

22 November 2017

Mr Gerry Mcinally
Committee Secretary
Select Committee into the Political Influence of Donations
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: politicaldonations.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr Mcinally,

RE: SELECT COMMITTEE INTO THE POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF DONATIONS

CropLife Australia (CropLife) is the national peak industry organisation representing the agricultural chemical and biotechnology (plant science) sector in Australia. CropLife is a non-partisan peak industry organisation that seeks to advocate for agricultural policy based on science and evidence to all political parties.

Recent testimony to the Select Committee on Thursday 2 November 2017 by Ms Fran MURRELL and Mr Bob PHELPS made misleading and deceptive claims about CropLife Australia in a calculated and deliberate attempt to smear CropLife's reputation on the public record.

CropLife Australia has a policy not to make political donations, however, we do actively support political events and functions to encourage and facilitate discussion on agricultural and science policy. All such contributions are done openly and transparently. CropLife's sponsorships and contributions to political events are made simply to facilitate discussion and debate on important agricultural and science issues, without any expectation of outcome.

I write to correct the inaccuracies and request that the evidence of Ms Murrell and Mr Phelps be disregarded and omitted from the final Committee report based on it being false testimony and attempting to mislead the Committee.

The *Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals Legislation Amendment (Removing Re-approval and Re-registration) Bill 2014* alluded to in the testimony of Ms Murrell and Mr Phelps was passed by the Senate on 14 July 2014. Ms Murrell and Mr Phelps try to link the passing of the Bill to sponsorships and contributions made by CropLife for participating in agricultural policy and business events in the 2014-15 and 2015-16 financial years. When questioned by the Chair, however, Mr Phelps admits he has absolutely no evidence to support such a grossly baseless accusation against CropLife. The contributions made by CropLife to attend, sponsor and participate in agricultural policy and business events in 2014-15 and 2015-16, referred to incorrectly as 'donations' in the testimony of Ms Murrell and Mr Phelps, had not even occurred when the Bill was passed.

Mr Phelps' claim that his organisation has never had any donations from overseas could also be considered misleading. Mr Phelps leads the organisation Gene Ethics, who are not entitled to receive tax deductible gifts¹, but solicit tax deductible donations via a funding relationship with Friends of the Earth (Australia)². Friends of the Earth (Australia) are the Australian arm of the global multinational anti-science activist group Friends of the Earth, and they receive international funding, in addition to local donations for their Australian activities. A proportion of this funding is passed onto local activist splinter groups such as those run by Mr Phelps and Ms Murrell.

¹ <http://www.abr.business.gov.au/SearchByAbn.aspx?abn=67104140918>

² See <https://www.givenow.com.au/foegeneethics> and <http://www.geneethics.org/donate>



Ms Murrell and Mr Phelps also mislead the Committee in their claims that they do not undertake political campaigning. Even as I write, both Mr Murrell and Mr Phelps are calling on their supporters through their websites, mailing lists and social media feeds³ to write to the Assistant Minister for Health, the Hon Dr David Gillespie, MP with the aim to influence his decision-making on the 2017 Review of the National Gene Technology Regulatory Scheme. This campaign is being coordinated through their major partner, Friends of the Earth (Australia). Indeed, Ms Murrell even appears on a Friends of the Earth (Australia) video posted to Facebook and YouTube urging supporters to get involved campaigning against changes to Australia's gene technology regulations.⁴ Ms Murrell's organisation MADGE is also currently calling on its supporters to campaign for the extension of the GM moratorium in South Australia⁵.

Mr Phelps has previously worked in conjunction with FoodWATCH WA to coordinate petitions to Western Australian state parliamentarians prior to the repeal of that state's GM crop moratorium legislation in 2016. There are numerous further examples, that stretch back more than 20 years, of Mr Phelps' direct involvement in political campaigning^{6 7 8}. For Ms Murrell and Mr Phelps to provide testimony to the Committee stating they do not take an active role in political campaigning is a complete and utter falsehood and actively misleads the Committee.

It is clear from the Hansard record Mr Phelps and Ms Murrell have no basis and are completely unable to substantiate any of the claims made in their submission or in testimony to the Committee because they are false. Their entire testimony is based on false and baseless accusation, for which there is no supporting evidence.

Please contact me should you require any further information or supporting evidence for the concerns raised in this letter.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Cossey
Chief Executive Officer

³ See for example: <http://mailchi.mp/5a4bd05bd9b4/madge-digest-2780489> and <https://www.facebook.com/pg/Gene-Ethics-for-a-GM-free-Australia-129145813774560/posts/>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdFkX5nbVtc>

⁵ See for example: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1881589025204075&id=112889015407427

⁶ See for example: [Gene Ethics Media Release 27 June 2016 'GM-free Food and Crops: Election Scorecard'](#)

⁷ See for example: [Gene Ethics Media Release 16 April 2012 'Forum backs GM-free SA'](#) and [Gene Ethics Media Release 17 April 2012 'Call for SA to stay GM-free'](#)

⁸ See for example: [Gene Ethics Facebook page post calling their followers to Lobby candidates for GM-free this election](#)