



HAWKESBURY ENVIRONMENT NETWORK INC

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Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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15th May 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment Enquiry into the Register of Environmental Organisations May 2015.

Thank you for your letter of March 2015 to our organisation inviting HEN to make a submission on this matter.

Hawkesbury Environment Network Inc., [HEN] is a community based umbrella environment group consisting of 15 affiliated organisations and many individual members who seek to advocate and work towards protection of our environment. It was established in 2011, incorporated in 2012, and applied for Deductible Gift Recipient status in 2013. At the time of writing, HEN has not yet been listed on the Register although preliminary stages are now passed.

Mission: The Leading Representative organisation for environmental information, advocacy, education and action in the Hawkesbury Region.

Vision: The Ecological Restoration and sustainable management of the natural capital of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment.

Further details about HEN, including a summary of our practical on-ground activities, information, education and advocacy for the environment can be seen after the comments.

Comment on the Inquiry Terms of Reference

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment will inquire into and report on the administration and transparency of the Register of Environmental Organisations (the Register) and its effectiveness in supporting communities to take practical action to improve the environment.

The Inquiry will have particular regard to:

- *the definition of 'environmental organisation' under the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997, including under Subdivision 30-E;*

Under the requirements for listing HEN needed to establish that its principal purpose is Protection of the Natural Environment [Section 30-265(1) of the ITAA]

An environmental organisation's principal purpose must be:

“(a) the protection and enhancement of the natural environment or of a significant aspect of

the natural environment; or

*(b) the provision of **information or education**, or the carrying on of research, about the natural*

*environment **or a significant aspect of the natural environment.**”*

An organisation seeking registration must provide evidence of its environmental purpose or

purposes by listing its formal objects as part of its constitutional documents.

The environmental purpose must be the organisation's principal purpose.

The objects of the organisation must be set in the context of the natural environment.

This

***includes all aspects of the natural surroundings of humans**, whether affecting them as*

individuals or in social groupings.

Eg The natural environment and concern for it would include, for example:

*significant natural areas such as rainforests; wildlife and their habitats; **issues affecting the environment such as air and water quality, waste minimisation, soil conservation, and biodiversity; and promotion of ecologically sustainable development principles.***

For discussion purposes, HEN's role in our local community is specifically concerned with areas highlighted in red or underlined above. Local communities need to make decisions about the sustainability of their environment on the basis of evidence and scientific information, which HEN strives to provide in all cases, especially through submissions and awareness raising. Our area is already under threat of rapid change in the peri-urban setting of greater Sydney; such changes are heavily impacting on the natural environment (specifically air, soil and water quality, and biodiversity) and will irreparably degrade them before the community is aware and able to take steps to minimise such damage. The imbalance in discussion about resource extraction such as coal seam gas mining in our water catchments is the greatest challenge of all; supported by very well-resourced vocal lobby groups and massive international corporation powers. For that reason, HEN feels that this review needs to look at the importance of the right to free exchange of views, because it contributes to the public welfare and the common good. It is the sign of a mature democracy in which such debate can take place that we aspire to.

- *the requirements to be met by an organisation to be listed on the Register and maintain its listing;*

In reply to the general terms of the enquiry, HEN has found the requirements to be met to be a drain on our resources both in time and costs of preparation of changes to our constitution and presentation to our members. Entry onto the Register required approval by both the Australian Tax Office (ATO) and the Department of Environment, and appeared to necessitate closest scrutiny and rejection of clauses in our constitution repeatedly, by possibly one obviously overworked entity in the latter.

Our first try in 2013 with presentation at our AGM followed up with rejection of some aspects led to the second attempt in 2014. It is the need to take such changes to a special meeting that causes delays and the subsequent scrutiny and further rejections became onerous. However, the benefits are that the public can be certain about HEN's motives and management.

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

HEN has confidence in our management standards and ability to put funding to suitable and sustainable on-ground works which will restore and protect our environment. Donations obtained through DGR status will also be able to specify how these are to be used; just as government grants are tied to certain specifications and reporting requirements. Practical actions and advocacy both lead to tangible environmental protection, within a greater supportive culture. HEN does not support any attempt to remove environmental advocacy groups from the Register. Specifically, HEN is concerned that groups espousing the greater development of renewables, within the context of concerns about fossil fuel effects on the climate, are being specifically singled out in a political challenge through this inquiry.

INFORMATION about HEN

Outline of HEN Status: HEN is registered as a Landcare group. It is governed by a Committee of eight appointed by election at its AGM held in November. An executive consists of Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary and Public Officer. A copy of its Constitution is attached as part of this submission. HEN operates its activities through the unpaid and time-consuming work of passionate and dedicated individuals who believe that the aims are important for the future of our natural environment and for the sustainable future of our community.

Member Groups: These include Hawkesbury Rainforest Network, Willow Warriors, Earthcare, NPA Hawkesbury-Cumberland, Bass Sydney, Hawkesbury Herpetological Society, Scheyville National Park Community Group, Kurrajong-Comleroy Historical Society, Cumberland Bird Observers Club, Bowen Mountain Association, Hawkesbury Harvest, Henry Doubleday, Alternative Technology Association, Hawkesbury Harvest, Kurrajong Heights Action Association, North Richmond and Districts Community Action Association, MacDonald Valley Association.

Mission statement and strategies to protect the environment

Mission: The Leading Representative organisation for environmental information, advocacy, education and action in the Hawkesbury Region.

Vision: The Ecological Restoration and sustainable management of the natural capital of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment.

Outline of HEN activities to protect the environment.

HEN raises awareness of issues via expert speakers; stalls and information material at local fairs; provides written submissions to various government bodies on environmental impact issues; and lobbies Local Government on sustainable environmental policy.

Use of social media as well as a well-resourced website and newsletters enable greater advocacy and engagement in repairing and protection of the environment.

HEN has been invited to provide members to stand on two Hawkesbury City Council Advisory subcommittees in Waste Management and Sustainability.

HEN has undertaken active land management through initiation of a funded youth environmental education project in 2012-13 called Alive! This project, in which the University of Western Sydney played a significant role, enabled 14 groups to establish on-ground programs in schools and local neighbourhoods such as creation of vegetable gardens, protection of endangered plant communities, and establishment of small wetlands. The Alive! success led to formation in 2014 of the Hawkesbury Environmental Education Network HEEN, which enables resource development and sharing across all levels and areas of education.

Other funded on-ground programs now include the Cats Claw Creeper Control program for Grose Vale-Kurrajong which has raised awareness amongst over 100 landholders, appointed a trainer-contractor to undertake weed management education, and initiated partnerships across noxious weed authorities and managers of linear reserves.

HEN is also auspicing a grant to a member group undertaking control of African Olive in a large area of Cumberland Plain Woodland.

In 2014 HEN submitted a successful sponsorship proposal to obtain the services of two Green Army teams in Round One, which started in February 2015. These now work on various sites including riparian, Aboriginal, forests and woodlands containing Endangered Ecological Communities. Their training benefits from the wide membership and organisational structure of HEN which enables the team to learn bush regeneration, bird watching, water quality testing, and cultural awareness. A Round Two Green Army team will be started in June 2015 on wetland rehabilitation on a significant waterfowl habitat site on the floodplains. Again, the enrichment of the team's experiences has everything to do with HEN's partnerships across ngos, its members, and agencies including Greater Sydney Local Land Services (GSLLS).

Funding for all of the activities undertaken in the list above has come from grants through government at all levels. Other small grants from local businesses or non-DGR donations have assisted HEN in its work in administering projects.

HEN supports the current application of DGR Status, although we also would support the process being much simplified or supported via approvals by one dedicated Office to save the volunteers time and energy in elaborate processes.

Yours Sincerely



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Hawkesbury Environment Network Inc

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