

David Crosbie – opening statement – ACNC repeal bill 23/5/14

Thank you to the Senate and the Economics Committee for the opportunity to present – in many ways we have all been here before. In this opening statement I just want to make three observations that really go beyond what is in our written submission.

The first is the overwhelming measure of support for the ACNC that this inquiry has again demonstrated.

This may not be reflected in the witnesses presenting today, but my own reading and independent analysis by a number of different sources I am aware of have found that around 90% of the submissions oppose the repeal of the ACNC. This is a remarkable level of support for a regulator and reflects the extensive work of this committee and others in informing the establishment of the ACNC. It shows how a parliamentary process that is genuinely participative and involves real consultation, compromise and a commitment to achieving a positive outcome can work. Years of consultation and refinement went into establishing the ACNC. The great thing about the establishment of the ACNC is that it was never about ideology or politics, but about achieving the best outcome for civil society and our broader community. And I know that is why I am here and I believe why you are here as well.

The second and related point is to highlight what the number of submissions says about the sector and it's preparedness to stand up for its own interests.

In 2011 this Committee conducted an inquiry into future financing of the not-for-profit sector, an issue of immense importance across the whole sector. This is a very large sector, employing around 1 million Australians and turning over around \$100 billion. Future financing is considered one of the most pressing issues for every organisation across the sector. In response to that inquiry, there were around 30 submissions. This inquiry has attracted over 150 submissions – again very strongly supportive of the ACNC continuing. This, to me, is a very real sign that the sector is finding its voice. And this means the sector can no longer be silenced by threats of funding withdrawals or taken for granted in national policy debates. I think anyone seeking to ignore or dismiss the sector's own views on what is in its best interests might look at this inquiry and recognize the power that is reflected in the over 100 submissions supporting the ACNC. It may not be straight political or economic power, but it represents some of the most trusted institutions in our society. Dismissing their views was never good policy, but I would suggest that as the sector finds its voice, dismissing that voice will also not be good politics.

Thirdly, I want to say that many believe the outcomes of this inquiry are predetermined by political positioning. For some, the unreflective bias against the ACNC in the witness list confirms this view.

I remain an optimist. I believe the Senate can and should ensure that proposals from the lower house are properly scrutinized and reviewed, and that the outcomes of those reviews be reflected in the positions adopted by the Senate. I would urge everyone involved in this inquiry to read as many of the submissions as possible, to listen and to respond, keeping in mind what is in the best interests of our community, not just the politics of the day.

I just wanted to end my opening statement by commending the staff of the ACNC.