

**From:** [Henry Haszler](#)  
**To:** [DGR Inbox](#)  
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G'Day Treasury

Look, I know you are public servants, as I was once, and you have to do the explicit bidding of the Commonwealth Government, your immediate boss and paymaster.

But I think public servants also have a duty to the public as opposed to their duty to the governments they serve. Based on my lived experience, it is ridiculous to think that governments have explicit mandates and that they always serve the public interest, as opposed to the interests of government politicians, apparatchiks, paid up lobbyists and the whole spin industry. Just think of the extraordinarily low level of ordinary ethics displayed by politicians all the time – travel rorts, Canberra housing allowance rorts, Chinese bill payers, etc, etc.

So first off I ask you to recognise that the moves to reduce or curtail the tax deductibility of donations to environmental organisations in the way proposed is nothing but a blatant political ploy. It is designed to curtail the advocacy efforts of environmental organisations which – sadly – are too often at odds with the environmentally suspect policies of the Turnbull Liberal/National Party Government – just think of climate change. In large measure Australia's conservatives are trying to react to organisations such as GetUp – not a directly environmental organisations, I know – which has been very successful in achieving some measure of participatory democracy in Australia and which on many things has been a better representative of the Australian people than very many of our elected politicians.

If you recognise the foregoing point, there is no other conclusion than that things should be left as is.

And for the record some specific points supporting my views.

1. Organisations should be free to set their own priorities and to make informed assessments of how best to achieve positive environmental outcomes, whether through advocacy or on-ground remediation. Any new restrictions or limitations should be strongly opposed.
2. The community expects environmental groups to be strong advocates for environmental outcomes.
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 to the cost of repairing future environmental damage.
4. Limiting the ability of environment groups to advocate for our environment would result in poorer environmental outcomes.
5. Some major environmental problems, like climate change, can't be stopped just through on-ground environmental remediation.
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.

Henry Haszler



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