



THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence and Security on the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Bill (2017)

Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security
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Dear Committee Secretary

I welcome the opportunity to offer this brief submission to the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence and Security.

The Pew Charitable Trusts is a global, not-for-profit institution. We work in many countries to inform the public and improve public-good outcomes on social, economic and environmental issues. Our work is evidence-based and strictly non-partisan. We do not engage in electioneering. We have been working successfully in Australia since 2007. We are registered as a charity in Australia.

In Australia, some of our key activities include working with a range of regional and remote Indigenous organisations to further their aims of managing their lands to tackle key threats by undertaking fire management, feral animal control, weed management, threatened species protection, tourism and visitor management and other activities which deliver benefit to both local communities and all Australians through natural and cultural heritage stewardship. Our work in partnership with Indigenous organisations includes work on the ground but also in assisting public advocacy around the value, for example, of key state and federal government programs such as properly funded Indigenous Ranger jobs. Given the huge scale of the Australian landscape there is a compelling case for further expansion of that work which also brings jobs to areas of great need.

Our organisation holds grave concerns about the deleterious impact that the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Bill would have on charitable work in particular, and the development of good public policy in general in Australia.

As it is currently drafted, and even taking in to consideration the amendments proposed last week by the Attorney General, this Bill would pose a range of constraints on Pew's ability to work with local partners in Australia. For example, we have worked in both Canada and Australia to highlight the value of the Australian model of Indigenous Rangers and well funded on-ground work not only in terms of environmental benefit but in social, economic and other returns for local people. We have supported Indigenous Rangers to travel to

Canada to talk firsthand to other First Nations groups, government officials in parks agencies at provincial and state level and political representatives of all backgrounds and in turn supported exchange visits of Canadian First Nations representatives to Australia where they can learn from Australian practice. As part of our normal activities, we regularly communicate to our international colleagues plans for future work in Australia, which includes efforts to advocate to improve or indeed endorse related Australian government policy. This advances the cause of both land stewardship and regional and remote jobs in both countries.

We are concerned that section 11 could require Pew staff, and Indigenous rangers employed in caring for country, to register as agents of foreign governments as a result of activities such as the above.

There is no public interest objective served by such a requirement, while the material implications for our work would be severe. It would risk compromising the independence of Pew and its activities and thus the future viability of our work. The prospect of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having to register as agents of a foreign entity, either because of the charity status of their own local organisations, which many are creating to seek additional funding for their work, or through working in partnership with other non-profits, should surely not be what is intended and would be a perverse outcome. Yet our advice suggests this would be likely.

The requirement to register as a foreign agent has the potential to negatively affect the reputation of our organisation and our local partners, ironically for often simply taking successful Australian models to other parts of the world as positive examples and advocating for their further expansion in Australia.

I would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Committee to offer some more specific examples of how this Bill threatens the valuable work of charitable and Indigenous organisations, and the cultural values and ecological conservation that it supports.

Sincerely

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