



**Ryde - Hunter's Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society**

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Member of Nature Conservation Council of N.S.W.

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Senior Adviser  
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The Treasury  
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Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for an opportunity to forward comment on the discussion paper on proposed changes to Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) tax arrangements. We express our serious concerns that the proposed changes will severely limit our potential, as a 50 year old local conservation group, to work effectively in raising community awareness about matters which affect our natural environment.

Whilst our organisation does not claim DGR for any donations that our members make to RHHFFPS, we do rely on the specialist expertise, advice and information provided by bigger organisations that would be affected by the proposed changes. We absolutely support the need and right for these organisations to continue to receive DGR. This is only fair and sensible if as a society we are to ensure in the public interest that there is adequate protection of Australia's biodiversity and natural areas, and long term sustainable management of our natural resources for the benefit of all Australians.

By way of background we provide the following history and comments.

Our organisation arose out of a community struggle in the mid 1960s by local residents concerned to see the protection of natural bushland at the Field of Mars Reserve, East Ryde. The local Council's intention was to expand the landfill area by piping the creek. This was stopped by community action and the reserve is now a Wildlife Refuge and contains the award winning Field of Mars Environmental Education Centre visited by over 15,000 students annually.

Whilst the RHHFFPS did engage in on ground works in the reserve in the early days of its activities, this does not occur now. Since 1966, Councils have assumed greater responsibility and interest in natural resource management and, importantly, insurance premiums limit the extent of the on ground works which can be undertaken by relatively small organisations such as RHHFFPS. Now our volunteers engage in regular Bushcare and tree planting days under the auspice of Council.

However, the protection of an urban bushland such as the highly valued and visited Field of Mars Reserve involves much more than the bush regeneration works undertaken by contractors and volunteers and keeping a Visitors Centre open at weekends with RHHFFPS volunteers.

Since the Society's formation in 1966, there have been significant changes in the way the natural environment is managed. In a very brief and general summary, this includes:

- The identification of areas required to be set aside for environmental protection and preservation;
- Land use zonings to facilitate ecologically sustainable development;
- Controls on pollution, especially on air and water;
- Recognition of the public interest in the environmental assessment and approvals process;
- Specific legislation that protects and monitors biodiversity and the natural environment;
- The establishment of government agencies to ensure compliance with legislation that protects the environment.

All of these changes have occurred within an overall increased societal awareness of the need for improved protection of the natural environment as a way of ensuring that the benefits of well functioning ecosystems are guaranteed for healthy land, water and air for future generations. The role of the community and the conservation movement has been paramount in the achievement of these improvements to the way in which our finite resources are managed and drinking water catchments protected.

Our members have contributed in various ways to the achievement of these broader changes. We understand that on ground works alone will not ensure the protection of the Field of Mars Reserve and its native birds and plants. The longer term protection of the Field of Mars relies on appropriate legislative protections and greater government responsibility to represent the public interest and commit to sustainable management of natural resources.

It would not be possible for our concerned membership to fully represent our interests and commitment to the protection of the natural environment if we did not have access to the specialist and trusted advice and support provided by the organisations which are being targeted in this current review of DGR.

Organisations involved in on ground works and those providing crucial informed advocacy contribute to better environmental outcomes in complementary ways and thus are equally deserving of assistance from the DGR mechanism to sustain their vital work.

We are concerned that this proposal comes as a result of lobbying by powerful vested interests that would have much to gain from reducing the capacity of advocacy groups.

If enacted, the changes to DGR will affect the valuable capacity building provided to smaller action groups by specialist advocacy organisations. This ultimately will reduce the community's democratic right to unbiased information as they work for improved environmental protection in the public interest.

In conclusion, our Society is strongly opposed to this move by government to silence reasonable dissent and limit the informed public debate on which social and environmental justice should be based in a healthy democracy.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Merchant,  
Committee Member RHHFFPS