

**Rhoda Dorrell: Address: 103 Cane St Redland Bay Qld 4165 Tel 07) 3829 0114**

**To the Committee Secretary**

**Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters- Election Funding and Disclosure Reform Bill**

**Name of Organisation: Quaker Service Australia (QSA), 119 Devonshire St, Surry Hills NSW 2010**

My participation with Quaker Service Australia (QSA)

- I have been active in the Queensland Quaker Service committee since the 1980's when Tasmania RM, started an Australia wide Quaker service committee that supported the Quaker Service Committee in England with projects in Africa and India.
- I became involved in the fund raising effort to send medicines and portable sawmills to Vietnam after the Vietnam war and locally the QRM QSA committee started fund raising for Vietnam refugees and ( boat people) settling in Brisbane.
- Also supporting anti Vietnam demonstrations and speaking out for the refugees coming to our shores by boat.
- QSA Queensland worked with the QRM Pay the Rent Committee to help the local Aboriginal community in Brisbane set up the first independent Aboriginal school. Teaching primary aged children from Aboriginal and European backgrounds to learn Aboriginal heritage and languages- which in later years was incorporated into the Qld Education system.
- Now continuing to be involved with supporting refugees from Africa through working with the QRM African Great Lakes Refugee committee and the speaking out against the treatment of refugees from the middle east.
- Active in publicising Quaker Service Australia and its work to our Meetings with local fund raising and distribution of the QSA Newsletters and publicising special appeals.
- I was appointed by QRM to be on the new QSA Linkage Committee for Queensland Regional Meeting in September 2016 and will continue to serve on it until 2020. on the new QSA Linkage Committee for Queensland Regional Meeting in September 2016.

**My arguments:** Whilst I have sympathy with legislation to curb foreign influence in our political systems and processes, I am concerned with the proposed linking of this to the charitable sector.

The government's new foreign donations legislation is a direct threat to democracy that will silence those organisations without the money to pay for lobby groups. As a long time volunteer worker for QSA, I object to my efforts and for QSA staff time to be consumed in lobbying.

I predict that the effect of these proposed restrictions would mean that rather than separating out donations, and ensuring they comply, most charities would simply cease advocating publicly on the issues that matter to them. We would cease to hear about issues

of injustice, which would be a tremendous loss to Australian society. The Charity Sector through collective sharing of information has provided valuable advice to DFAT, Indigenous Affairs, Immigration and other agencies.

Charities should be free to advocate on behalf of people who are powerless or vulnerable. We need a regulatory environment that respects and encourages charities' participation in public policy as the free exchange of opinions, information and ideas is vital in an open democratic society.

QSA's voice will be silenced as we cannot afford to, or might not choose to pay for advocacy. The irony is that the legislation generally only applies to public activities. One perverse outcome if the legislation is passed in its current form, may be that it drives advocacy out of the public realm.

I consider that the requirements are complex, cumbersome, broad and vague. One requirement, for example, would require senior staff and board members of charitable organisations to disclose if they are members of political parties. If organisations like QSA are found to be in breach of this legislation, the threat of big fines or potential jail time will hang over our heads. In a democracy this legislation is ridiculous.

**Conclusion:** There already exists sufficient legislation under the States' Charities Acts to prevent the disquiet being exhibited by the Government in muffling their voices. Charities are already well regulated and prohibited from supporting political parties and candidates. They can only advocate for their charitable purpose, which must be for public benefit. The legislation could be challenged as a restriction on freedom of political communication. It would discourage and suppress public comment. Given the lack of justification offered for the legislation applying to charities, there are serious risks that the legislation would be invalid if it was passed in its current form. In other words, it promises to be a huge time waster to a Government which has many really important areas to address at present.

Thank you for your consideration of my concerns.

Yours faithfully

Rhoda Dorrell

Convener QSA Committee and member of QSA Linkages Committee