

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

9/7/2015

Dear Secretary,

I wish to make comment in regard to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment established to inquire into and report on the administration and transparency of the Register of Environmental Organisations (the Register) and its effectiveness in supporting communities to take practical action to improve the environment.

My comments are made with 25 years' experience in community based natural resource management and Landcare, with experience in policy and on ground application at the local, state and national scale.

This submission unashamedly focuses on the grass roots community organisations that deliver on ground change through the delivery of education, extension, decision support tools, and demonstration projects, it does not focus on organisations whose primary role is to advocate.

It has become clear there are now a plethora of organisations and community groups that fall under the banner of an environmental organisation, with many of these groups delivering huge eco system services for little private benefit, but delivering huge public benefit.

There are also many organisations that call themselves environmental organisations, perhaps to gain community legitimacy, but in fact it would seem they deliver little on ground action or broad community benefit with core business being advocacy.

We are in a period of financial constraint where individuals and organisations are not as philanthropic as they could be. I feel it is unfair to smaller community based groups who do deliver on ground benefit, are competing for scarce funds with organisations whose main aim is to advocate in many cases against Governments of the day, that are providing the vehicle to give that organisation the tax break that helps the organisation raise money, and perhaps survive.

I am sure many donors do not know where their dollar is spent when it is donated to many organisations, is it used for administration, on ground works, or advocacy?

For future clarity, if groups or organisations want to be listed on the register they should list their present core business with past examples of what donated moneys have been spent on, this should then be made available as a public document.

For clarity on how an organisation is receiving, and spending money there needs to be a consistent template that can be filled in every 3 years that will document what areas donated moneys has been spent, ie education, on ground, etc. Apart from clarity and good governance this will allow a comparison to be made of what organisations are delivering, again this information would become public.

For openness, clarity and good governance there should be a register that shows the names of donors over a certain amount perhaps \$5000?

I urge the committee to consider these recommendations and others, but remember compliance can be costly and burdensome, especially for smaller groups who do not have the facility's to deal with complex reporting, the secret here is to have a simple streamlined process, that must be developed in partnership with those who will be complying with the process.

Those organisations that have a core role of advocacy either through demonstrated past actions or in the aims of the organisation should not be listed on the register, as their prime function is to lobby. Industry lobby groups normally raise funds through industry levies not through Government taxation instruments.

I also understand some of the Australian Governments funded regional bodies also have tax deductible gift recipient status funds, these organisations are not community organisations, and are already funded by the Australian taxpayer; they should not be receiving more advantage by being on the environmental register.

My submission is not attempting to restrict the ability of individuals or organisations to take a different position to Governments, but to make sure the smaller groups that deliver on ground change are not swamped by larger well-oiled politically savvy organisations for scarce funds through donations.

Government should be targeting and helping those community organisations that deliver public benefit by making sure they can be on the register of environmental organisations, this will allow them to continue to value add the Governments and community's investment on behalf of the taxpayer.

Please feel free to contact me for further clarification, good luck in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

IAN SAUER