



Birds Queensland
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Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment
PO Box 6021
Parliament House, Canberra, ACT, 2600

21 May 2015

Dear Committee,

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into the Register of Environmental Organisations

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to make a submission on the administration and transparency of the Register of Environmental Organisations. I do so, on behalf of Birds Queensland, the trading name for the Queensland Ornithological Society Inc, which was formed 45 years ago.

Birds Queensland is a not for profit environmental group that is a Registered Charity, and thus entitled to receive tax deductible donations, either to the Organisation or to our Research Fund. Our membership is comprised of people from many backgrounds who value our bird biodiversity and wish to ensure the conservation of birds in Queensland. Birds Queensland's constitution states that our aims are "to promote the scientific study and conservation of birds by all means possible with particular reference to Queensland". Our wide-ranging activities include fundraising for scientific research, issuing Grants for Research, contributing funds for wildlife conservation activities, production of a scientific journal entitled 'The Sunbird', participating in citizen science activities such as bird surveys, educating the general community about birds and their needs, and lobbying all levels of government for the protection of bird species and their habitats. Many of our members have specialised knowledge of the ecological requirements of birds. The sharing of this knowledge with land developers and land management agencies is a very important role for our organisation, particularly when Environmental Impact Statements need to be scrutinised.

Organisations like ours are repositories of much data derived from bird surveys and historical observations, and this is an invaluable community resource that is acquired and maintained without cost to the taxpayer. We believe that decisions about land development or management should be based on data such as we provide. We have a very proud history of contributing to the preservation and rehabilitation of many important bird habitats by working with government and other interested parties. For example, we played an important role in the preservation of Brisbane's Tinchi Tamba Wetlands, an important migratory shorebird habitat, by working in conjunction with fishing and other groups that also wanted to see this area preserved as a fish spawning area. A further example of our work is managing the visitor program at Bowra Sanctuary, owned by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, an important area for many inland bird species. Our volunteers ensure that visitors to Bowra

contribute their observations to a database that will inform land managers and future visitors about the status of the many species about which we know very little. Our annual bird banding program at Bowra will also contribute significantly to knowledge of how arid land birds live, and if they are being affected by changing climatic conditions.

The Australian Government report entitled 'Australia's Biodiversity and Climate Change: Summary for policy makers 2009: Summary of a report to the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council commissioned by the Australian Government' observes that "Australia's unique biodiversity, already under threat from a wide range of stressors, now faces a further threat from a rapidly changing climate. Effects of climate change are already discernible at the genetic, species and ecosystem levels in many parts of the continent and coastal seas". The scientific literature now contains predictions of over 100 Queensland bird species being pushed to extinction by the above-mentioned stressors. This will mean many species being added to the State and Federal Government lists of threatened and endangered species with ensuing legal obligations being triggered for those governments to intervene, an activity that entails considerable public expenditure. The work done *now* by our organisation and similar groups to strengthen the adaptability and survival chances of our many threatened birds (and the other animal species that utilise the same habitats) will benefit the government and the public purse by potentially saving many thousands of taxpayer dollars in expensive captive breeding programs and other last-minute efforts to save them.

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

Birds Queensland recommends there be no tightening of the current definition of 'environmental organisation' under the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*. Current legislation rightly allows organisations like ours to hold deductible gift recipient status, and this would be compromised by restricting the terms of eligibility. The definition should include all organisations that work to protect the natural environment, or assist the community to do so. These organisations benefit the public by shifting some of the burden of funding of many maintenance and conservation aspects of the natural environment back onto the community. Proactive efforts by organisations such as Birds Queensland to protect birds and their habitat before their destruction are essential. These efforts are not for personal gain by members, but to preserve the natural environment and healthy functioning ecosystems for the public good.

The requirements to be met by an organisation to be listed on the Register and maintain its listing and the reporting requirements for organisations to disclose donations and activities funded by donations

Birds Queensland is an organisation with volunteers filling all management and financial roles. We have no paid staff. Given our limited resources we recommend that the administrative burden on environmental organisations not be increased. For Birds Queensland to detail these activities to government would place an extreme burden on the organisation. The research grant proposals funded by donations to Birds Queensland are well documented in its Annual Report. We are already subject to sufficient scrutiny by regulators. People are discerning in how their money is spent and have a choice as to where to donate.

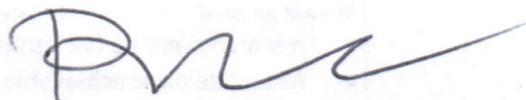
Activities undertaken by organisations currently listed on the Register and the extent to which these activities involve on-ground environmental works

Activities should not only include 'on-ground' work, but also activities such as education, advice and advocacy. For example, assisting community groups with land development proposals and disseminating information on wildlife (including birds) and their habitat requirements helps prevent or reduce environmental damage before it occurs. Sometimes

alternative options can be recommended that still allow the development to proceed but with less environmental impact than in the original proposal. The conservation of our natural environment depends on the public understanding all the issues, which can only be achieved through education from those with appropriate expertise. Members of Birds Queensland have the knowledge to advise, educate and advocate for birds and their habitats.

Birds Queensland therefore recommends that environmental organisations which are proactive in protecting the environment and in educating others about environmental issues, as well as those with 'on-ground' activities, all retain their deductible gift recipient status.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Richard Noske', written over a faint, illegible background.

Richard Noske, PhD, Grad Dip Ed

President

Birds Queensland

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