



EDO NQ

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Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
By email to: environment.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee,

Submission to the Inquiry into the Register of Environmental Organisations

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. My submission to the Committee addressing the Terms of Reference is below.

My name is Mark Buttrose and I am President of the Management Committee of the Environmental Defenders Office of Northern Queensland (EDO NQ). As a practicing architect in Cairns for many years I have also been a client, or member of a client community group, that has relied on EDO NQ for legal support in challenging poor planning decisions made by our local government. The invaluable support provided by EDO NQ to the community led to me providing my support to EDO NQ by becoming a member of the management committee, of which I am currently President. Hence, I make this submission both as an individual and on behalf of EDO NQ and I, or another committee member, will be prepared to address the inquiry in person if requested to do so.

I support proactive efforts to protect and enhance the environment, including on-ground work, education, advice, casework and advocacy. Donations to organisations for this full range of proactive actions should remain tax deductible. For example, the environmental legal services, - education, law reform, advice and casework - provided by the two Environmental Defenders Offices in Queensland (EDO Qld and EDO NQ) which help the community **to protect and enhance the natural environment for the benefit of all, especially the World Heritage Areas of the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics.**

Definition of ‘environmental organisation’ under the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*

I recommend keeping unchanged the current definition of ‘environmental organisation’ under the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997* so those organisations continue to hold deductible gift recipient status. Organisations that satisfy the ‘principal purpose’ test benefit the public and I recommend donations to them being tax deductible as the current legislation allows.

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

I 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.

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

I recommend that environmental organisations that help to *proactively protect the environment*, including on-groundwork, education, advice, casework 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. For example, explaining environmental laws to communities, advocating for community rights or helping groups scrutinise poorly thought-out development proposals, helps people prevent environmental harm before it occurs. Strong advocacy,

public understanding and participation is 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

Mark Buttrose – President of Management Committee, EDO NQ