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## Property Rights Australia submission to:

# Register of Environmental Organisations

Property Rights Australia is a not for profit organisation without tax deductible status for donations. We rely wholly on donations from members and a limited amount of sponsorship used solely for an annual conference. We advocate on behalf of landowners covering issues which affect their property rights. Constantly we find ourselves at odds with large, well-funded multinational environmental organisations that have access to politicians and the mainstream media and a polished, populist spiel which appeals to journalists and the general public. This spiel is often based on selective science promulgated by scientists with an agenda other than to be scientifically rigorous and balanced.

Farmers, fishermen and foresters with no scientific support and no access to tax deductible funding are found having to attempt to rebut the believable lies to downright outrageous claims of large well-funded environmental organisations resourced with access to experts in fields such as law and science. These environmentalists and “scientists” with an environmental agenda, unquestioning media attention and favoured status under tax law and competition law have often caused real harm to industries that they target. They often do this with the cynical intention of drawing the businesses into what will become an audited and expensive, income earning certification scheme<sup>1</sup> rather than hands on environmental projects.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ipa.org.au/sectors/food/publication/1918/naked-extortion-environmental-ngos-imposing-involuntary-regulations-on-consumers-and-business>

The original granting of tax deductible status to charitable organisations involved in conservation efforts was and remains credible for small community hands-on conservation groups. Recent decades has seen the rise of environmental organisations that are no longer localised even to a single nation. They are no longer solely depended on donations or even government grants but have developed independent income streams most notably certification schemes, at times enforced with secondary boycotts, a practice that is no longer available to unions in regards to industrial action. These large environmental organisations are not struggling as some operate on multi-million dollar budgets and are financially managed no differently from large multi-national corporations. Based in large cities these organisations have lost touch with the reality of solutions for small community conservation efforts and have shifted to environmental idealism and advocacy of their cause by lobbying governments.

The harm to the Tasmanian forest industries and the financial harm caused to companies involved in it and subsequent job losses in a State with a high unemployment rate is well documented. At least part of the agenda for the Tasmanian Forest Wars was to blackmail companies into abandoning the international Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) approved Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) for the WWF initiated Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). This should always have been a commercial contest with commercial rules in place but one side was fighting at an advantage with generous tax deductible funding and immunity from prosecution under the secondary boycott provisions of the Australian Competition and Consumer Act.

Similarly, the most lightly fished and most protected waters in the world come under another WWF inspired certification scheme, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), whose costs are prohibitive. The result is that in excess of 70% of our seafood is imported from countries whose standards are inferior to our own by every measure.

The present focus of the environmental groups is agriculture and its effect on the Great Barrier Reef.

There has been a very careful campaign with a couple of aims. One is to access generous Government funding. The other is to press for agricultural industries in reef catchments to be drawn into the ubiquitous WWF certification schemes. Naive industry organisations have been easily drawn into these schemes through lack of research, the promise of funding and fear of market discrimination.

Landowners in Queensland in particular are reeling and incensed by attacks which suggest that agriculture is solely responsible for anthropogenic damage to the Great Barrier Reef and that every catchment needs to be regulated, a course of action that environmental groups have convinced the Queensland Labor Government to pursue. All accusations of damage are based on modelling and assumptions made by agenda based pre-determined outcomes and not on verifiable data

Recent research indicates that sheet erosion as previously claimed is not the dominant source of sediment to the reef but bed and bank erosion.<sup>2</sup> This should change the whole landscape of the blame game which has attributed much of the sediment to land clearing and other agricultural activities.

No doubt the businesses small and large who are under attack in Australia's well protected marine areas and regulated forest areas feel just as much under siege as Queensland landowners do.

Even with a "noble cause" it should be necessary to be able to substantiate all allegations and when those allegations result in real losses of real money and real jobs criminal sanctions and penalties must apply. It becomes particularly galling that these organisations obtain government grants and enjoy tax deductible status.

PRA recommends that a definition should be reached such that small community based hands-on conservation groups retain a charitable tax deductible status and large environment organisations who indulge in business destroying activism and cause great harm are removed from such favouritism. However careful drafting is needed to ensure against the possibility of small shop front groups set up through which large environmental organisations channel funds.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://research-hub.griffith.edu.au/display/n4498fc4d4ace14e09b6de76a24a7227a>