

**From:** [Helen Saville](#)  
**To:** [DGR Inbox](#)  
**Subject:** DGR status of environmental charities - submission  
**Date:** Tuesday, 1 August 2017 9:11:38 PM

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Dear DGR OFFICER, Australian Treasury

I am making a submission as an older member of the public who has supported a range of environmental organisations throughout my life. I am making this submission on my own behalf and do not receive any financial assistance from any organisation in doing so. I have not made any political donations that relate to this or any other issue.

I support organisations that engage in environmental remediation, education and advocacy for environmental causes and I regard all of these activities as aspects of the public good. Consequently I do not see any need to change the DGR status of environmental or any other charities which engage in advocacy on the issues that they raise funds to support and remediate. These aspects go together and have done so for a very long time.

Philosophically, I believe that it just as important to attempt to prevent harm to our environment, or to groups in our society, as it is to repair damage. It is frequently more cost effective to prevent harm that may happen through ill-advised organisational decisions. There is a far greater cost in replanting and regenerating important bushland habitat than there is in acting to prevent the damage in the first place. This is what all conservation groups recognise and it is why groups campaign to have land included in national parks or coastal and ocean areas included in marine sanctuaries. Such campaigns, based on this recognition of the need for education and advocacy and regeneration activities, conducted together, have been happening in Australia at least since the late 19th century and will continue to happen.

Those who attempt to oppose advocacy and education as legitimate activities of environmental and other charities do so for commercial reasons and self-interest. The mining lobbies, who are foremost in campaigning for changes to attempt to limit the activities of environmental charities with DGR status, are clearly motivated by commercial interests, whereas the groups who oppose new or expanded mines are acting from a broader sense of the public good as they seek to protect land and water and the livelihoods of those who depend on a healthy environment, including farmers, tourism operators, local residents in affected areas, and of course the flora and fauna which deserve to survive in their own right and also make areas worth living in for human residents.

The mining companies and their lobbyists are all paid employees or business owners motivated entirely by profit seeking, whereas those who are acting to protect threatened areas, and donating for this purpose, do not have financial motivations. It is dishonest and hypocritical of mining companies and other businesses to seek to curtail the activities of environmental and conservation groups through campaigning against their DGR status, as the costs of lobbyists and public relations companies who act on behalf of mining companies will generally be written off as business expenses. The written off lobbying expenses of the mining industry may well far outweigh the savings to the individual taxpayer who donates to an environmental cause and receives a tax deduction.

Furthermore, the person, like myself, who donates to help protect the environment through advocacy, is aware that this is only part of what they are donating to, as funds will also be used for research to back up environmental issues as well as remediate where appropriate. For myself, I am retired and no longer receive any tax deductibility for donations, yet I still make donations as and when I can. There are many donors to environmental charities who are not motivated by the DGR status of the organisation they are donating to, although they may appreciate that option. However, it is my view that large numbers of ordinary Australians will donate to help preserve our environment from destructive developments, no matter what the mining company lobbyists argue for. In fact, the mining companies, who are known to pay little or no tax in Australia, are likely to create even greater public opposition to their activities if they engage in such blatant attacks on ordinary citizens' rights to make up their own minds about whether a development is for the public good or not.

There is a broader issue of history here, as many of the organisations which advocate for environmental protection are long established and held in high esteem. The mining companies and their lobbyists and political supporters would do well to recognise this. For example, one organisation that I am a member of and support through small donations, is BirdLife Australia. They are engaged in a number of campaigns to protect the habitats of threatened bird species, and thereby also protect other associated species. They support education for bird lovers, birdwatching activities for members, run bird observation centres in some key habitats in Australia, and seek to influence public policy through lobbying and advocacy. This organisation is the well-supported successor to the Gould League of Bird Lovers, which ran educational activities in schools when I was at primary school in the 1950s. To attempt to curtail the campaigning and advocacy activities of organisations such as this will lead to a very significant public backlash and politicians would be well advised to think very seriously before attempting to impose restrictions on the DGR status of such organisations.

To conclude, ill-advised attempts by politicians to limit the DGR status of environmental and similar charities simply will not succeed. This is because concerned people donate out of conviction and will still do so and will also very likely campaign against the politicians who advocate such changes to DGR status, which is already quite tightly controlled. Furthermore, it would be more beneficial to the Australian taxpayer and the government's budget to limit the tax deductibility of business expenses that mining companies currently claim for their lobbying and public relations media exercises. There is no groundswell in the community to limit the DGR status of established environmental or other charities whereas there is certainly a groundswell of support for much more effective taxation of companies wanting to profit from Australia's mineral resources and politicians would do well to respond to this rather than seek to curtail the activities of citizen based groups who are motivated by concern for the public good, both now and in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Saville



