

Treasury Discussion Paper – Environmental Charities requirements.

I wish to amplify my opposition to the ATO proposal that for Environmental Charities to be eligible for DGR status that a higher limit of 50% should have been considered. (I also do not support the 25% proposal).

The local organisation I am a member of (Macedon Ranges Sustainability Group) has DGR status and undertakes a number of activities under their umbrella:

Running a local farmers market.

Operating a permaculture garden.

Supporting a bee-keeping educational initiative.

Supporting a food swap at each Farmers market.

Running an annual Sustainable Living Festival.

Operating a Renewable Energy fund that has assisted local groups in installing PV solar.

Exploring options for community renewable energy projects, and assisting initiation of it.

Providing support for healthy and sustainable eating.

Providing information of a factual, science based nature on a range of environmental matters in newsletters and on local noticeboards.

Supporting environmental initiatives that reduce impacts on human well-being.

Making submissions of environmental and related matters of public interest.

Running monthly “Movies that matter” with a focus on environmental issues.

While the benefit of DGR status is of value, it is evident that much of the membership does not engage directly in the type of “remediation” suggested, some of our members support Landcare and other groups that do so.

My position.

I am the current Chair of the Engineers Australia branch of the Sustainable Engineering Society, and have Tertiary qualifications in Civil Engineering, Town Planning and Public Management. I have been employed by State and Local authorities, run a consultancy practice for 20 years and recently retired.

I am opposed to limits on public advocacy that represent an attack of free speech and while I have personally criticised both State and Federal policies of political parties across environmental and economic areas, I have also been involved with local action groups who are informal and do not have DGR status and campaign locally on matters such as plastic bags waste and broader issues such as the proposed Galilee Basin development.

I note that tree planting or similar remediation work will under no circumstances offset the potential health and environmental damage of (for example) either excessive plastic waste or the added carbon emissions from the Galilee basin development or like projects. We are running out of offset options in Australia. It is far better to *account fully for all development impacts* and use policy/economic and regulatory levers before the negative consequences occur – that is what much advocacy is about – to ensure the public interest is protected both for now and future generations. If that advocacy is regarded as contrary to public policy, then I would find that to be a serious and dangerous infringement on the right to free speech – to place such a restriction on public comment is to disenfranchise members of the public and bias the discussion towards those who have more power.

On balance I see no overall public benefit from the proposed requirement for tree planting or remedial work. Most of that work is undertaken in Victoria through catchment management authorities or Landcare groups. It is a simplistic solution to a problem that largely arises from a systemic failure to adjust to a model that ensures we take adequate action to provide for a sustainable future. To me the proposal is primarily directed to thwart valid public concerns about the need to sustain our future on this planet. The suggested remedial or planting proposal should be rejected and recognised as a blocking move directed by powerful vested interests with a short term focus, directed against those who are trying to ensure a future for upcoming generations.



Keith Altmann

Disclaimer. The views expressed herein are mine and do not necessarily reflect those of organisations I belong to.