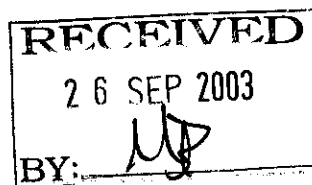


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Consultation on the Definition of a Charity
The Board of Taxation
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26 September 2003

Submission Re: Charities Bill 2003

Nature and Purpose of Organisation

The History Council of New South Wales is the peak body representing a culturally and geographically diverse membership. Members include local, regional, family and labour history organisations, Aboriginal history groups, museums and galleries, migrant and non-English speaking history associations, professional and amateur bodies, university history departments, libraries and archives, heritage organisations, local government, as well as any other organisation where historical work is undertaken. Individual members are also a vital part of our organisation.

The History Council of New South Wales promotes interest in history and appreciation of its value to society. It regards historical understanding as an essential tool for decision making in public and private spheres by individuals, organisations and governments at all levels. As the peak body representing history in New South Wales, the Council responds to the history interests of the broader community and speaks and acts authoritatively in the interests of improved historical practice.

The Charter of the History Council declares that the Council will take a public stand on relevant social and political issues to increase historical awareness, recognising that history is broadly practised in the community in a diversity of forms by many different groups and individuals. In the interest of good government, the Council advocates the appropriate appointment of historians to government boards, authorities, departments and enquiries. The History Council seeks to raise the profile of history in education, state development, transport, urban and regional planning, business, heritage, environment, tourism, the media and the arts.

The History Council also seeks to support the interests of its member organisations, which include a broad range of community-based groups as well as publicly-funded bodies, and it is on this basis that we make our current submission.

Response to the Charities Bill 2003

History and heritage societies are not-for-profit organisations that benefit the community through research, education and cultural pursuits. Many such groups benefit from being defined as a deductible gift recipient. This allows them to raise funds for particular purposes such as library resources and conservation works.

Many community history and heritage groups lobby local government, state government and federal government for the preservation of our history. For many groups, history education and history advocacy go hand-in-hand. Advocacy is a key element for many historical societies. Under the definition of a charity in the 2003 Charities Bill, many history and heritage societies will be excluded from being defined as a charity (and therefore the taxation concessions associated with such a definition) under clause 8 (2).

The ability to be a deductible gift recipient is an important fundraising facility for many historical and heritage societies, such as the Society of Australian Genealogists and the National Trust of Australia (NSW). The loss of tax concessions will be a serious burden on many societies and may cause some to fold.

As the Australian Council of Social Service has pointed out in their submission, the Charities Bill seeks to impose outdated and counter-productive restrictions on the advocacy and lobbying activities of charities.

The adoption of this Bill would exclude many history and heritage societies from the "charities" definition and effectively remove them from contributing to the social and cultural life of our nation. It would penalise history and heritage groups for being a community advocacy group - a voice of the people.



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