a tax deduction.

#### UPDATE FROM THE AUSTRALIAN TAXATION OFFICE

Representing the Australian Taxation Office, Tom Wheeler provided an update to Charity Forum members.

##### Key points:

- Forum members were encouraged to assist the ATO in efforts to communicate to NFPs of the need to either complete and lodge required self-review returns if they are income-tax exempt, register as a charity if eligible, or comply with their obligations as a taxable entity.
- [Payday Super](#) changes apply from 1 July 2006, and employers must take steps to ensure super is paid at the same time salary and wages are paid.
- A common cause of delay when updating ABN details for not-for-profits is the submission of incomplete forms or missing information. Information about what information the ATO and ABR needs can be found via the [ATO’s website](#). Some changes charities and NFPs navigate (for example changes to entity type or changes because of mergers) can be more complex – help is available, including via the ‘contact us’ or chat options on the ATO’s website.