



Gladstone Conservation Council Inc.

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19/12/19

To: egc@parliament.qld.gov.au

RE: Electoral and Other Legislation (Accountability, Integrity and Other Matters) Bill 2019(Bill).

Dear Sir/Madam,

Gladstone Conservation Council is concerned about the proposed Bill because we believe that as it is currently drafted, it will stifle advocacy by Charities and not-for-profits. We acknowledge the intent of the bill to make elections fairer and to limit the influence of big spenders in elections.

Gladstone Conservation Council was formed in 2011 in response to the construction of gas plants on Curtis Island, and we advocate for better environmental solutions in the renewable energy space.

We have a very small budget and would not be able to afford the fine if we should inadvertently breach the new rules while we are advocating in a very hotly contested space. The large companies who we oppose and bring to account would not have to abide by these rules, which makes them unfair.

We understand that even running a small non-partisan electoral candidates forum would be a potential breach of the rules. We don't believe that was the intent of the legislation, and it should be amended. Elections are an important time when the public is making decisions on who to vote for, and are also a critical time to advocate on the issues that matter most such as Climate Change. Given that the definition of 'electoral expenditure' is vague, we are concerned that it might limit a wide range of non-partisan issues based advocacy.

The new requirements for handling donations to be used for electoral expenditure are complex, impractical and a significant barrier to advocacy. We are often given donations from the general public to further our work and our decision on whether we use those funds for influencing election outcomes would not occur until close to the election. The reporting requirements are also very onerous for a small group with a volunteer treasurer.

Gladstone Conservation Council supports inserting the following subsection to proposed section 199 of the Bill, which defines electoral expenditure:

(6) Expenditure incurred by a third party registered under the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012 or with an annual income of less than \$50,000, is only electoral expenditure if material that is published, aired or otherwise disseminated refers to—

(d) a candidate or a political party; and

(e) how a person should vote at an election.

This amendment would allow us us to continue our advocacy for the environment in a non-partisan way, as has always been the case.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AH', on a light blue background.

Anna Hitchcock – Coordinator – 19 December 2019