

Submission to the DGR Discussion Paper, with Reference to Environmental Organisations

My argument can be put very simply. An environmental organisation is defined as one whose primary purpose is to protect the environment, or to conduct education and research into the environment. Such organisations have DGR status because of the public service they provide.

Protecting the environment does not consist only of remediation work; it must necessarily include prevention of environmental damage in the first place. It is therefore entirely legitimate for an environmental organisation to pursue the prevention of environmental damage by any legal means. This may include advocacy, political debate and legal action, any of which may be necessary for the protection of the environment from societal or commercial activities which cause environmental damage, degradation or destruction.

Confining environmental organisations to a specified proportion of remediation work would cause poorer environmental outcomes, since certain commercial activities such as large-scale coal mining cause damage (to the natural and agricultural landscape, groundwater supplies, and through contributions to runaway global warming) which is beyond the possibility of remediation. In such cases the only effective environmental protection is prevention of those activities.

It is not intellectually, morally or legally defensible to limit or confine the legal activities of environmental organisations with DGR status to one set of actions, in order to satisfy the interests of commercial or political actors who feel inconvenienced by those organisations' efficacy in protecting the environment.

Environmental health is an acknowledged common good, in the possession of society as a whole, and a legacy to be handed on intact to future societies. Without ecology, there can in the end be no economy. Environmental protection by any legal means therefore needs to be prioritised over a policy which would allow irremediable damage.

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