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using the law to protect the natural and built environment

MEDIA RELEASE – 3 April 2014

Environmental Legal Services Improving Access to Justice

Today's National Day of Action for Community Law recognises the invaluable service provided by community legal centres. It also provides an opportunity to remind Tasmanians how to access help for issues that affect them.

EDO Tasmania is one of Tasmania's nine community legal centres. The office specialises in public interest environmental and planning law, assisting individuals and community groups throughout Tasmania to stand up for their local environment. People contact EDO Tasmania with concerns ranging from loss of parkland in their local neighbourhood to health impacts from factory emissions to applications to explore for minerals on their property. The office has helped to prevent the canal estate at Ralphs Bay, protect residents from industrial pollution, secure neighbourhood amenity and reduce the impact of development in coastal areas.

Funding cuts announced by the Federal government in December threaten future access to this service. EDO lawyer, Jess Feehely, said:

"Tasmanian laws provide many opportunities for the public to participate in resource management decisions. However, without clear legal advice about how to use these laws, many people find it too difficult and daunting to get involved.

Without EDOs, defending the environment, community amenity and cultural heritage could become unaffordable for many Tasmanians."

She also noted the important role that EDO Tasmania plays in discouraging people from commencing appeals which have no prospect of success.

"There will be many people who find themselves caught up in legal proceedings, taking up the Tribunal's time and putting themselves at risk of significant costs, simply because they have not been able to get advice that their case is not strong."

Ms Feehely emphasised that, while litigation was important, it makes up only a small percentage of the work undertaken by community legal centres.

"CLCs provide advice, and we represent individuals where it is necessary to help them achieve justice. Importantly, we also work to address systemic issues by improving community awareness and advocating for more effective legislation."

For example, EDO Tasmania publishes a range of practical handbooks and is currently developing new resources to assist communities affected by mineral exploration and to help farmers understand the complex array of environmental laws affecting their activities.

Ms Feehely urged Tasmanians to use the National Day of Action to learn more about the work of community legal centres in their area,

"Legal issues are complex, and everyone should have access to clear, affordable legal advice to help find a way through problems they are facing. Community legal centres are there to provide access to justice for people who would otherwise be left behind."

MEDIA ENQUIRIES: JESS FEEHELY on 6223 2770 or 0400 803 262

For more information about EDO Tasmania, visit www.edotas.org.au

For more information about Tasmania's community legal centres, visit www.clctas.org.au