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MEDIA RELEASE

EDOs of Australia welcome \$14 million funding commitment

The Environmental Defenders Offices of Australia have welcomed the ALP's pledge to restore funding to Australia's network of environmental community legal centres.

The commitment, totalling \$14 million over 4 years, reinstates crucial Commonwealth funding which was withdrawn in 2013, and will expand the ability of EDOs to work together and provide free or low-cost legal services to people around Australia.

Jo-Anne Bragg, Convenor of EDOs of Australia and CEO of EDO Qld said:

"We warmly welcome this commitment to reinstate federal funding across the EDO network, and thank the Hon Mark Dreyfus QC for recognising the vital role environmental community legal centres play around Australia.

"Each year we provide free or low-cost legal support on environmental and planning issues to thousands of people across seven states and territories who simply could not otherwise afford it.

"Every Australian wants to ensure their environment is protected – whether it's prime agricultural land, our National Parks, the Great Barrier Reef, the Murray Darling, the Kimberley, or a piece of local bushland that's under threat.

"Unfortunately, many everyday Australians – particularly those in remote or regional areas – can't access legal support on environmental issues due to a lack of services in their area, or the prohibitive cost of legal advice.

"That's why EDOs are so crucial. We provide top shelf legal services to thousands of farmers, community groups, and individuals every year, ensuring they are well-represented and have effective access to justice regardless of what's in their bank account.

"Along with these services, EDOs run regular workshops, seminars, and legal education events, while also contributing to law reform and environmental decision-making across the country.

"Federal funding is critical to ensuring our offices can remain open and serving the public, but EDOs are also hugely reliant on other sources of revenue such as state funding and much-needed donations from our valued supporters.

"A diverse range of strong funding streams is vital to the survival of the EDO network."

David Morris, CEO of EDO NSW said:

“This commitment is great news for the Australian community, who get tremendous value for money from a properly-funded network of environmental community legal centres.

“Historically, there has been broad bipartisan support for funding of EDOs from governments who recognise the value of our work representing the public, educating the community, and contributing to vital law reform.

“EDOs perform a crucial role in providing access to justice for our diverse client groups across Australia through advice, case work, education and law reform in public interest environmental law.

“We act for farmers, Aboriginal communities, residents affected by poor water or air quality, and others concerned to secure a sustainable future.

“The Productivity Commission has also acknowledged the economic benefits that EDOs provide, in achieving outcomes that reduce long-term costs associated with poor environmental and planning decisions.

“This funding will mean we are again properly resourced to bring those benefits to more Australians, and help more people from all walks of life access expert legal advice and first-class representation across the country.”

Note

The EDOs of Australia are independent, not-for-profit, non-partisan, specialist community-based legal centres. Our offices do not support, promote or oppose any particular political party or candidate.

The EDOs of Australia have sent correspondence to each major party seeking restoration of federal funding. We warmly welcome any commitment made by any political party around restoration of these much-needed funds.

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About the EDOs of Australia

The Environmental Defenders Offices of Australia are non-profit community legal centres specialising in public interest environmental and planning law.

EDOs have existed in the Australian legal landscape, providing vital legal services, for over 30 years. The network is currently comprised of eight offices across seven states and territories. Each office is part of the National Association of Community Legal Centres.

The work of skilled and experienced EDO staff improves access to environmental justice for thousands of Australians every year through:

- Providing free or low cost legal advice and, where necessary, representation in litigation;
- Delivering community workshops and producing easy to understand guides to environmental laws, to enable participation in environmental management and decisions;
- Providing expert input to government and non-government enforcement and law reform

There is a particular demand for EDO services in rural and remote communities, where access to justice is uniquely compromised. We are often the only service in Australia that can provide the impartial expert advice and assistance such members of the community need and deserve.

EDOs of Australia is a critical partner of government (the legislature, executive and judiciary) in achieving a sustainable environment, empowering the community and upholding the rule of law.

In 2013, Federal funding was abruptly terminated, ending nearly 20 years of bipartisan support for these community legal services. EDOs were also specifically excluded from restoration of Federal funding for other community legal centres in 2015.