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Submission from Voices of the Valley

Individuals and Indirect Tax Division

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Thankyou for the opportunity to make a submission regarding the consultation paper which proposes potential reforms to Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) tax arrangements.

Voices of the Valley was formed during the Hazelwood Mine Fire while we were going through an Industrial disaster in which we felt forgotten and abandoned. We do not have a Tax Deductible Gift Recipient status as an organisation but it was due to the support of organisations that do have the status that helped us achieve the outcomes of the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry and the changes that have been needed in the Latrobe Valley. it is extremely important that we have organisations that can engage in community education, campaigns and advocacy to protect the environment and communities.

As a community advocacy group we have found how important it is for independent groups to be able to speak freely for the communities they speak for. The current Australian government has progressively withdrawn support from bodies concerned about climate change and environmental degradation, and it is only through the persistence of community funded organisations that climate and broader environmental issues remain part of public debate. The work of community advocacy is done on minimal resources and having DRG status is one way of stretching those resources. It would be deeply disappointing that the government used an investigation into the tax status of environmental advocacy groups to limit their effectiveness and their ability to speak for the growing number of people who are concerned about environmental and climate issues.

Safeguarding independent community voices is extremely important in this day & age of Fake News, political system that are not trusted and our democratic right to free speech and social justice needs to be protected.

Often community organisations and green groups are now called on by Government organisations wanting to use their skills, knowledge & community connections; not only should the DGR status of groups be protected but Government should acknowledge the good that these groups do and consider funding these groups so they can do more great work.

It seems quite clear that there is a political motive to silence those that stand up for the environment and communities in this review process. While it relates to all not for profits, it clearly singles out (ENGOs) environmental organisations. Suggesting green groups with DGR be forced to allocate 50% of their funds to planting trees, clearing rubbish or other environmental projects that already have great organisations the do this is ridiculous, the organisations that seem to be attacked by this are fundamental to our society.

The right to protest is a democratic right, to question and debate is what Australia has been built on. Free speech and advocacy and is not illegal and should never be illegal.

We ask that you consider the real motivation behind this investigation which seems politically motivated and look at how Government can support their work not take away from them.

Yours sincerely,

Wendy Farmer

President

Voices of the Valley