



## CLARENCE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

31 Skinner Street

South Grafton 2460

Phone/ Fax: 02 6643 1863

Web site: [www.cec.org.au](http://www.cec.org.au)

E-mail: [admin@cec.org.au](mailto:admin@cec.org.au)

Date: 8<sup>th</sup> November 2012

Attn the Hon Barry O'Farrell, Premier  
The New South Wales Government  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney  
NSW 2000

Dear Premier, Ministers and Members of Parliament

### **Special Purpose Funding for the Environmental Defenders Office**

The Clarence Environment Centre has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for over 23 years, and has a proud record of environmental advocacy. We are a registered not for profit charity, run 100% by volunteers who receive no pay or even reimbursement for expenses.

We are the local coordinators for the national Land for Wildlife program and have a small, fully equipped, volunteer bush regeneration team that assists members of the community with their weed or erosion problems. As well we offer a recycling collection point for household batteries, used printer cartridges, and mobile phones.

Our members regularly provide voluntary assistance to the local National Parks and Wildlife Service with flora and fauna surveys, and our local Clarence Valley Council also benefits from our expertise from time to time.

We also offer a free plant identification service, but most importantly we serve as the first stop for any members of the community who have a problem that is related to the environment. These range from people wanting to know the best way to control noxious weeds, or who to contact for the best advice, to getting advice on the best way to report an illegal activity, such as land clearing.

Within the last few years these requests for assistance have come from a wide spectrum of the community, from the doctor who wanted advice on how to go about re-vegetating his rural property, to the farmer whose property had suffered chemical drift from aerial spraying on a neighbouring plantation, to a landowner who was suffering erosion problems caused by suspected illegal clearing by a next door neighbour.

Many of those reporting problems to us do so because, for personal reasons, they wish to remain anonymous. However, we do not know all the answers, and in many cases we refer them to the excellent free legal advice provided by the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO)

So the recent announcement that funding has been cut to this valuable service, that could see it cease operations altogether, has shocked us all, because there is nothing to replace it. Local solicitors are not only expensive, which puts them out of reach of many in the community, but know

next to nothing about the specialist field which is environmental law.

The EDO provides a wealth of information through its publications, such as one that provides advice on the responsibilities of rural landowners, several of these publications can be freely obtained from our premises.

Their solicitors also regularly undertake workshops and seminars across the state, describing the legal ramifications of newly introduced regulations, or clarifying existing ones, essentially doing the Government's community consultation for it.

This has been the case with landowners' rights in the face of the current controversial coal seam gas (CSG) mining that is occurring across the state, and a typical example of the critical need for the EDO. Here we had the entire community faced by an industry that had, they believed, the potential to destroy their land and force them to vacate their properties. In the face of that fear, there was a deafening silence from Government and the industry, other than "trust us, we know what we are doing".

There was no one available to provide advice, and that void was filled by the EDO which has made dozens of presentations at the request of landowners across our region alone, providing up to date advice on their rights, and how to obtain legal representation to get the best deal possible for themselves when approached by the professional negotiators employed by mining companies.

Throughout this process the EDO solicitors have acted professionally and impartially. However, certain media outlets have taken it upon themselves to inform their readers that somehow the EDO's actions are subversive, when all they were doing was providing free legal advice that successive governments in NSW have failed to provide.

We see the EDO as a service that benefits, not only members of the community, but State and Federal Governments as well. Therefore we urge the NSW Government to seriously reconsider the proposed funding cuts, and immediately end this uncertainty.

Yours sincerely  
John Edwards  
Honorary Secretary.