



**PROTECT  
CONSERVE  
SUSTAIN**

**May 21<sup>st</sup> 2015**

Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee,

***Submission to the inquiry into the administration and transparency of the Register of Environmental Organisations and its effectiveness in supporting communities to take practical action to improve the environment.***

The Queensland Conservation Council (QCC) would like to take this opportunity to make a submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into the Register of Environmental Organisations. QCC's submission to the Committee addressing the Terms of Reference is below.

Queensland Conservation Council (QCC) is Queensland's peak environment organisation since 1969 representing almost 60 member groups. These groups represent a wide range of conservation interests and include ten peak regional conservation councils.

Queensland is characterised by extensive areas of globally significant natural habitats, renowned for amazing diversity and spectacular beauty. This includes five World Heritage areas – the Great Barrier Reef, Wet Tropics, Gondwana Rainforest, Riversleigh and Fraser Island, Cape York Peninsula (under consideration for World Heritage listing), an impressive national and marine park estate, numerous RAMSAR quality wetlands and high biodiversity landscapes such as the Gulf Savannah and Channel Country.

Many of these much loved places underpin a vital tourism industry in Queensland and are only here today because of the efforts of the voluntary conservation movement. Over the past 60 years groups large and small have worked tirelessly to draw attention to the values of these areas and advocate to secure their protection.

However, these environs are exposed to increasing pressures of mining, habitat degradation, runoff, coastal and urban development, population pressures and climate change.

QCC and our member groups, have a comprehensive geographic and sector coverage. As a result, it can be seen that the conservation councils play a vital role in the development of policy for Queensland in two ways. First, through input in various consultative mechanisms during the development or review of policy, and second, through their capacity to promulgate proposed new policy to a wide-ranging regional constituency.

Today the Queensland Conservation Council, its network of regional conservation councils and our other environmental and conservation organisations, continue to play a crucial role in advocating for

a cleaner, better protected and more sustainable Queensland, as well as policy and processes of the Queensland Government through liaison with and coordination of input from the regional conservation sectors and community.

QCC and our member groups deliver substantial benefits to the Queensland community. These include:

- A mechanism for the Queensland and Federal Governments to efficiently and effectively consult in all regions throughout Queensland about regional, state or national environment matters;
- Providing a pivotal role in environmental education, awareness raising, information gathering and sharing;
- Providing the community with support, advice and direction on many issues related to the environment;
- Provide 1000s of hours of expert pro bono advice to the Federal, State and Local Governments;
- Active involvement in local and regional committees and community consultation forums for government and industry, providing locally specific knowledge;
- Strong conservation sector voices which work closely with their communities, independent from government, industry or vested interests;
- Representation of over ten thousand people as members and supporters throughout the state;
- Over 100,000 volunteer hours per year supporting efforts to protect and enhance our natural environment;

Funding and support from tax deductible donations has enabled conservation groups to maximise their engagement in Queensland environmental issues and to provide an excellent resource base of knowledge and experience which can be accessed by all three levels of government, environmental management agencies and community members.

#### **Definition of 'environmental organisation' under the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997***

QCC recommends keeping the current definition of 'environmental organisation' under the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997* unchanged, so those organisations continue to hold deductible gift recipient status. Organisations that satisfy the 'principal purpose' test benefit the public and we recommend donations to them being tax deductible as the current legislation allows. QCC raises about \$35,000 a year through tax deductible donations. Without the tax deduction the organisation would find it harder to raise money to fund our work.

#### **Requirements to be met by an organisation to be listed on the Register and maintain its listing / Reporting requirements for organisations to disclose donations and activities funded by donations/ Compliance arrangements**

QCC is on the Register of Environmental Organisations. We recommend that the administrative burden on environmental organisations is not increased. Environmental charities are already subject to sufficient scrutiny by regulators and the public, particularly given their limited resources. QCC reports our activities to donors in Audited Reports, in our e-newsletter, on our website and on Facebook. We send receipts to donors. QCC has an Executive Board elected by QCC members.

#### **Activities undertaken by organisations currently listed on the Register and the extent to which these activities involve on-ground environmental works**

We recommend that environmental organisations that help to *proactively protect the environment*, including on-groundwork, education, advice, group work and advocacy, retain their deductible gift recipient status because of the great public benefit of their work in protecting the environment and human health dependent on our environment. Such work includes working with businesses, government, industry groups and communities; developing policies; holding meetings, forums and

conferences to bring together experts and getting people talking; monitoring progress and rating the performance of governments and their programs, helping smaller environmental organisations to act for the environment and government to take more advised decisions. Strong advocacy, organisation understanding and participation are essential to create the framework for effective on-ground work. Deductible gift recipient status should not be limited to activities that involve on-ground physical environmental work.

Advocacy by environmental organisations is an essential contribution to free speech and our democracy. Please do not remove tax deductions from your citizens for trying to make the world a better place by donating to a charity of their choice.

*Yours sincerely*

**Nichola Hungerford**  
**Coordinator**