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**Submission to Tax Deductible Gift Recipient Reform Opportunities Discussion Paper
15 June 2017**

I am concerned that society has allowed an artificial construct to be placed over the health of our natural environment/biodiversity. Our modern construct is one where ‘economic value’ is all that matters. Everything is a resource from which someone can make money – either directly or indirectly. And recently the influence concerned public members have over access to environmental justice has been further reduced by the action the Government has taken to removed access to funding for many environmental groups.

Environmental justice is certainly an important aspect of social justice. Regulation and decisions about development and environmental policy have a huge impact upon our quality of life. It influences and affects our health, as well as that of our urban and natural environments as well as availability and access to natural resources. Everyone is entitled to availability to environmental justice, but it disadvantaged communities and members of society that appear to bear the brunt of the environmental risk and impacts of human activity. As impacts from climate change intensify, this will certainly the brunt of impacts upon disadvantaged communities will grow.

It must be accepted that a healthy and clean environment is essential to the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. It is also essential that access to natural resources such as clean water and productive land is critical to human health and welfare and social and economic rights including the right to health and water have always been recognised as being intrinsically linked to the rights to a clean and healthy environment.

Dirty and environmentally harmful operations have been seen recently such as the disaster at Hazelwood Power Station in Gippsland, which affected the health of many people in the area, and more recently, the fire in the Toxic Waste Dump in Melbourne, which caught fire in a densely populated area of Melbourne, is still smouldering away as I write this. In Melbourne the toxic and hazardous waste sites located in Victoria at Tullamarine. Lyndhurst and Cranbourne which receive toxic and hazardous waste from around Victoria are worried about the impacts these dumps are having on their health and local environments, but have very limited ability to participate in decisions about how the waste will be handled in future.

In 2004, unwittingly, I became involved in a proposed Toxic Waste Site fight at Hattah-Nowingi, which was situated between two national parks, and as a 1000 year proposal of containing toxic waste, contained the possibility of leaking through groundwater into the Murray River. The local community fought this issue which ended in a 55 day Panel Hearing and in January 2007, it was announced that the Victorian Government would no longer use the area as a Toxic Waste Dump Site. Several environmental groups, presented as the Hearing, as there were many rare and endangered species found on site. It was

suggested at the time, that the Government visit Denmark and Sweden where a variety of significant avenues are used to reduce all waste, leaving only around 2% which cannot be dealt with, but I am not aware of any State or the Federal Government pursuing this avenue. It cost our local Government Council, plus community members many years of hard work and well over one million dollars. Communities and individuals should have the right to fight issues and also the support of the many environmental groups that currently receive Tax Deductible Gifts.

I would like to bring up six key points in my submission.

1, I strongly oppose any new restrictions or limitations that are planned to be imposed on any of the environmental organisations. I do not believe that the DGR's which undertake advocacy activity are out of step with the expectations of the broader community, particularly environmental DGR's, and I believe that they do have a principal purpose of protecting the environment, particularly the State EDO's, but also all the other environmental organisations. Whilst I agree that it is important to clean up or repair our environment, most of the environmental groups are involved already with this type of work, and each organisation should be free to set its own priorities and to make an informed assessment of the best way to achieve environmental outcomes. This could include both or either advocacy or on-ground remediation. It is horrifying to think that all environmental charities would have to spend up to half of their money (50%) on remediation instead of advocating for our environment. As stated in the beginning of this submission, our modern construct with regard to the environment is one where 'economic value' is all that matters. We want our environmental charities to be able to advocate for the environment when the need arises

2. The community expects environmental groups to be strong advocates for environmental outcomes, and it is nothing less than bullying for the Federal Government to dictate how environmental charities can spend any donations from communities or individuals. It would appear that the Federal Government just wants to restrict the kind of perfectly legal activities the environmental charities can take part in and nothing else. They have already been heavily restricted by losing government grants and have been forced to rely on DGR's. At the same time, the Government seems to support financially corporations, particularly in the field of coal mining.

3. Advocacy to improve environmental policy is about preventing damage from happening in the first place, not only cleaning up the mess or fixing the damage after the fact. Advocacy for better policy can be the most efficient expenditure compared in the cost of repairing damage after the fact. Advocacy for better policy can be the most efficient expenditure compared to the cost of repairing future environmental damage. I refer to the current damage caused to the Great Barrier Reef, our great forests, farming communities and other areas by mining companies, wood cutting companies. Building of ports in the wrong areas, mining, fracking, grabbing excellent farming land used for vegetable growing around Werribee and Bacchus Marsh and fracking in New South Wales and Queensland for example, needed and still need advocacy from environmental charities to hold governments and corporations to account for destroying nature or polluting our air and water.

4. Limiting the ability of environment groups to advocate for our environment would result in considerably poorer environmental outcomes. Do we want to end up like many of the African countries that have removed all their forests, have very little water available for their populations, with many adults and children dying of starvation and lack of water each

year, or are we going to continue to be greedy with our main goal a financial one? With the prospect of climate change held over our heads we need to ensure that our rivers and forests are healthy and we at times we will need strong advocacy to maintain the status quo. We have already seen what greed can produce with the recent ABC production of the water issues that are occurring in the northern Darling River in New South Wales. I live in north-west Victoria, and although in the past, some areas of the Darling River have become just water holes, I have never seen the lower Darling without water in the river and flowing into the Murray. There have been several huge floods up in the northern Murray Darling Basin in the past few years, but none of the water has come down the Darling to Wentworth and those living in the south only received water last year when the Menindee Lakes finally released some water, which is quickly disappearing. I cannot believe that those living in the north are allowed to take so much water out of the Darling to fill their dams, and the fact that it was apparently mostly all stolen by some of the station people is just unbelievable. Many of the rivers no longer continue to flow into the Murray each year, and if the Murray Darling Basin is destroyed then what happens to Australia, as greedy people are allowed to steal water? This is a time when advocacy by environmental groups is vital before it is too late.

5. Some major environmental problems, like climate change and land clearing, cannot be stopped just through on-ground environmental remediation. The EDO 's in each state, if restricted to 50% on-ground environmental remediation, means it would lose 50% of its resources from campaigning to cut pollution, increase clean energy, phase out coal, protect our rivers and promote energy efficiency. This is just not on. We need them to advocate for us and to hold governments and corporations to account.

6. The inquiry and discussion paper create a false dichotomy between remediation and advocacy. On-ground work often needs supporting policies or funding from government, which may only arise as a result of advocacy. Many Land Care Groups and organisations such as the Mallee Catchment Authority could perhaps fall into this category.

Finally, I trust you will listen to community members such as myself. Please do not attack environmental charities but instead allow them to get on with their work and be free to make their own decisions about how to focus their efforts.

Mary Chandler

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