



09/01/2020

Committee Secretary
Economics and Governance Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
by email egc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Electoral and Other Legislation (Accountability, Integrity and Other Matters) Bill 2019 (Qld)

Submission by the Darling Downs Environment Council *inc*

The Darling Downs Environment Council, (DDEC), is a regional peak conservation body dedicated to preserving and enhancing the environment, natural, built, and managed, primarily in the Regions of the Darling Downs, Southern Downs, Northern Downs and Lockyer Valleys. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the above bill.

DDEC supports the conceptual basis of the electoral legislation, which, to our understanding, limits the financial influence that can be brought to bear by way of donations to political candidates and parties. This can only be a good thing when the general and the public interest is the prime responsibility of Government. At the same time, however, we are concerned, that in an effort to address concerns about the effects of sectional interests, the interests of groups such as ours, who campaign continuously on matters such as soil health, responsible water use, and vegetation management, are not taken to be partisan political campaigns, attracting both the limitations and administrative burdens of the proposed Bill.

Under the proposed Bill we can envisage a situation where, in the context of a Queensland Local Government or State election, our highlighting of an issue relating to Koala habitat or vegetation management, we would be infringing the rules applying to unregistered third parties, even though the expenditure would have been made in the course of our normal business. As an organisation with a modest budget any specific campaigning on an issue would necessarily be limited, but as we understand, any donation to the campaign of over \$1000 would put us in breach.

It might be said that a simple solution would be for us to register as a third party. DDEC would not wish to do so as we do not align or campaign on partisan lines. We only wish to be in a position to comment or campaign on issues that are important to our regional environment. Whilst this will mean that we will align with one or another political party, we do not wish to ally with any as it is not our purpose. Our purpose in this regard is outlined in our objectives as educating the public. It is this that we do not wish to see caught up in expenditure limitations, reviews, or administration.

We are alerted to the statement by Michelle Bennett, Communications Director, Human Rights Law Centre "These laws can have unintended consequences for people who are actively engaged in the issues that they care about, be it climate change or women's rights. It's critical that the laws do not effectively prevent small charities and local community groups from speaking on important issues in an election year."



We are mindful that the HRLC has studied the Bill in detail, and therefore we ask that you give consideration to modifying the Bill such that Organisations such as ours are able to freely conduct their normal educative and campaigning activities without undue extra administrative responsibility or financial limitation, within reason. To this effect we recommend the committee review the applicable financial thresholds for small organisations such as ours, or create an exemption for where the activity is carried out as a normal part of the organisations business, in the Public Interest.

Thankyou for considering our submission.

Paul King - Community Organiser