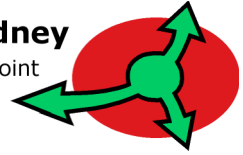


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A submission to the

INQUIRY INTO THE REGISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

Standing Committee on the Environment
House of Representatives
Parliament of Australia

Prepared by EcoTransit Sydney
20 May 2015
Authorised by the Executive Committee of EcoTransit Sydney

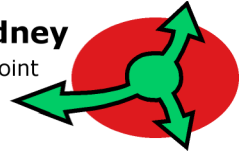
The submission consists of 4 pages.

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Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

20 May 2015

A submission to the inquiry into the administration and transparency of the Register of Environmental Organisations and its effectiveness in supporting communities to take practical action to improve the environment.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

EcoTransit Sydney advocates for environmentally sustainable transport outcomes for communities. We have 50 members, the majority of whom live in Sydney, as well as regional NSW. The group has no affiliations to vested (business) interests or political parties.

The transport sector is a significant generator of greenhouse gas emissions in Australia and the choices we make with regard to transport infrastructure profoundly influence the nature of urban development and its associated environmental footprint.

Sustainable transport policies seek to minimise energy use and emissions (greenhouse gas, other gases, and harmful particulates), and maximise urban amenity, environmental sustainability, and public health. The advocacy of such policies results in a focus on improved public transport (rail, light rail, buses) and active transport (cycling and walking) outcomes.

The EcoTransit Sydney Public Gift Fund has been listed on the Register of Environmental Organisations since 27 September 2001. Since its inception, the Public Gift Fund has received approximately \$5000 in tax deductible donations.

EcoTransit Sydney has always complied with the requirements of the Register of Environmental Organisations in regard to how it has used funds from the Public Gift Fund. In particular, funds have been used for the purpose of education, with a focus on explaining the environmental benefits to the community of sustainable transport policies, and the corresponding real costs of unbridled motorway-based developments.

An example of the way in which donations to the Public Gift Fund have been put to use was a community forum held in March 2011 at which EcoTransit Sydney outlined the environmental and community benefits of the long overdue North West Rail line. The North West of Sydney is a rapidly growing, but heavily car dependent area. The addition of a new heavy rail line to the area will offer a more sustainable transport alternative and result in reduced congestion, reduced car and diesel bus emissions, and fewer contaminants released into the Sydney air shed.

Our most recent use of the Public Gift Fund was the contribution of \$800 toward the digitisation of the Kyeemagh-Chullora Road Inquiry¹, commonly referred to as the Kirby Report.

This inquiry was prepared before the widespread digitisation of government reports and inquiries. The report itself represents an extremely worthwhile resource for those people interested in understanding the negative environmental costs² and planning outcomes associated with unchecked motorway development.

Characterised by an informed, lucid and accessible writing style, the report is an invaluable, independent information resource for the community. It contains what is still today one of the clearest expositions for the lay reader of the phenomenon of induced traffic. EcoTransit Sydney felt that there was a strong community benefit in making this information available on the world wide web and a worthwhile use of the Public Gift Fund.

Each year, EcoTransit Sydney submits a questionnaire to the REO in which we report on how funds from the Public Gift Fund have been spent, and the activities undertaken using those funds. We also provide a report to our members at the Annual General Meeting.

As per the REO's reporting requirements, EcoTransit Sydney engages auditors to audit the Public Gift Fund on an annual basis. The rules of the REO preclude administrative costs, such as audit costs, from being charged to the Public Gift Fund. Instead, the costs are borne by EcoTransit Sydney. Given its small size and very limited funds, this represents a significant burden to the organisation.

Please note that we have no objection to this requirement and can see the merit in not having donations eaten away over time by administration costs. However, given the requirement for audited accounts, it would be helpful if the REO could work with professional accounting associations, such as the Institute of Chartered Accountants, to identify those accountants who would be willing to undertake what is, in the case

1 <http://roadinquiry.blogspot.com.au/>

2 <http://roadinquiry.blogspot.com.au/2015/03/volume-3-e.html>


the Public Gift Fund, a very simple audit for a nominal fee.

EcoTransit Sydney would express its concern over proposals to make the administrative requirements more complex. The overwhelming majority of organisations on the REO is made up of very small community groups, like EcoTransit Sydney, whose membership consists of volunteers who, though often time poor, give up their time to promote and protect the environment in Australia. It is unclear what the overall community benefit would be in making that task more difficult.

EcoTransit Sydney would also question the public benefit in limiting the REO to only those organisations engaged in “on-ground environmental works.” This is an excessively narrow interpretation of what it means to promote and protect the environment.

As originally constituted, the REO recognised that there was a role for organisations that were not tied to a specific geographic area, nor focussed on particular on-ground environmental works, but whose purpose resulted in outcomes that had an environmental benefit. The activities and aims of EcoTransit Sydney fall within that definition. It would be regrettable and disheartening for our organisation to be removed from the REO on the basis of the Committee recommending that the REO's membership be limited to only those organisations engaged in “on-ground environmental works.”

Yours sincerely,


John Bignucolo
Secretary
EcoTransit Sydney