



Australian Bahá'í Community

**Submission by the Australian Bahá'í Community to the
Review of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Legislation**

The Australian Bahá'í Community welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Panel conducting the Review of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) Acts.

The Australian Bahá'í Community was established in 1920. As members of the Bahá'í Faith—an independent worldwide religion, founded over 170 years ago, with more than five million members around the globe—we work to promote and apply principles derived from Bahá'í teachings which are aimed at contributing to the development of a united, peaceful, just and sustainable global civilisation.

The Bahá'í Faith, which has no clergy, is governed by elected councils at the local, national and international levels. The national governing body is the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia Inc., incorporated in the ACT under the *Associations Incorporation Act 1991* (ACT). Across Australia there are some 168 local governing bodies, known as Local Spiritual Assemblies, some of which are incorporated bodies and others are unincorporated associations. The National Assembly and most Local Assemblies are registered as charities with the ACNC.

The Australian Bahá'í Community was supportive of the establishment of the ACNC. We had found the regulatory framework for the not-for-profit sector unnecessarily complicated and not well suited to the needs of organisations such as our own, and we hoped that the establishment of the ACNC and related reforms would fulfil their purpose of making it easier for the sector to deliver its services for the public benefit.

Five years since its establishment, we wish to commend the ACNC for its work. We feel it has done much to fulfil the objects of the principal Act, which remain both relevant and appropriate:

- (a) to maintain, protect and enhance public trust and confidence in the Australian not-for-profit sector;
- (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.

In our view, the ACNC has struck a good balance between supporting charities to act appropriately and deterring and dealing with misconduct. We have also appreciated and benefited from its ongoing educative and consultative efforts within the sector.

In relation to the object of reducing unnecessary regulatory obligations, the Australian Bahá'í Community was particularly concerned, prior to the establishment of the ACNC, with the unnecessarily complex and duplicative regulatory and reporting burden imposed on charities like our own, with a national presence and entities in every State, which were subject to numerous different regulatory and reporting requirements. We commend the efforts of the ACNC to reduce and regularise this burden. Where the ACNC has succeeded in negotiating red tape reduction with state regulators, it has successfully reduced duplicative reporting burden and achieved reduced costs for charities. However, we note that much work remains before the harmonisation of regulatory frameworks for charities is achieved across all jurisdictions and agencies.

Finally, the Australian Bahá'í Community believes that non-government organisations and other organs of civil society play an invaluable role in Australian society, complementary to that of government, by improving not only the material side of the lives of many Australians, but also the spiritual dimension of their lives. We trust that recognition of the value of the sector and the services it provides will continue to underlie the approach of the ACNC and the manner in which it exercises its powers and responsibilities.

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The Australian Bahá'í Community thanks the Panel for this opportunity to contribute to the Review.

Australian Bahá'í Community
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