

16 February 2024

Mr David Fredericks PSM
Secretary
Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Via email: david.fredericks@dcceew.gov.au

Dear Mr Fredericks

I write to you on behalf of Opposition Senators, in relation to the Additional Senate Estimates hearing of the Environment and Communications Committee that was held in Canberra on 12 February 2024.

During the hearing, your Department was asked a series of questions about the use and management of the Government's \$8.3 million grant to the Environmental Defenders Office.

In response to the subject matter covered in a number of those questions, you and other senior DCCEEW officials advised us that they were not a matter for your Department. As an encapsulation of many of these responses, Deputy Secretary Luise McCulloch told us that, "the arrangement that the Department has with the EDO is a purely financial arrangement under the grant agreement".

She also said that, "we do not engage with (the EDO) on anything related to the work they do or the legal matters they engage in ... the conduct of the EDO is sufficiently arm's length from government. Our arrangement with the EDO is purely financial".

In relation to a number of issues covered in our questions, we were also advised by you and your officials that these were the responsibility of the Business Grants Hub within the Department of Industry, Science and Resources (DISR).

However, some of this evidence was then contradicted, on 15 February 2024, by Ms Meghan Quinn, Secretary of DISR, and Ms Samantha Chard, Division Head of the Business Grants Hub and Integrity Division at another Additional Senate Estimates hearing.

Ms Quinn said that "the grant guidelines are managed by the program owner which, in this case, would be the Department of Climate Change and so those are the sorts of questions they would consider in evaluating the program and the outcomes of the program. Whether the guidelines did or didn't provide enough guidance: they are more matters on policy and effectiveness of the policy, rather than the operations of the Hub – which is around the grant agreement and whether milestones and specific agreed outcomes or agreed actions had been met".

Ms Chard, among other evidence, said that "the assessment of whether or not the grant overall met the policy objectives would actually be a responsibility of the policy agency. We would certainly provide them with information about the delivery of the grant to help them" but that, in respect of "consideration of the program more broadly and the intent of the program and whether the program was meeting its policy objectives, that would be a matter for DCCEEW as the policy department".

Once it is finalised by Hansard, I would potentially be happy to provide the relevant extracts of the official transcript if these would be of assistance to you.

I remind you of the requirement that all witnesses must provide accurate information to parliamentary committees, and of the importance of correcting and clarifying evidence if required.

Accordingly, Opposition Senators would appreciate your response to the discrepancies between DCCEEW's evidence and DISR's evidence by no later than **5.00pm on Monday 26 February 2024**.

Please do not hesitate to contact me by email on senator.hughes@aph.gov.au if you have any questions or wish to further discuss this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Senator Hollie Hughes
Shadow Assistant Climate and Energy Minister
Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee