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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

Inquiry into the *Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Unsolicited Communications) Bill 2019*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission to the Inquiry into the *Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Unsolicited Communications) Bill 2019 (the Bill)*.

About Amnesty International and how we are funded

Amnesty International is the world's largest independent human rights organisation, comprising more than eight million supporters in more than 160 countries.

Amnesty International works to promote and defend all human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other international human rights instruments. Amnesty International undertakes research and conducts campaigns focused on preventing and ending abuses of these rights.

Amnesty International is impartial and independent of any government, political persuasion or religious belief. Amnesty International Australia does not receive funding from governments or political parties. We rely almost entirely on individual donors to fund our work promoting and protecting the human rights of people all around the world. It is thanks to those generous individuals that we are able to hold governments to account for violations of human rights and to end injustice without fear or favour.

Recommendation

Amnesty International recommends that the Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications (the Committee) not recommend the passage of that part of the Bill that removes or modifies the exemption of charities from the *Do Not Call Register Act 2006* (the DNCR Act) regime.

Concerns about removing the charity exemption from the DNCR Act

The Bill seeks to create a class of Australian telephone numbers which are 'charity-contactable', and those that are not able to be contacted by charities for fundraising purposes.

A charity will be able to apply to the Australian Consumer and Media Authority (ACMA) to 'wash' its list of Australian telephone numbers against those numbers designated as 'charity-contactable' in order to make fundraising appeals over the telephone. ACMA would charge a fee for such services for lists comprising 20,000 + numbers.¹

¹ See <https://www.donotcall.gov.au/industry/subscription-overview/> for the scale of fees.

There are over 57,000 charities registered in Australia. Of those, almost 80% command an income of less than \$1M.² Forty eight percent of all charities identified the general community in Australia as the main beneficiary.³ Where charities identified specific beneficiaries, children were the main beneficiaries.⁴ Further, many services are provided uniquely by the charitable sector to communities in need.

The introduction of the 'charity-contactable' class on the Do Not Call Register could make an important source of funding for essential programs unaffordable to a very significant number of charities in Australia.

Amnesty International Australia's 'Human Rights Defender' program

Almost 80% of Amnesty International Australia's funding is from our regular giving program, where individuals donate an amount every four weeks to the organisation. Generous donors resident in Australia (called Human Rights Defenders) are able to join this program in a number of ways: online, by talking to a fundraiser in person or by joining up over the phone. Being able to invite individuals to join our movement over the phone is a successful and cost effective way of ensuring support for our work for human rights. Calls are also made in order to welcome a new donor to our community and to confirm their commitment to become a Human Rights Defender.

Amnesty International Australia prides itself on its quality interactions over the phone with its Human Rights Defenders. This is absolutely central to our relationship with our supporters. Testament to this is the extremely low number of complaints we receive: approximately 0.035% of all conversations held.

The Bill would significantly reduce this source of support for our work.

Conclusion

The Bill, if passed, would have a serious impact on the source of funding for many Australian charities, including Amnesty International Australia. It would become more difficult and costly for charities to approach people resident in Australia about supporting their activities, with the result that some important services provided uniquely by this sector could cease altogether.

The Committee should not recommend the passage of those aspects of the Bill which modify or remove the charity exemption from the Do Not Call Register.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Lizzie Borwick
Director of Fundraising
Amnesty International Australia

² Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission *Australian Charities Report 2017* accessed at <https://www.acnc.gov.au/charitydata> on 18 February 2020.

³ Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission *Australian Charities Report 2017* page 11.

⁴ Ibid.

