

Letter-writing guide & example letter

Now is a very important time in the Emerald Link campaign to write to your local Member of Parliament (MP) for those parties that currently have no or poor forest protection policies. So, if you live in a seat currently held by the Greens, write to the Environment Minister, Lily D'Ambrosio.



Letter-writing is a simple and effective way to gain political traction on an issue. We must let our representatives know: we want secure protection for East Gippsland's forests which must not be destroyed by logging.

Firstly, the truths about letter-writing:

The unfortunate truth is that most of our Representatives, and especially our Ministers, simply do not have the capacity to read each piece of correspondence they receive daily. So they have staff to do it for them. They also have staff to carefully write 'prepared responses' on certain issues that are often vague and don't actually answer your letter. Most correspondence gets binned unless it is personal and asks for a response. Hence why there is no point in us pre-preparing letters for you and everyone else to send *en masse*. It has to come from you, personally, or on behalf your organisation, officially, and you will have to put in a teeny bit of effort.

The fortunate truth is that if our Representatives get flooded with many (non-spam) emails and legitimate letters from concerned citizens and organisations on a certain issue, it will start raising alarm bells for them. Especially if those citizens happen to live in their electorate. So it's always good to write to your local Member of Parliament as well. The good news is that letter-writing is still regarded as one of the most effective ways to gain political traction on an issue with your MP—that's why we're asking you to do this, for the Emerald Link.

Here are a few tips to help you get started:

Include your name and address: Identify yourself as a constituent by including your address when you write to your elected representative/s. Generally, politicians are likely to pay most attention to people who live in their electoral district, or to people who raise issues directly relating to their portfolio responsibilities. Writing on behalf of your organisation can also be effective.

Keep it brief: Letters should be no longer than one page and should be about one issue only. Be as concise as possible. Politicians receive many letters on many topics every day. Long letters are likely to be put aside to read on a less busy day and that day may never come.

Use your own words, not someone else's: an original letter sent by one single person is more effective than a form letter (or cut and pasted texts) sent by dozens of people. Even if your writing skills are not the best, a letter written in your own words will carry much more weight than regurgitating what someone else said.¹

Handwrite, or type and sign, your letter: a handwritten, or typed and signed, letter is far more effective than photocopied form letters, postcard campaigns or emails. Some politicians regard handwritten letters more highly than typewritten letters (some of these are technologically illiterate, and some find it convenient to claim the sender probably just cut and pasted what someone else said without thinking about the issue themselves). Some, very likely many, regard emails as "second class mail" and some do not even read email.

State the topic clearly: Include a subject line at the beginning of your letter. Include the specific issue, value, threat, area or place in the subject line, or at least in the first paragraph.

Start with a clear statement of purpose: For example:

"I am writing to urge your support for / opposition to..."

"I am writing to ask you to support / oppose ..."

Focus on three important points: choose the three points that are most likely to be persuasive in gaining support for your position and flesh them out. This is more effective than attempting to address numerous points in a letter. Helpful links for facts and figures to flesh out your three most important points: www.emeraldlink.com.au

¹ For more information about why this is important, please visit: <https://www.efa.org.au/get-involved/lobbying/>

Ask your representative / the Premier / the Minister to take concrete action: for example, ask them to raise the matter in their party room and seek to have their party support the course of action you want to see the current or future government take (depending on whether your local MP is in office, or in opposition). Point out that the issues are important enough to warrant immediate action.

Ask for a response to your letter: while the response will usually be a form letter, written and authorised by their political party, you will know you have had an impact on their office. Party politics in Australia are such that few elected politicians are likely to tell you whether or not they personally share your views/position. However, a well-written letter can be instrumental in prompting them to take action behind the public scenes to inform and potentially change their political party's position.

Personalise your letter: when possible, include a personal story and/or information on how the issue affects you, your family, your business, or people around you. This can help your representative understand your position and can be very persuasive as he/she forms a position on an issue. The more personal your letter, the more impact it is likely to have.

Personalise your relationship: if you have ever voted for the representative, or contributed time or money to their election campaign, or have met them, etc, say so. The closer your representative feels to you, the more effective your letter is likely to be.

Be polite: be courteous, but don't be afraid to take a firm position. While your representative's job is to represent you, remember that politicians and their staff are people too. Threats, hostile remarks and rude/offensive language are among the fastest ways to alienate people who could otherwise decide to support your position in light of rational and reasoned argument. Your representative could be in elected office for decades, and could be promoted to higher, more influential, office within their party. Avoid creating enemies.

Thanks is as important as criticism: politicians/political parties need to be able to tell the 'other side' that they have been inundated with calls and letters supporting their position. Write thank you letters to politicians/parties that you know support your position. This will encourage them to stand firm on their position rather than backing down, which has often happened during the passage of proposed laws through Australian parliaments.

Keep the irritation factor low: Avoid accusing/criticising the wrong politicians/party. Politicians, like anyone else, may become irritated when accused of holding views they do not. If you are not sure of the views of the person or political party you are contacting, either research the matter, ask them, or just inform them of your views and why they should support same.

Example letter for your guidance:

<Your Name>
<Your Address Line 1>
<Your Address Line 2>

<[The Honourable] Local MP name>
<Minister for XYZ / Member for place>
<Street Address>
<Suburb state postcode>
<Email: local.mp@xyz>

<Insert Date>

Dear Minister xyz / Mr/Ms xyz,

<INSERT SUBJECT>
i.e. SECURELY PROTECT EAST GIPPSLAND'S FORESTS
i.e. SUPPORT AND CREATE THE EMERALD LINK
...or better yet, make up your own individual subject!

Step 1: Clearly outline why you are writing:

"I am writing to urge your support for / opposition to..."

"I am writing to ask you to support / oppose ..."

Step 2: Write your personal story & connection to the issue (briefly!):

Perhaps you have been out to East Gippsland's forests?

Perhaps you have seen similar forests destroyed?

Maybe you just feel strongly about it because...?

**Also a good time to include any personal/ professional connection you have to the Minister/MP (i.e. if you've met them, voted for them, etc).*

Step 3: Outline your concerns & make your points clearly!:

Use the Emerald Link website and for facts, figures and information.

Make three points nice and clear - here are some examples:

- The forests of East Gippsland have long been recommended for protection because of their high conservation values (elaborate).
- The Emerald Link is a terrific opportunity because (your favourite thing about it).
- These forests are under threat from logging and say why logging shouldn't happen there.
- Now is the time for these forests to be *securely* protected in the Emerald Link (highlight the urgency).

Step 4: Urge your local MP to take action (most important part!):

Outline to your local MP that you want them to:

- a) Raise the Emerald Link and the importance of it with Premier Daniel Andrews, and the Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio (if your local MP is in opposition, with the Opposition Leader Matthew Guy and the Shadow Environment Spokesperson Nick Wakeling).
- b) Highlight the urgency for them to act to immediately protect forests in the Emerald Link, because logging is happening right now. They must step in and immediately put in place a moratorium on logging in the icon areas of the Emerald Link.

Step 5: Ask questions/ ask for a response!:

Remember to ask questions and ask for a response.

Remember to be polite and courteous – and say thanks!

Yours faithfully,

<hand sign your letter>

xyz <then print your name, or if typing your letter, also type your name>