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Government's slashing of legal assistance will sound death knell for EDO and jeopardise Access to Justice
Wednesday 18th December 2013

Community Legal Centres Tasmania is extremely concerned at Treasurer Joe Hockey's $43.1m cuts to legal assistance services over the next four years, which will jeopardise access to justice and compound the problems faced by the most vulnerable members of our community.

"Slashing funding to community legal centres and other legal assistance services will jeopardise the ability of individuals and small community-based organisations to access justice in circumstances where their opponents are often those with significant power, money and resources" said Benedict Bartl, Policy Officer with CLC Tas.

The cuts over the next four years include $19.6m from the community legal centre sector, $6.5m from Legal Aid Commissions, $13.3m from National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and $3.66m from Family Violence Prevention Legal Services.

In Tasmania, the cuts threaten closure of the Environmental Defenders Office and may result in reduced services at other legal assistance services.

"The federal Government's decision to provide no further funding from 1st July 2014 will sound a death knell to the Tasmanian Environmental Defenders Office and its three staff who only receives $8,750 per year from the State Government."

"As well as threatening closure of the Environmental Defenders Office, these cuts will stretch legal assistance services to the limit meaning reduced services and increased waiting lists. Significantly, the ability of our most vulnerable to access justice will worsen, with flow on effects for people's health, housing and employment prospects" Mr Bartl said.

"We urge the federal government to reinstate funding and call on all sides of Parliament at both State and Federal levels to stand up for improved access to justice" Mr Bartl concluded.

Further information: **Benedict Bartl – 0417 032 832**