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**Subject:** The Australian Government needs to encourage community groups to speak out, not silence them  
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The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP  
Prime Minister  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Re The Australian Government needs to encourage community groups to speak out, not silence them

Dear Prime Minister

Commenting on the Department of the Treasury inquiry into potential reforms to the Deductible Gift Recipient tax arrangements The Australian Government should create an environment that encourages all not-for-profit groups to speak freely and contribute to public debate.

Some elements of the Treasury consultation follow a clear and worrying trend of Australian governments seeking to restrict the free speech of not-for-profit groups, in this case by attempting to hamstring the ability of environmental advocacy groups to raise money.

One of the things that makes your democracy great is having an informed public debate with a range of voices. Instead of silencing advocacy groups, the Australian Government should safeguard and encourage vibrant debate on matters of public interest.

The inquiry is looking into whether environmental groups should be required to do a minimum of 25 to 50 per cent "remediation" work to be eligible for deductible gift recipient status, a tax status that allows groups to receive deductible donations and which is therefore critical to their fundraising ability.

The consequence of this policy would be severe. It could effectively strip environmental advocacy groups of their fundraising ability and threaten the survival of groups that have fought to save some of Australia's most loved places, from the Franklin River to the Barrier Reef.

The inquiry picks up recommendations from the 2016 House of Representatives Environment Committee's report, that sought to limit DGR status to environmental advocacy groups, but not to groups that do "remediation work" such as planting trees.

Let's not forget that environment groups are simply doing their job when they advocate for the environment. It is misleading for the government to create a false distinction between the value and legitimacy of remediation and advocacy work. It undervalues the strong contribution advocacy has made to conserving iconic Australian places of great environmental value.

Thank you for the opportunity to bring these remarks to your attention.

Yours sincerely,  
Robert E. Rutkowski, Esq.

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Re Human Rights Law Centre submission  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/580025f66b8f5b2dabbe4291/t/5983fe77b8a79b3541090c0e/1501822588528/HRLC+submission+Tax+Deductible+Gift+Recipient+Reform+Opportunities+August+2017.pdf>