



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

ADJOURNMENT

GetUp!

SPEECH

Thursday, 19 June 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Christensen, George, MP

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Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (12:58): We are all familiar with the term 'give until it hurts'. There is an insidious form of giving which aims not only to hurt but to totally destroy livelihoods and whole industries of national importance in my electorate of Dawson. The giving I am referring to is of the deceptive Green variety, a giving which masquerades as being all about conservation but in reality is all about shutting down the coal industry. The amazing thing about this very destructive giving is that much of it goes on while enjoying tax deductibility status. That is something which has to stop. This giving has been highlighted most recently in two articles in *The Australian* newspaper and acknowledged as a serious concern by Senator Eric Abetz. An article on 2 June in *The Australian* states:

A LARGE donation originally “secured” by pressure group GetUp to fund its campaigns for last year’s federal election was provided to green group Friends of the Earth, meaning that the funds could be treated as a tax deduction.

That large donation came from millionaire Wotif founder Graeme Wood. Essentially, it seems, Friends of the Earth receipted a \$130,000 donation on behalf of GetUp! That money went to the Labor Party's marketing arm, Essential Media Communications, for communications research. The report from the research then went back to GetUp!, who ran a campaign leading up to the election favouring the parties they are most closely aligned with—Labor and the Greens. So for an organisation that screams about transparency in political donations, GetUp! seems to be very clever at attempting to cover its tracks in funding what was effectively a political campaign.

Let us take a closer look at Friends of the Earth. They are obviously more of a good friend of the GetUp! organisation. Friends of the Earth have enjoyed tax-deductibility status for the last 12 years. It is such a giving organisation that it effectively gives its tax-deductibility status to other friends, including environmental political activist groups like Quit Coal and the Six Degrees coal and climate campaign. You would not expect a donation to Quit Coal—an organisation which conserves or protects absolutely nothing but blatantly seeks to destroy the livelihood of workers in the coal industry—to be tax-deductible, but apparently it is. If you go to the Friends of the Earth website and click on the 'donate' link, it takes you to a range of organisations you can donate to. One is Quit Coal, which proudly states that, yes, donations are tax-deductible. How can that be when Quit Coal is not on the deductible gift register? Quit Coal key spokesman Dominic O'Dwyer has proclaimed:

We are a peaceful group but we are willing to break the law because it's so important to ensure that we get action on climate change.

Why can a group willing to break the law get tax-deductibility status?

In my electorate there are people working in coalmines and supporting industries who do the hard slog at work, take their pay and pay their tax dollars. They will have then have some of those tax dollars subsidise tax-deductibility for donations to groups who seek to take their very livelihood away from them. It is wrong for government to facilitate this process whereby tax dollars from those whose lives depend on the resource sector effectively subsidise those who want to shut down the resource sector. These groups include Friends of the Earth, the Lock the Gate Alliance, the Environmental Defenders Office, Greenpeace, the Nature Conservation Council, Beyond Zero Emissions and the Capricorn Conservation Council. All of the organisation I have just mentioned are signatories to the 'Stopping the Australian coal export boom' political action strategy. The Australian Marine Conservation Society also enjoys tax-deductibility status and they are behind the political campaign against the Abbot Point coal terminal called 'Fight for the reef'. It is wrong.

In my electorate, there is the Mackay Conservation Group, which also enjoys tax-deductibility. Currently, with the help of GetUp! and the Environmental Defenders Office, they are taking court action against the Abbot Point coal terminal development at Bowen. That is giving that really hurts Bowen, a community where businesses are seeing a drop in turnover of 30 per cent to 40 per cent and where about 30 businesses have already closed their

doors. I say to the green activists: if you want to wage war against the resources sector that helps to keep this country afloat and which has enabled us to enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world, you should do so without the luxury of tax-deductibility status—which you do not deserve.

I am calling on the Australian Taxation Office to undertake a complete and forensic review not only of the activities of Friends of the Earth, which acts as a frontman for environmental political organisations and organisations like GetUp! and Quit Coal, but of the activities of all so-called environmental organisations on the Register of Environmental Organisations—which affords them deductible gift recipient status. The register needs cleansing. Of course there are many worthy conservation groups on that register, but we need to weed out those working against the decisions of government by waging environmental activist political campaigns.

Last year, Sea Shepherd was refused tax-deductibility status by the ATO because it was found that the group's main activity was campaigning against whalers, not providing any direct care to animals. That is a very telling finding which should be applied elsewhere. It is time to stop these acts of giving which not only hurt but in fact destroy jobs and opportunity for so many. *(Time expired)*