

Front cover

In pre-Federation Australia the various armed colonial services wore a gorget, or breastplate, to indicate the rank of officers. The gorget itself being only a ceremonial imitation of the full gorget of an armoured knight that connected the helmet to the armour plating of the chest protected the neck.

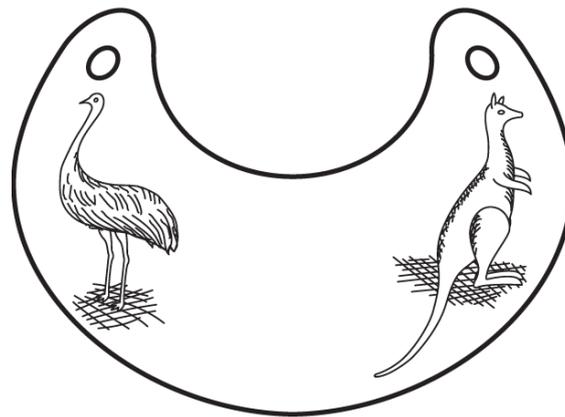
To honour those Indigenous Australians who distinguished themselves in the eyes of the newly arrived colonial settlers a brass gorget might be given with a grand title. Commonly the title of King was bestowed and this gave rise to the alternate descriptions of the gorgets as *king plates*. In many cases these honours were sincerely well intentioned gifts, and in some cases as a bribe for treachery against other Indigenous people, but in all cases these honours were given in ignorance of the actual

customs and leadership structures of Australia's Indigenous peoples.

Because of the ignorance about Indigenous systems, and the use of gorgets to create privileges for those Indigenous men and women who helped the settlers, some people perceive these gorgets to be offensive and demeaning tokens.

At Tanjenong Indigenous Corporation we are committed to playing our part developing the skills, resources, expertise, and the institutions, for our people to be truly autonomous.

As part of this commitment we are reappropriating symbols of subjugation as symbols of a new and emerging capacity to determine our own affairs. Reappropriating symbols of subjugation as symbols of sovereignty.



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Indigenous Corporation
Tanjenong
ICN: 8392

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D: 28 August 2018.
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Cover letter

To: **REVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN CHARITIES AND NOT-FOR-PROFIT COMMISSION (ACNC) LEGISLATION,**
Care of: the Principal Adviser, Individuals and Indirect Tax Division.
email: ACNCReview@treasury.gov.au
post: CATSI review, PO Box 29, WODEN. ACT. 2606.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Review Panel,

Tanjenong Indigenous Corporation (*Tanjenong IC*) is a unique organisation by structure, purpose, intention and aspiration. We are in the most germinal stage attempting to bootstrap our projects into reality without, thus far, any support from any source aside from the seeding of Tanjenong by our founding and sole organisation member, the *Nikolaous Institute of Philanthropy Pty Ltd (Nikolaous Institute)* which is a corporate trustee to funds regulated by the ACNC. The views and concerns thus expressed in this submission are also supported, endorsed and are in significant part supplied by the *Nikolaous Institute*.

Our perspectives, born of our structure and experiences, are unique. However, we argue that by *Tanjenong IC* being the aberration in constellation of *CATSI Act* entities is instructive and relevant to the bulk of entities who will be regulated by the outcomes of the **REVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN CHARITIES AND NOT-FOR- PROFIT COMMISSION.**

Many of our joint concerns have been covered by other submissions, so we wish to focus your attention to the following three (3) concerns.

1. Anti-competitive practices supported by the ACNC – without prejudice to the motive.
2. Obnoxious regulatory barriers to the registration of Indigenous not-for-profit enterprises.
3. The ACNC's inability to provide information on their processing of Indigenous owned and controlled applicants seeking endorsement for charitable tax concessions.

We look forward to seeing the Review's recommendations when they are available, and, with the gracious support of my fellow Directors I am happy to appear before the Review or otherwise assist.

Sincerely,
Reuben J. Humphries,
CEO Tanjenong IC,
Director of the corporate Trustee: Nikolaous Institute of Philanthropy
Made free of London (Freeman by redemption) 2009

About us

Under our constitution *Tanjenong Indigenous Corporation (Tanjenong IC)* is incorporated with only one full member, mentioned by name, and three appointed directors. Our one member is itself a corporation, specifically *The Nikolaous Institute of Philanthropy Pty Ltd ACN: 135 330 371 (Nikolaous Institute)*. *The Nikolaous Institute* is a non-trading trustee company, as per legislated requirements, to act as trustee for a fund Endorsed under the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997 (ITAA 97)* as an *Item 2 Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR)*, amongst various other charitable trusts.

Since the inception of *The Nikolaous Institute*, and thus also its trustees, fully one half have been, and will remain, Indigenous. This level of Indigenous ownership and control is both a functional reality of a philanthropic foundation designed to be a family heirloom. An heirloom of civic duty to be carried by the families of the founders, and a requirement of the family constitution regulating those founding families. The character, structure and nature of the *Nikolaous Institute* is the polar-opposite of democratic structures such as incorporated associations and more akin to the family and clan structures of its founders. Wishing to provide a formal assertion of the Indigenous heritage of the founders behind the *Nikolaous Institute*, they sought, and were granted, registration of *Tanjenong IC* under *ORIC* in 2016.

The incorporated association structure, the only model, for entities registered under the *CATSI Act* does not reflect the founders preferred trustee-like structure. An exemption granted to permit only one full member, instead of the minimum of five, with the *Nikolaous Institute* as a corporation being that sole member. A “work-around” permitted, but not anticipated, by the *CATSI Act* that most closely resembles our ways of leadership, the heavy responsibility we demand, and the accountability of clearly identified trustees who are perpetually subject to account as they can never eschew personal liability or tribal justice in the eyes of the beneficiaries and the founders.

Tanjenong IC is Endorsed under the *ITAA 97* as an *Item 1 DGR*, in the form of an Indigenous *Public Benevolent Institution (PBI)* which further cements the relationship between the two entities and provides a pathway for the transfer of public and private contributions to the benefit of the Indigenous community.

With persistence and great personal expense typically beyond our Indigenous communities, our founders developed an entity that:

- a. the *CATSI Act* does not provide for; and,
- b. the *ACNC* was, initially, unable to endorse as newly incorporated *PBI* without evidence of this entity previously being a *PBI*.*

It is from this unique and hybrid perspective that *Tanjenong IC* offers this submission to the *REVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN CHARITIES AND NOT-FOR-PROFIT COMMISSION*.

*Note to the reader: the above listed point ‘b’ is not a typographical error, this was indeed the absurd ‘catch 22’ logical paradox that bedevilled our application for endorsement with the *ACNC*.

The objectives of the Review

Your reference:

Terms of Reference dated 20 December 2017

The Review Panel will inquire into and make recommendations on appropriate reforms to ensure that the regulatory environment established by the ACNC Acts continues to remain contemporary, that the ACNC Acts deliver on their policy objectives and that the ACNC Acts do not impair the work of the ACNC Commissioner to deliver against the objects of the principal Act; being:

- a. to maintain, protect and enhance public trust and confidence in the Australian not-for-profit sector;
and
- b. to support and sustain a robust, vibrant, independent and innovative Australian not-for-profit sector;
and
- c. to promote the reduction of unnecessary regulatory obligations on the Australian not-for-profit sector.

The review should evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of the ACNC Acts. In particular, the review should:

1. Examine the extent to which the objects of the ACNC Acts continue to be relevant.
2. Assess the effectiveness of the provisions and the regulatory framework established by the ACNC Acts to achieve the objects.
3. Consider whether the powers and the functions of the ACNC Commissioner are sufficient to enable these objects to be met.
4. Consider whether any amendments to the ACNC Acts are required to enable the achievement of the objects and to equip the ACNC Commissioner to respond to both known and emerging issues.

Public submissions

... Some focusing questions for submissions could be:

1. Are the objects of the ACNC Act still contemporary?
2. Are there gaps in the current regulatory framework that prevent the objects of the Act being met?
3. Should the regulatory framework be extended beyond just registered charities to cover other classes of not-for-profits?
4. What activities or behaviours by charities and not-for-profits have the greatest ability to erode public trust and confidence in the sector?
5. Is there sufficient transparency to inform the ACNC and the public more broadly that funds are being used for the purpose they are being given?
6. Have the risks of misconduct by charities and not-for-profits, or those that work with them, been appropriately addressed by the ACNC legislation and the establishment of the ACNC?
7. Are the powers of the ACNC Commissioner the right powers to address the risk of misconduct by charities and not-for-profits, or those that work with them, so as to maintain the public's trust and confidence? Is greater transparency required and would additional powers be appropriate?
8. Has the ACNC legislation been successful in reducing any duplicative reporting burden on charities? What opportunities exist to further reduce regulatory burden?
9. Has the ACNC legislation and efforts of the ACNC over the first five years struck the right balance between supporting charities to do the right thing and deterring or dealing with misconduct?

Mapping our responses

We wish to focus the attention of the Review panel to:

1. Anti-competitive practices supported by the ACNC – without prejudice to the motive.
2. Obnoxious regulatory barriers to the registration of Indigenous not-for-profit enterprises.
3. The ACNC's inability to provide information on their processing of Indigenous owned and controlled applicants seeking endorsement for charitable tax concessions.
4. The ATO is using its regulatory powers to impose debts upon *Item 2 Public Ancillary Funds*, and unnecessary increasing regulatory obligations.

These three issues map to the Review's Terms of Reference in the following way.

1. Anti-competitive practices relate to the Review's examination of principle objects 'a' and 'b' of the Act, namely: *maintain, protect and enhance public trust and confidence in the Australian not-for-profit sector; and to support and sustain a robust, vibrant, independent and innovative Australian not-for-profit sector...*
2. Obnoxious regulatory barriers to the registration of Indigenous not-for-profit enterprises relate to the Review's examination of all three principle objects of the Act, namely: *maintain, protect and enhance public trust and confidence in the Australian not-for-profit sector; and to support and sustain a robust, vibrant, independent and innovative Australian not-for-profit sector; to promote the reduction of unnecessary regulatory obligations on the Australian not-for-profit sector.*
3. The ACNC's inability to provide information on their processing of Indigenous owned and controlled applicants seeking endorsement for charitable tax concessions also relate to the Review's examination of all three principle objects of the Act, as listed above.
4. The ATO is using its regulatory powers to impose debts upon *Item 2 Public Ancillary Funds*, and unnecessary increasing regulatory obligations relate to the Review's examination of principle object 'c' of the Act, namely: *to promote the reduction of unnecessary regulatory obligations on the Australian not-for-profit sector.*

Each of these issues is addressed with numbered response for the consideration of the Review panel. We are aware that some of the material of the issues and of our responses may fall outside the strict boundaries of the Review, such as the powers of the ATO. However, wording such as: *enhance public trust and confidence* and *to promote the reduction of unnecessary regulatory obligations* that the Review has regard to appears to us to be a *prima facie* license to the Review examine the ACNC Legislation in context and its relationship to other sources of regulation. A holistic approach that we hope the Review will apply in practice.

1. Anti-competitive practices

Tax deductibility for donors from providing certain gifts and other tax concessions are widely perceived to be a form of redistributive justice were the community determines, and constantly re-examines, the causes best meeting the public expectations and the extent of that support. The deductibility of certain gifts effectively creates a free market in which worthy causes evolve under the scrutiny of the public rather than bureaucrats ineptly picking winners and losers at glacial pace. As with any free market, the marketplace of worthy causes and the institutions serving them will seek its own equilibrium, achieving the greatest benefit for the least cost. For example, a charity that successfully delivers the same public as its competitors but innovates by redeploying some paid staff to the recruitment of volunteers and new donors may achieve more benefit per dollar and thus be rewarded with more donations and winning bigger contracts for delivering services.

Free markets do however require some basic public protections and interventions. Anti-competitive behaviours must be vigorously prosecuted wherever they are found. The body of Australian competition law would be very effective at addressing anti-competitive behaviours were it able to get traction inside of the non-profit marketplace, and even more so if it were bust open the charitable marketplace. The difficulty lays in the systemic and unquestioned assumption that charity and non-profit activities are not businesses, and business is not charity, therefore they operate by opposing and incompatible rules. Where cartels are a criminal offence in business, they are encouraged among charities, where price fixing bids for government tenders attracts serious consequences for corporate directors, charities are encouraged to share pricing information, where large businesses attempt to block or hinder new competitors it is a scandal, but open talk of too many registered charities on the ACNC's books and meetings between the ACNC and other established charities to consider how reduce the number is celebrated as progressive and in the public interest.

Where any activity of the ACNC as the regulator or of any combination of other non-profit or charitable entities is written and then parsed with for-profit entities or their regulator and the conclusion would be that the activity is an anti-competitive behaviour, then a crime against the interests of the public is manifestly established. The following examples are illustrative:

- a. The proposition: The ACNC invites a select group of advisers drawn from established large charities to discuss ways to reduce the number of registered charities on its books. If this sentence is now parsed as "[ASIC] invites a select group of advisers drawn from established large [corporations] to discuss ways to reduce the number of registered [businesses] on its books" then you have very likely established collusion to reduce the choice of clients seeking services, to reduce the choice of the public to donate to entities that may be more efficient or deliver better outcomes, or to limit which type of cancer research the public can support.
- b. The proposition: Several prominent charities decide to jointly set higher professional standards for face-to-face fundraising through a membership based group. This group offers its members donation collection staff access to locations such as major shopping complexes and even entire local government areas under exclusive contracts signed with the local government body or centre management because of the assurance of "higher standards". This group also enjoy the open support and endorsement of the ACNC. If this sentence is now parsed as Several prominent [corporations] decide to jointly set higher professional standards for [retail] through a membership based group. This group offers its members [retail] staff access to locations such as major shopping complexes and even entire local government areas under exclusive contracts signed with the local government body or centre management because of the assurance of "higher standards". This group also enjoy the open support and endorsement of [ASIC] then you have very likely established allocation of territories, exclusion of competitors and a cartel. For the edification of the Review panel please see:
 - i. www.pfra.org.au/pages/benefits-of-membership.html
 - ii. www.pfra.org.au/pages/council-fact-sheet.html and,
 - iii. the ACNC's statement supporting the PFRA can be found on their front page at www.pfra.org.au

- c. The proposition: A group of community healthcare and social service charities meet regularly to discuss what is a reasonable fee to charge for their services reflecting costs like wage increases and the increased costs of healthcare innovations like the latest model of hearing aids. If this sentence is now parsed as "A group of [private healthcare centres] meet regularly to discuss what is a reasonable fee to charge for their services reflecting costs like wage increases and the increased costs of healthcare innovations like the latest model of hearing aids." then you have very likely established price fixing and price gouging by charging the healthcare system or patients for devices under new patents with no proven benefit or increased comfort over equally discrete, comfortable and functional devices out of patent and at a substantial lower cost.

1. Our recommendation

The Review panel should consider if anti-competitive behaviours in the non-profit and charity sector may be against the public interest. If a concern for the public interest does exist then:

1. the ACNC Legislation should explicitly state that all entities registered by the ACNC are subject to other legislation protecting free and fair competition;
2. that the ACNC must have regard to any perception that it supports or colludes in any way to limit or control competition, which includes any implication that it seeks to limit competition by bullying or compelling entities into deregistering, merging or winding up for anything other than a serious breach, putting barriers in front of new registrations to discourage them, or supporting groups that may encourage anti-competitive behaviours;
3. that the ACNC must also be compelled to cooperate with any proceedings against any entity for anti-competitive behaviour; and,
4. ACNC registration listings, by a website or any other means must **NOT** be allowed to become a marketing billboard where the ACNC creates a de facto higher level of endorsement promoting those charities who have the funds to provide glossy annual reports and other materials or data filled with information of no material importance to their registration. For non-profits and charities a history of previous grants and contracts becomes a form of endorsement that locks out competitors, so for the ACNC to permit materials like glossy annual reports where this self-promoting information can be slipped in is to make the acnc.gov.au website a marketing platform where the ACNC picks winners and losers.

Our thanks to Mrs Joanna Palatsides, one of our Directors, for her contribution in this matter, Mrs Palatsides' writing on the topic can be found at: www.linkedin.com/pulse/charity-trust-repugnant-people-joanna-palatsides

2. Obnoxious barriers to Indigenous registration

Obnoxious regulatory barriers to the registration of Indigenous not-for-profit enterprises do exist and they are having a chilling effect on self-initiated Indigenous charitable registrations.

Tanjenong Indigenous Corporation (Tanjenong IC), incorporated on the 20th of April 2016, submitted its application for endorsement as an Indigenous *PBI* to the ACNC on the 5th of May 2016. Forty-three (43) days later, despite the ACNC's principles of service delivery and response times, and despite the ACNC's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities Engagement Strategy*, Tanjenong IC received a request for information made under *section 30-15(1) of the ACNC Act*.

The request required of us to demonstrate that we had the character of *PBI* by conducting ourselves as a *PBI* before we could be accepted as a *PBI*. As a corporation founded only days before for the specific purpose of operating as a *PBI* we were required to furnish the percentage of time and resources applied to each existing program or activity, evidence of our fundraising, and provide copies of our "website, Facebook page, pamphlets, brochures, media releases etc ... that would support your charitable purpose, openness and public benefit." This was required to demonstrate our "openness" and our public benefit, otherwise our application would be rejected. The ACNC also informed us that the model winding up clause adopted directly from the model rules developed jointly between the *Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC)* and the ACNC was rejected as it only referred to the winding up of our *Gift Fund* and not to the entire entity of *Tanjenong IC*. Significantly *ORIC's* model rules, as co-drafted by the ACNC, are designed to especially obviate the need for specialist legal counsel for remote, impoverished and isolated Indigenous communities when establishing new for-profit and non-profit enterprises.

Had we displayed the "openness" required of us by the ACNC it would have violated our obligations to be a closed *PBI* only for the benefit of Indigenous persons on benevolent need as set out in the Commissioner's Interpretation Statement: Indigenous charities found at www.acnc.gov.au/ACNC/Publications/Interp_IndigenousCharities.aspx

We were also led to believe that if we were unable to demonstrate that if *Tanjenong IC* could not demonstrate that it had the character of a *PBI* through evidence of its publications, media releases, social media and more, our application would still be rejected as any entity's purposes alone without the evidence of its character are not enough to justify endorsement.

As the purposes of *Tanjenong IC* including applying for grants from *item 2* deductible funds rather than soliciting only from the public we were also unable to demonstrate our fundraising activities as it would have been illegal for us to have received *item 2* deductible funds as we were not endorsed as an *item 1 PBI*. A classic 'catch 22' logical error, to be endorsed we needed to demonstrate that we were already endorsed.

The ACNC kindly provided a copy of a winding up clause they'd be happy to accept which utterly omitted the specific requirement for an *item 1 endorsed PBI* that upon winding up that its assets must be directed to another *item 1 endorsed* charity. This omission, had we adopted it on the advice of the ACNC, would have caused our application to be rejected on that point alone. This fundamental omission was only noticed by *Tanjenong IC's* founders, with no formal legal training, because of their near decade long experience as directors of a corporate trustee. A skill set that would be uncommon amongst the disadvantaged communities that the ACNC is obliged to serve.

With further exchanges between *Tanjenong IC* and our legal counsel, and the ACNC we had concluded that, to use a phrase, the deck was stacked against us because of the nature and purpose of *Tanjenong IC*. With great expense upon counsel, time and effort, thus further compounding our disadvantage, and an *FOI request* upon the ACNC seeking information the ACNC's institutional barriers blocking Indigenous applicants, we managed to win our endorsement that was backdated to the date of our incorporation.

2. Our recommendation

The assessment of *PBI's* for endorsement needs to be overhauled and settled with clear criteria for the endorsement of newly emerging *PBI's*. This must also be considered against concerns about free competition being stifled by unnecessary bureaucracy. As with any other anti-competitive behaviours, it is not the intention, but the result that constitutes the offence.

The *ACNC* also needs to begin keeping records of Indigenous applicants, their position within the processing of the application, and the outcome. This would allow:

1. the celebration of success stories,
2. inform efforts on *Closing The Gap*,
3. help the *ACNC* to:
 - a. maintain, protect and enhance public trust and confidence in the Australian not-for-profit sector; and
 - b. to support and sustain a robust, vibrant, independent and innovative Australian not-for-profit sector; and
 - c. to promote the reduction of unnecessary regulatory obligations on the Australian not-for-profit sector.
4. keep the *ACNC* accountable in Indigenous matters,
5. provide assurance to entities like *Tanjenong IC* that the *ACNC* does not have a structural bias against us.

3. ACNC's inability to provide data on Indigenous charity endorsement

Provoked by our experience with the ACNC listed under our item '2' *Obnoxious barriers to Indigenous registration*, we sought information from the ACNC under *FOI*. We sought information on the activities of the ACNC without restriction or limitation from the date of the founding of the ACNC to the date of our *FOI* request, the 20th of June 2016, relating and entities seeking endorsement as *Deductible Gift Recipient* entities for their very first time and who have done so through the ACNC and of those how many were Indigenous owned and controlled.

We also requested information on how, and in what number, requests for further information under *section 30-15(1) of the ACNC Act* had been against Indigenous and non-Indigenous applicants, and if the indigeneity of the applicant played any role in triggering *section 30-15(1)* requests.

We pointed out that:

Indigenous affairs is fraught with the politics of a highly competitive race for funding opportunities, from all sources and even competition for DGR gifts. It is the stuff of legend within the Indigenous community that those who have legislative monopolies over Indigenous affairs develop corrupt cliques of employees with undisclosed allegiances to particular Indigenous interests and to the exclusion of others. The ACNC exercises one such monopoly by determining who will and will not be endorsed as an Indigenous DGR entity. ...

We also request that any fees or changes in relation to this FOI Request be waived on the grounds of public interest. We contend that dispelling erroneous assumptions about corruption within government, or semi-government, authorities that exercise a legislative monopoly over any part of Indigenous affairs is a vital public interest matter and an obligation for those authorities. We further contend that given the recent founding of the ACNC and the digital storage of communications that the ACNC undoubtedly uses, that searching all outgoing correspondence to entities seeking endorsement as DGR entities for references to "section 30-15(1)" and variations on the search phrase, and further broken down into the data as requested in this FOI request, is entirely reasonable in the public interest.

The ACNC replied as follows:

From: Regina Rutten **Sent:** Wednesday, 29 June 2016 5:11 PM **To:** 'ceo@tanjenong.org.au'
Subject: RE: This is a formal FOI request of the ACNC under the FOI Act - Tanjenong Indigenous Corporation (ICN: 8392). [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

Hello Mr Humphries,

Thank you for speaking with me about your FOI request today.

I confirm that it was received on 20 June 2016, and the 30 day statutory period for processing your request commenced from the day after that date.

As discussed, I have made preliminary enquiries with our Registration and IT Directorates about whether the ACNC holds documents that answer your request, and advise you as follows:

- the ACNC does not collect the statistical information you have requested;
- the information you seek cannot be readily extracted from our systems; and
- it is estimated that it would take an ACNC officer about one month to individually review applications within our systems and manually collate the statistics sought.

I confirm that the work involved in manually collating the information you seek is beyond that required by the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Cth). As such, could you please either withdraw your FOI request (by reply email) or contact me to discuss ways you may reduce or alter your request so that we can process it.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any queries.

Regards,

Regina Rutten

Legal Counsel | Legal and Policy | Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission
T (03) 928 51739 | F 1300 232 569 | E regina.rutten@acnc.gov.au | W www.acnc.gov.au

Faced with a prohibitive cost and a refusal by the *ACNC* to accept a “public interest” argument for funding the cost of collecting the data we withdrew our *FOI* request.

Building upon various telephone and email correspondence between the *ACNC*, ourselves and our legal counsel billed at an hourly rate, we wrote back to the *ACNC*'s Legal Counsel, Ms Regina Rutten, expressing our concerns and frustrations in the hope that this might edify the internal conversations of the *ACNC*. Without any further contact, on the 25th of August 2016, the *ACNC* confirmed to our counsel by phone that they had granted our endorsement that day.

3. Our recommendation

With the digital storage of its data and the computing power available to the *ACNC* it is entirely reasonable that the *ACNC* should be able to provide any permutation and breakdown of all its applicants and registrations on demand. Determining the Indigeneity of applicants should be as easy as determining if they incorporated under the *CATSI Act*, similar State based registrations or if self-identified in their application.

All outgoing correspondence from the *ACNC* should also be easily archived and searchable for phrases like “*section 30-15(1)*” as this will allow any phrase to be searched and then converted into statistical information.

As the taxpayer funded regulator, the *ACNC* should be compelled to accept “public interest” argument, and therefore bear the costs, of any *FOI* request or similar instrument where the enquiry is initiated by a charity it regulates and that goes to a question of the *ACNC*'s own conduct.

The regulator should not be permitted excuse from scrutiny because it can name a fee exceeding the capacity of the charities it regulates to block that scrutiny.

----: End of submission :----