

Summary of Presentation for the EDO National Conference 2005 Elaine Johnson (Environment Liaison Officer) and Sylvia Hale MLC

What is the Environment Liaison Office?

The Environment Liaison Office (ELO) provides a link between NSW environment groups and members of the NSW Parliament. It aims to provide information from environment groups to Members of Parliament, particularly in relation to Bills being introduced, relevant inquiries and topical issues. The ELO also provides a mechanism for the views of Members to be communicated to and considered by environment groups. Currently, the ELO consists of eight environment groups, and the EDO plays an important advisory role.

How to Make Use of the Parliamentary Process

Parliamentary process can be used by campaigners to raise awareness of an issue, to obtain information, to participate in Parliamentary inquiries or to push for legislative change. In addition, Parliament House can provide a useful forum for public briefings, and Members themselves can also contribute to raising the profile of a particular campaign.

Ways in which process can be used by campaigners or individuals include:

Raising Awareness of an Issue

Members can introduce issues into Parliament through Adjournment Speeches (in the Upper House) or Private Members' Statements (in the Lower House) which are short speeches on a topic of political interest. This basically gets an issue on the public record, and may also get other Members to think about it. Petitions can also be used to formally call for action from the government, while a Notice of Motion can be used to get an issue mentioned in Parliament, or to have it discussed by Members in Parliament.

Obtaining Information

Question time in Parliament is an opportunity for Members to ask Ministers or other Members questions about public matters with which they are concerned. This may be useful for a quick response or to highlight an issue. If a more detailed response is required, questions can be placed "on notice" and a detailed answer is supplied at a later date. Members can also obtain government documents through a "call for papers", however there are several restrictions on how and when this process can be used.

Participating in Committee Inquiries and Hearings

Parliamentary committees are set up by Parliament to inquire into specific issues, or to conduct Budget Estimates hearings which scrutinise government expenditure of resources. These hearings are a good opportunity to lobby committee members to ask questions of government, or to make submissions or give evidence on a particular issue.

Pushing for Legislative Change

Finally, when Bills are being debated in parliament, this is another opportunity for groups to lobby the government and other politicians so that better environmental outcomes can be included in legislation. While it may be difficult to gather support for amendments to legislation once it has reached Parliament, it is still possible, with the support of either the government or the opposition and the crossbench. This is one of the key roles of the ELO, which provides the important function of lobbying for legislative change at the Parliamentary level.

See the ELO website (www.nccnsw.org.au/parliament) or the Parliamentary website (www.parliament.nsw.gov.au) for more information on the issues raised above.