

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Additional Estimates

26 February 2014

Question: AET 3039

Topic: Friends of the Earth

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Senator EDWARDS asked:

Senator EDWARDS: I want to take you to the court case that is going on in the west but not specifically to the court case about the neighbour who is suing the other neighbour with the genetically modified seeds blown in across the fence, who has lost his organic accreditation. The Safe Food Foundation is conducting fundraising activities to raise money for the organic grower Steve Marsh, who is suing his neighbour, Michael Baxter, for the loss of organic certification. To facilitate their fundraising efforts in the campaign against the farmers who chose to grow the GM crops, the Safe Food Foundation has advertised all donations to the Safe Food Foundation and the Steve Marsh Legal Fighting Fund as tax deductible, despite the fact that they themselves do not have a DGR status. In a similar vein, anti-GM activist group Gene Ethics are using a DGR status of Friends of the Earth to solicit tax-deductible donations to their long-running campaign against agricultural biotechnology.

I want to draw to the ATO's attention the use of the Australian tax-deductibility laws by Friends of the Earth Australia. Friends of the Earth are a charitable institution endorsed as a deductible gift recipient and they are being used openly by the Safe Food Foundation—I have links, websites and things like that here—and Gene Ethics to collect donations on their behalf. Safe Food Foundation and Gene Ethics are not endorsed as a deductible gift recipient. Is the ATO satisfied that Friends of the Earth have met the requirements to act as an agent for these other organisations?

Mr Olesen: I was not aware of that particular information, but I am very grateful to take that intelligence and look into it further.

Senator EDWARDS: Take it on notice and I can provide you with more.

Answer:

Due to secrecy provisions, the ATO cannot comment on individual cases.

As part of our overall risk management approach, we take into account a range of intelligence and information from various sources, including representations from the public about their concerns. This is added to information we gather ourselves or obtain from other agencies. As the result of our intelligence gathering processes, we take appropriate compliance action, which varies based on the circumstances and can include remedial actions to comply with the law or, in the more serious cases, remove entitlement to tax concessions.