

# Not-for-Profit Sector Development Blueprint

## *Submission to the Blueprint Expert Reference Group*

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The Australia Institute welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Federal Department of Social Services Community Services Advisory Group's Not-for-Profit Sector Development Blueprint consultation.

We want to draw the Reference Group's attention to Australia Institute research on the important advocacy role played by the not-for-profit sector.

The Institute would welcome the opportunity to discuss research findings further with the Reference Group.

## **Government interference in the not-for-profit sector**

During the Howard Government, the Australia Institute developed a large body of work that demonstrated the way that the levers available to the federal government had been used to silence critics, including those in the not-for-profit sector. The experience remains a caution for the sector.

Maddison, Denniss and Hamilton (2004) *Silencing dissent: Non-government organisations and Australian democracy*,  
<https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/silencing-dissent-non-government-organisations-and-australian-democracy/>

Edgar (2008) *Agreeing to disagree: Maintaining dissent in the NGO sector*,  
<https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/agreeing-to-disagree-maintaining-dissent-in-the-ngo-sector/>

## Electoral laws and the not-for-profit sector

In the last parliamentary sitting weeks of 2021, the Morrison Government and Labor Opposition negotiated a deal to pass “political campaigner” legislation, although the legislation now refers to “significant third parties” instead.

The not-for-profit sector, including the Australia Institute, expressed serious concerns that the legislation is ill-considered, rushed and designed to quell legitimate charity advocacy.

At the time, Andrew Leigh (now Assistant Minister for Charities) acknowledged that the new laws increased the “paperwork burden” on charities and that Labor planned to “revisit this framework” if it won the election.

Browne (2021) *No good deed goes unpunished: The effect of Coalition–Labor “political campaigners” amendments on charities*,  
<https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/no-good-deed-goes-unpunished/>

## Public attitudes to advocacy

In 2015, the Australia Institute conducted polling research to test public support for tax-deductible donations being used for advocacy activities. At the time, it found:

- Most Australians support tax-deductible donations to a wide range of advocacy activities, including:
  - advocacy to change environmental policy (68 per cent),
  - environmental campaigning (68 per cent) and
  - legal cases to uphold existing environmental law (55 per cent).
- Only 27 per cent said environment groups had too much influence in public debates, while 34 per cent said they had not enough influence.
- By contrast, most people said big business (62 per cent) and mining companies (58 per cent) had too much influence.

We do not expect that these attitudes would have changed significantly in the intervening eight years, but we would encourage the Reference Group to consider conducting its own polling research on public attitudes to the not-for-profit sector, including advocacy.

Swann (2015) *Who says? Public support for environmental advocacy*,  
<https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/who-says-public-support-for-environmental-advocacy/>