



tasmanian conservation trust inc

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment
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House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment inquiry into the Register of Environmental Organisations

The Tasmanian Conservation Trust (TCT) thanks the House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment for the opportunity to make a submission to it inquiry into the Register of Environmental Organisations.

If the Committee decides to hold hearings the TCT would welcome an opportunity to make an in person representation, to provide a fuller explanation of the points made in our submission, provide further examples and answer any questions.

The Tasmanian Conservation Trust

The TCT is Tasmania's oldest continuing non-government environmental organisation (founded in 1968).

Our mission is to conserve Tasmania's biodiversity and natural landscapes and to ensure that the use of natural resources is sustainable. We work on the full range of conservation issues. We are not politically aligned.

The TCT is asked by the state and federal governments to represent the non-government conservation interests by participating in a wide range of high level advisory committees. The TCT believes it is important to participate in government processes and attempts to lodge submissions on all important government legislation, strategies, discussion papers and management plans.

Apart from its role in policy, planning and community support, the TCT has and continues to run strategically important on-ground projects and provides support in a range of ways to community groups.

Further detail in regard to what the TCT does and how it operates is included in the following attachments:

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- 1. An overview of the Tasmanian Conservation Trust;
- 2. TCT Committee Representation;
- 3. Key submissions on government strategies, discussion papers and management plans for the financial year 2012-13.

Core concern of the inquiry

The Terms of Reference commence with the following statement:

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment will 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.

The TCT understands that this expresses the core concern of the inquiry and that it relates to the effectiveness of the Register of Environmental Organisations in supporting communities to take practical action to improve the environment (principally through provision of deductible gift recipient status).

We will also make comments regarding the other more specific matters raised in the terms of reference.

The TCT is listed on the Register of Environmental Organisations by virtue of being listed at sub-section 30B of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997. Subject to annual reporting to the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission this grants the TCT the status of a deductible gift recipient status allowing it to receive tax-deductible donations from its members and other supporters.

While we cannot provide an objective measure of the benefit that this status has for our income, it is undoubtedly important for many of those who donate to us that they are able to claim a tax-deduction from their donations and therefore this increases the TCT's annual income from this source. Clearly the level of our income is a key determining factor in the TCT's effectiveness in protecting, managing and rehabilitating the natural environment.

All of the TCT's work is aimed at making an on-ground or practical benefit to the natural environment (as is clear in the attached statement of the TCT's mission and objectives and shown through our current work and our history of achievements) although some is more directly and immediately related to practical outcomes. A great deal of the TCT's work involves it working with community groups and individuals to achieve environmental outcomes.

On-ground projects

Some of our work relates to implementing our own on-ground projects or co-managing or assisting others to manage on-ground practical projects.

In recent years the TCT has administered a number of Caring for Our Country and other grant projects and most are in collaboration with other community groups and individuals. TCT receives only an administrative payment. These have related to weed management, prevention of weed incursions or establishment, cat control and responsible cat ownership. In recent years we have found grants more difficult to obtain.

The TCT currently runs the Kingborough Cat Management Project cooperatively with Kingborough Council to encourage responsible cat ownership. The TCT has recently started the Tasmanian Tyre Cleanup program, which aims to work with

the tyre industry and community to identify and cleanup inappropriately stored and illegally dumped car tyres. In the absence of any obvious government funding program the TCT is currently seeking private funding to expand this project to keep up with the growing demand. If our tax-deductable status was removed this project would be less likely to receive donations.

Preventing environmental loss or harm

Where we take action to prevent or minimize environmental loss or harm (which involves advocacy, actions through the courts or planning tribunals, collaboration with industry or public campaigns) this aims to achieve an on-ground or practical benefit for the environment.

A current important example is a court case we have commenced that aims to stop the clearing and conversion of 1804 hectares of high conservation value native forest near Ansons Bay in Tasmania.

Submissions to government processes

The TCT believes it is important to participate in government processes and forums. Within the limits of our resources, the TCT attempts to lodge submissions and representations on all important government legislation, strategies, discussion papers and management plans. See Attachment 3: Key submissions on government strategies, discussion papers and management plans for the financial year 2012-13.

Through this work we aim to achieve improvements in laws, management plans, strategies and policies that relate to environmental protection and/or natural resource management. These changes can directly or indirectly lead to on-ground benefits for the environment including providing the broader community and future generations with an improved capacity to take on-ground works to benefit the environment.

The TCT's input to the development of the Tasmanian Cat Management Act 2009 ensured that legislation provided rural communities, in particular those managing stock, with clear authority to manage cats on their properties.

The TCT's submission brought numerous specific changes to the Final Wellington Park Management Plan 2013.

Representation on formal committees

The TCT is represented on a broad range of formal committees established by the Australian and Tasmanian governments as well as a range of less formal committees formed by local government, NRM regional groups, industry and community groups. See Attachment 2: TCT's committee representation – current as of May 2015.

Some of these processes provide us with the potential to take the specific community concerns and represent them to government and industry, which may relate to on-ground matters.

An important current example of where the TCT works as a conduit for the concerns of community groups and individuals is the recently convened state government Cat Management Reference Group. While community groups that are active in controlling cats and encouraging responsible cat ownership are not represented on the group, the TCT is networking with these groups to ensure their views are considered.

An increasing part of our work is participating in industry certification processes including Forest Stewardship Council, Fisheries Stewardship Council and Aquaculture Stewardship Council. With one forestry company that has received FSC certification, we have seen real on-ground improvements that are in part linked to the TCT's involvement.

Representing the interests of community groups

In addition to helping community groups to manage on-ground projects, the TCT regularly takes up the concerns of community groups whether they are members or not. This is done through advocacy to local, state and federal government, through making media statements and provision of advice and support. Some of these matters relate to protecting an area or an environmental value that the community has been working practically for.

Some recent examples involve the TCT working with groups concerned regarding:

- major tourist developments proposed at Seven Mile Beach Peninsula and Rosny Hill Nature Recreation Area;
- a proposal to revoke part of the Woodvine Nature Reserve; and
- a proposal for a high level hazardous waste facility at Copping.

Responses to other matters covered by inquiry terms of reference

Tor point 1:

the definition of 'environmental organisation' under the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997, including under Subdivision 30-E;

No comment.

Tor point 2:

the requirements to be met by an organisation to be listed on the Register and maintain its listing;

We achieve this status in 1982 and therefore we cannot make comment based on experience regarding the current eligibility requirements. The reporting requirements seem appropriate and we hope that there are no plans to add to the complexity or difficulty of these processes.

Tor point 3:

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

We have commented above on the activities of the TCT, outlining the onground works we are involved in.

Tor point 4:

reporting requirements for organisations to disclose donations and activities funded by donations;

The TCT does not have any particular concerns regarding the reporting and recommend that the current processes seem appropriate.

Tor point 5:

the administration of the Register and potential efficiency improvements;

The TCT does not have any particular concerns regarding the administration of the register.

Tor point 6:

compliance arrangements and the measures available to the Department of the Environment and the Australian Taxation Office to investigate breaches of the Act and Ministerial Guidelines by listed organisations; and

We do not feel capable to comment.

Tor point 7:

relevant governance arrangements in international jurisdictions, and exploring methods to adopt best practice in Australia [see Canadian and New Zealand legislation below].

The TCT is aware that the Canadian government has made changes to its laws that remove tax-deductable status from groups defined as advocacy groups. An advocacy group is defined as committing more than 10% of their resources into advocacy and advocacy is defined very broadly as meaning virtually any form of communication with government.

Such a change would seriously impact the TCT's effectiveness in all aspects of its work including providing assistance to community groups engaged in practical works.

Yours sincerely

Peter McGlone
Director

ATTACHMENT 1:

An overview of the Tasmanian Conservation Trust

Our mission

- Our mission is to conserve Tasmania's biodiversity and natural landscapes and to ensure that the use of natural resources is sustainable.

Key goals

- To conserve, manage and rehabilitate Tasmania's terrestrial, freshwater and marine biodiversity and the natural landscapes that support it's biodiversity.
- To ensure that the extraction, use and disposal of natural resources is sustainable.
- Ensure that the major causes of environmental problems are addressed and where possible are prevented or avoided and that we deliver measurable and lasting on-ground outcomes.

Values and Principles

- We work on the full range of conservation issues, not just those which grab headlines or are popular or current.
- We use independent science-based arguments to achieve our goals.
- Where possible we co-operate with governments, industries, community groups and land owners in a non-confrontationist manner to deliver environmental outcomes.
- We are not politically aligned or partisan i.e. we do not support or endorse particular political parties or individual politicians.

What the TCT does: a snapshot

- The Tasmanian Conservation Trust (TCT) is Tasmania's oldest community environmental organisation (founded in 1968).
- No other state-wide environmental organisation in Tasmania involves itself in the same breadth of environmental concerns as the TCT. While most other prominent Tasmanian conservation organisations are primarily concerned with forestry and climate change issues, the TCT have concerns about a much wider range of issues.
- As of May 2015 the TCT is a member of 19 high-level State and Australian Government advisory committees, as well as 6 national non-government environmental alliances and 7 non-government industry and community committees. In the vast majority of instances fees are not paid for preparation and attendance or even for travel undertaken.
- The TCT attempts to lodge submissions on all important government legislation, strategies, discussion papers and management plans. The TCT believes it is important to participate, within the limits of our resources, in government processes and forums.
- The TCT is regarded as the primary point of contact by many smaller community organisations, NRM regional groups and local government for an ever expanding range of mainly 'brown issues'.
- Apart from its role in policy, planning and community support, the TCT has and continues to run strategically important on-ground projects and provides support in a range of ways to community groups.

ATTACHMENT 2:

TCT Formal Committee Representation – current as at May 2015

Terrestrial and freshwater - unless stated TCT's representative is Peter McGlone

Threatened species and wildlife

- National Swift Parrot Recovery Team
- National Orange-bellied Parrot Recovery Team
- Tasmanian *Galaxiidae* Recovery Team
- DPIPWE Invasive Species Partnership Group
- Tasmanian Native Lowland Grasslands Recovery team (status uncertain)
- Save the Tasmanian Devil Program Stakeholder Reference Group (group's status uncertain)
- Biosecurity Legislation Framework Primary Stakeholders Committee
- Tasmanian Planning Planning reform Taskforce: Environment and Historic Heritage Consultative Group
- Cat Management Reference Group

Reserve management

- Multi-Day Recreation Track: Hobart to Snowy Range Working Group

Other community and NRM committee representation

- Derwent Estuary Program (Penguin Working Group)
- Kingborough Cat Management Project Officer Steering Group
- NRM South Landcare Facilitator Reference Group
- No Pulp Mill Alliance

Fisheries and marine conservation: TCT's representative is Jon Bryan

Tasmanian Government-managed fisheries

- Abalone Fishery Advisory Committee
- Crustacean Fishery Advisory Committee
- Scallop Fishery Advisory Committee
- Scalefish Fishery Advisory Committee
- Recreational Fishery Advisory Committee
- *Centrostephanus* Working Group

Australian Government-managed fisheries:

- Scallop Management Advisory Committee
- Small Pelagic Fishery Resource Assessment Group
- Sub-Antarctic Fisheries Management Advisory Committee

Non-government marine-related committees:

- Committee Member Tasmanian Association for Recreational Fishing Inc
- Tassal Sustainability Report Advisory Committee
- Tasmanian Aquaculture Reform Alliance (decision group member)

National NGO Affiliations

- Australian Forest Stewardship Council, Environment Chamber
- Stop Invasive Species Alliance
- Australian Wetlands Alliance
- Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition
- Places you Love National Coalition
- Australian Waste Management Association

ATTACHMENT 3:

Key submissions on government strategies, discussion papers and management plans for the financial year 2012-13:

Key submissions were made by the TCT to the:

- Tasmanian Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public works in regard to the Three Capes Track – also provided evidence in person
- Wellington Park Management Trust on the Draft Wellington Park Management Plan.
- DPIPWE on the Animal Welfare Act Review.
- Department of Treasury and Finance on the 2013-14 state budget – also attended the Treasurers community round table.
- Legislative Council regarding the Tasmanian Forests Agreement Bill 2012 – also made a presentation to the Legislative Councillors.
- Legislative Council Select Committee regarding the Tasmanian Forests Agreement Bill 2012 - also made a presentation to the Select Committee.
- Legislative Council regarding Rural Road speed limits.
- Department of SEWPAC regarding the EPBC Act referral of the Van Diemen's Land Company proposal for clearing of native forest.
- DPIPWE regarding application to import African Serval.
- DPIPWE on the pre-release draft of the Management Strategy for Feral cats in Tasmania.
- Input to DPIWE draft feral animal booklet.
- Tasmania Irrigation on pre-release draft EPBC Act referral for the Upper Ringarooma Irrigation Scheme.
- Tasmania Irrigation on pre-release draft EPBC Act referral for the South-east Irrigation Scheme.
- DPIPWE regarding application to import Cheetah.
- Prepared and submitted a nomination of the Great Western Tiers for listing on the register of the National Heritage List on behalf of the TCT and HSI.
- Completed the National Wetlands Policy: stakeholder consultation questionnaire.
- Prepared draft letters on Borthwick report and AFMA representation for super trawler NGO coalition.
- Submission for joint conservation group submission to AFMA on proposal to allow transshipment at sea.
- Contributed to joint conservation groups' submission to Minister Burke regarding the Interim (Small Pelagic Fishery) Declaration 2012 and the expert panel assessment process.
- Contributed to joint NGO submission on Commonwealth fisheries management.
- Participated in CSIRO interview as part of study on fisheries supply chains/climate change.
- House Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry Inquiry into the Role of Science for Fisheries and Aquaculture (Federal Parliamentary committee) – also gave evidence as a witness.
- SEWPAC on nomination to list giant kelp forests as endangered community.
- DPIPWE on Macquarie Harbour aquaculture expansion proposal EIS..
- SEWPAC on Tasmanian Scallop Fishery assessment.
- SEWPAC on Tasmanian Rock Lobster Fishery assessment.
- SEWPAC on Abalone Fishery assessment.
- Completed AFMA management survey.