

Submission to the Inquiry into the register of environmental organisations

On behalf of

The Natural History Society of South Australia inc.

Prepared by Peter R Clements PhD, President.

The Natural History Society of South Australia Inc. was only recently granted admission to the Register of Environmental Organisations in October 2014. The document to admit us was co-signed by Federal Environment minister Greg Hunt and the then acting assistant treasurer Matthias Cormann. Therefore we have not yet had a full year as member of the Register. However, we experienced an immediate benefit in the number of donations we received from our members once we announced our inclusion to the Register.

As an organisation dedicated to the preservation of Australian native flora and fauna by preserving habitat of those species, we rely on donations to operate. We are an organisation which is run entirely on a volunteer basis and we have no paid officers. Without donations we could no longer continue to operate effectively. As an indication of the depth of the Society's activities in preserving habitat I refer you to the attached document which is a submission to the South Australian parliamentary inquiry into biodiversity made earlier this year. The document will provide a background to the many activities of the Society on the five wildlife reserves it holds in South Australia. In it you will see that the main reserve we maintain for the habitat of the southern hairy nosed wombat is Moorunde Wildlife Reserve (6950 ha) near Blanchetown in South Australia. There are sufficient ancestral burrows on the reserve to house around 2000 wombats. The reserve was purchased as a result of a fundraising campaign in 1967 to purchase wombat habitat in response to a drought that was leading to wombat starvation. The Society members therefore consider that we hold the reserve in trust for the people of South Australia. The Society's four other reserves were all donated to the Society by environmentally concerned people. All have wombats resident on them.

While initially a lobby group for the protection of native flora and fauna in earlier decades, our society's primary focus has more recently become the protection of the southern hairy nosed wombat which is the state fauna emblem in South Australia. The wombat, while not endangered, has become locally threatened in the Murray Mallee, a region easily accessible to Adelaide at just over 100km distant. Threats come from feral pests such as foxes and cats, grazing competition from sheep, rabbits and kangaroos, weed invasion including several toxic weed species and encroachment on wombat habitat by human activities including farming and by trail bike riders. Farmers and graziers can and do apply for destruction permits for wombats on their properties even though the wombat is protected in South Australia.

Our Society's efforts to preserve the habitat of this species have become more and more reliant on donations as the government grants which we had been receiving until 2014 as part of our heritage agreements are not likely to continue much longer in view of the parlous financial state in which the government of South Australia finds itself. We were annually receiving grants to support our weeding programs and our rabbit baiting program. Both of these have had to be scaled down in the light of a lack of funding from the SA government. Donations from our members have allowed us to

continue these activities at a reduced level. However as you will see from the attached biodiversity submission the scale of our program to reduce weeds and revegetate large areas of the reserves to restore native grasses for the wombats is going to require significant funding. We therefore are preparing to embark on a major fundraising effort in order to attract donations from large corporations and philanthropists. It would simply be impossible to even approach large potential donors without the tax deductibility which comes from membership of the REO.

Because of the Society's focus on wombats we have decided to register with ASIC the trading name "Wombats SA". This we hope will give the Society more visibility and attract more willing helpers and donors. We need to remain as a registered organisation of the REO for fundraising to be viable for our organisation.

There is a largely unexploited tourism potential for native species such as the wombat and I personally have taken many overseas visitors to the reserve over many years. We have also hosted visits from schools and scout groups. Recently our reserve was host to a German film crew, Naturfilm, doing a documentary on the wombat. A Japanese film crew has just recently contacted us with a view to doing a similar documentary. The potential for this kind of exposure relies on the preservation of a viable population in their natural habitat so that the wombats may be observed in as natural a setting as possible. This in turn relies on our Society remaining financially able to protect and manage the reserves which in turn relies heavily on donations and tax deductibility for the donors. Prior to the granting of admission to the REO the Society was supported by one generous individual who died in 2013. We are therefore now more reliant on donations than ever before.

I thank you for the opportunity to present this submission to the parliament.

Yours sincerely

Peter R Clements PhD

President, Natural History Society of South Australia Inc. (Wombats SA)