

**Australian Government****Department of the Environment and Heritage**

P253

1st submission

Mr Gerry Antioch  
Secretary  
The Board of Taxation  
Langton Crescent  
PARKES ACT 2600

Dear Mr Antioch

I refer to your letter of 29 September in relation to public consultations on the definition of charity. Specifically, you were requesting from this Department information on whether and the extent to which the Department requires:

- peak bodies to advocate for policy change on behalf of their members; and/or
- formal input from peak bodies in the policy formulation process.

The Department does not have a formal policy in regard to promoting advocacy by environmental or heritage organisations. However, the Department does support mechanisms that allow, and encourage, the environment and heritage sectors to advocate a policy position at the Federal, state and regional levels. The Department funds several forums that facilitate policy consultation, but we do not use service agreements with peak bodies in the policy formulation process.

The National Environment Consultative Forum (the NECF) has been developed for regular formal consultation between the peak environment organisations and the Government on environmental matters. The NECF was established in October 1996 by the then Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator the Hon Robert Hill, as a new consultative group to improve formal consultations between key national representative conservation organisations, the Commonwealth Government and the Department of Environment and Heritage.

The NECF superseded the old Peak Conservation Organisation. It consists of approximately 32 national and State/Territory voluntary conservation organisations. The NECF acts as an 'umbrella group' for voluntary conservation organisation representatives to meet with the Minister and officers of the Department to discuss specific key strategic and policy issues relating to the environment.

The NECF runs for a week during a Parliamentary Sitting period and during that week the NECF spends a day or more in formal discussions with the Department and a subsequent day in formal discussions with the Minister.

The Department acts as the secretariat of the NECF for the Government. The Department meets the cost of travel for one representative for each of the 32 NECF groups from their head offices. NECF members find their own accommodation while in Canberra.

The National Cultural Heritage Forum (NCHF) was established in 1996 by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage and the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. The NCHF's purpose is to provide expert opinion and advice to the Ministers on matters relating to cultural heritage policy and practice at the National and Commonwealth levels.

The Forum is comprised of peak national bodies, both government and non-government, with appropriate expertise and experience to provide advice on matters relating to Australia's cultural heritage, including Indigenous or historic matters, heritage places, heritage objects, collections and documents. The Forum meets twice yearly in Canberra with the Minister for the Environment and Heritage and the Minister for the Arts.

The Department provides funding to the Marine and Coastal Community Network that is a national community-based network that informs, involves, and connects community interests, government, and industry. The Network is an interface between the community and Commonwealth and other government programs delivering marine/coastal conservation and management. It was established and funded to promote a more cooperative and coordinated approach to marine and coastal planning and management.

The contact officer for this matter is John Heagney, who may be contacted on 02 6274 1467.

Yours sincerely



Kevin Keefe  
Assistant Secretary  
Policy Coordination Branch

14 October 2003