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Media release

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Police Independence Fundamental to Australian Democracy; Lawyers

Lawyers in Queensland have joined the debate about the sponsorship of Queensland Police by private corporations such as Santos.

“The independence of the Australian police is fundamental to our democracy and our human rights” said Nathan Kennedy, lawyer and President of Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR). “The sponsorship of the State’s Police Force by Santos is an unacceptable conflict of interest. This embarrassing state of affairs has received widespread citizen criticism for good reason”.

“The Queensland Police Service (QPS) is a public sector executive agency charged with protecting and serving the public. The QPS wields significant power over people’s ability to enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms. How it is funded and who has influence – or even perceived influence – over its actions, is a fundamental democratic and civil rights issue” Mr Kennedy said.

The QPS announced in 2012 and again in June 2015 that it would be partnering with Santos and others for the ‘Stay on Track Outback’ campaign. Santos has reportedly already given \$40,000 to the campaign.

“Such conflicts of interest undermine public confidence in the QPS to uphold the law in a neutral and impartial manner, particularly where essential human rights under the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* are involved such as the right to freedom of association, the right to freedom of assembly, and the right to equality before the law” said Mr Kennedy.

Mr Kennedy referred to the [UN Human Rights Standards and Practice for the Police](#) (published by the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights) which states that “*law enforcement officials are obliged to know, and to apply, binding international standards for human rights. The police shall be an independent organ of the Executive and shall provide for the protection of public safety and the rights of all persons. Every law enforcement agency shall be representative of and responsive and accountable to the community as a whole. All police officials are part of, and have a duty to serve, the community.*”

Other national lawyer groups are also concerned. Michelle Maloney, Lawyer and National Convenor of the Australian Earth Laws Alliance (**AELA**) stated:

“Private sponsorship limits the ability of the QPS to carry out its functions of protecting and serving the public fully and impartially. The public outcry over these Santos-branded vehicles reflects popular concern over the perception that the Police are allied with Santos”.

“What happens if the police have to investigate alleged criminal activity involving their sponsor?” Ms Maloney said. “What happens if the police have interactions with people legally protesting the environmental destruction caused by Santos and other mining companies? Will this sponsorship influence their treatment of people exercising their legal right to freedom of speech, expression and assembly, protesting against Santos, or any other organisation that funds the police? The Police should be neutral, fair enforcers of the law. When private groups are allowed to invest in Police activities, where is the line drawn? How do we know what influence Santos has over the Police?”

ALHR and AELA are calling for greater scrutiny of corporate sponsorship of State controlled services. They are promoting a petition demanding:

- Immediate termination of the Santos sponsorship agreement;
- Removal of the Santos logo from QPS Vehicles;
- A public register of police sponsorship agreements; and
- Adoption of a sponsorship policy which is transparent, accountable and directed at preventing corruption and the perception of corruption.

The petition is available [here](#) or <https://www.communityrun.org/petitions/stop-the-sponsorship-of-the-queensland-police-service-by-santos>

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Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR) is a network of Australian lawyers active in practising and promoting awareness of international human rights standards in Australia. ALHR has a national membership of over 2,600 people, with active National, State and Territory committees.

The Australian Earth Laws Alliance (AELA) is the Australian expression of a growing international movement of people striving to create a more harmonious relationship with our beautiful planet. Our activities include research, education, promotion and advocacy. AELA is a founding member of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature, which brings together more than 60 organisations around the world, who support Earth Jurisprudence and Rights of Nature.