

Submission  
No 12

**INQUIRY INTO 2025 INQUIRY INTO THE OPERATION  
OF THE APPROVED CHARITABLE ORGANISATIONS  
UNDER THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS  
ACT 1979**

**Name:** Ms Sarah Hart  
**Date Received:** 26 October 2025

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Partially  
Confidential

To the Committee,

I write this submission as a wildlife carer advocate with grave concerns for the volunteer community within WIRES, NSW and the future of wildlife rescue both in this state and beyond.

Though I'm fully aware that this enquiry's focus is on RSPCA NSW, other charitable organisations who have strong ties to the RSPCA should also be brought into question as the collaboration between RSPCA, WIRES and ARC/ARS (Animal Rescue Service) is undeniable.

In February, 2020, I met with WIRES CEO-Leanne Taylor to discuss a potential donation to WIRES from an international donor who wanted to ensure that the Netherland's group donation would be passed on to rescuers and carers impacted by the Black Summer bushfires. At this meeting I also passed on concerns to Ms Taylor, on behalf of many members of the wildlife rescue community in NSW who had contacted me regarding the lack of support they were experiencing despite the large volume of funds being donated. Members were asking for a wider and swifter distribution of the funds to impacted areas as matter of urgency. These concerns were all ignored.

Since that meeting, concerns regarding the spending of the bushfire donations have only increased and have now extended to the mistreatment of carers within the organisation; these concerns are shared by many across the broader sector, including other wildlife organisations and veterinarians.

Carers contact me from all over Australia as my advocacy is well known and well supported. WIRES carers are unable to speak up publicly so I do this on their behalf.

WIRES and the greater community have lost many of their most experienced rescuers, carers and mentors which leaves the sector in NSW with far fewer volunteers and a vast collective of knowledge and experience lost.

The toll on the mental health of volunteers has been enormous; every year lives are lost as a result. One life lost annually is too many.

Many organisations report that retaining volunteers can be difficult but WIRES rate of attrition is particularly acute. In 2023 WIRES commissioned a Volunteer Satisfaction Survey, the results of which were never released despite WIRES management assuring members that feedback would be available and actioned upon. The person who chaired the VSS committee and was privy to over 550 responses later stated that the results were so damning, WIRES decided against releasing any information and no action was taken to address any concerns.

The Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy Review recently undertaken highlighted concerns about the internal governance and culture of WIRES. Once again, no action taken.

## **RSPCA and WIRES**

Reports to the RSPCA, by WIRES, about suspected animal cruelty without substantial evidence, appear to be increasing in number and the response time between reporting and RSPCA 'raids' on carers is almost instant.

These incidents have instilled a feeling of fear throughout the rescue community with many volunteers making the difficult decision to walk away from their role; the risk to their wellbeing, families and property is now perceived as being far too great.

No volunteer wants to become the next victim; it seems that anyone who asks questions is at risk of becoming a target.

RSPCA appears to be giving priority to WIRES despite reports of RSPCA's scarce resources and the RSPCA's obvious lack of understanding regarding native animals.

## **QUESTIONS TO RAISE:**

1. Are RSPCA inspectors qualified to assess wildlife in the setting of rehabilitation, especially considering these animals arrive into care in a compromised state?
2. What training do RSPCA inspectors have in wildlife rehabilitation AND the Codes of Practice?
3. Why is WIRES being given preference by the RSPCA over other agencies who report cases of suspected animal cruelty relating to domestic animals and livestock?
4. Is there a financial relationship between WIRES and the RSPCA?
5. Is there not a conflict of interest when the RSPCA conducts both property inspections of wildlife rehabilitators, then acts to prosecute them?
6. Should there not be an independent investigation of allegations from an agency independent of the RSPCA?

WIRES animal welfare staff were in attendance during the well-publicised case of Tracy Dods vs RSPCA in Katoomba court where Tracy was ultimately charged with Aggravated Cruelty after being referred to the RSPCA by WIRES, relating to a kangaroo in Tracy's care.

Why were WIRES in attendance throughout Tracy's many hearings when their presence was not required? The enforcement collaboration between the two agencies is obvious to all.

The community suspects that WIRES is moving towards becoming an ACO so they can take on the role of reporting and prosecuting members, effectively bypassing the RSPCA.

This is supported by WIRES' creation of an animal welfare team who are all ex-RSPCA inspectors. The CEO of WIRES is herself, an ex-RSPCA employee.

Interestingly, **WIRES CEO, Leanne Taylor** has no traceable employment history with no online profile at all.

**What are her qualifications for running WIRES and what oversight has there been in her role as CEO for the past 15 years?**

**What oversight does WIRES have?**

**Who is actually making sure they are spending The Public Gift Fund funds appropriately?**

WIRES NSW appears to be shifting its business model to one based on the RSPCA model, as an agency of law enforcement, foregoing the original purpose of WIRES as a volunteer-led organisation with the core value of the rescue and rehabilitation of wildlife at its foundation. The question of whether or not WIRES is intending to become an Approved Charitable Organisation is of great concern to all and should be raised.

WIRES, at its foundation, was never intended to be a law enforcement agency and WIRES constitution does not support enforcement action. Given the increasing concerns about RSPCA processes and lack of transparency, WIRES should not follow in this same direction.

The result of the shift in WIRES' focus has been the disintegration of the organisation; the collateral damage to the core membership who perform the volunteer work for which WIRES receives its funding from public donations, corporate sponsorship and other income, under the guise of wildlife rescue cannot be overlooked.

The reality is VERY real.

Many concerns have been raised over the last 5 plus years and have intensified over time. WIRES windfall from public donations of over \$105m in 2020 followed by their transition from a charity to a Company Limited by Guarantee have amplified issues which existed well before.

Of the greatest concern is WIRES treatment of its volunteer workforce; the expulsion of over 1300 members who did not accept the changes proposed by WIRES as laid out in the updated constitution submitted by WIRES, to ASIC with their application to transition to a CLG. It should also be noted that WIRES knowingly submitted a version of the constitution that members voted against at three separate Special General Meetings; management decided to submit this version anyway and are now in the process of retracting that submission. They have since blamed incorrect legal advice for this "error".

WIRES lack of transparency in spending and financial reporting is a huge concern for both WIRES members and members of the general public. Several media articles have highlighted the concerns of the wider community that donated these funds for wildlife.

As of FY 2024 WIRES Financial accounts published on the ACNC website state that they have opted for Reduced Disclosure standards for their accounts. They no longer provide a detailed breakdown of expenditure. This is not appropriate since the public want to be reassured that

the bushfire donations are being spent for the purpose for which they were donated. The newly released 2025 EOFY report has significantly less detail than previous years. Administration costs have blown out-salaries, wages and consultants fees are the single biggest expenditure whilst direct spending on animal costs and vet bills has barely changed and has in fact decreased when compared to previous years. For the last several years WIRES has been running at a significant loss.

Governance issues within WIRES have been highlighted and are now the subject of two Supreme Court actions by one current and one former member. There are also several cases running concurrently in Fair Work NSW for incidents of bullying and harassment by WIRES staff and board members; also, at branch level. Intimidation of members is rife and the culture stems from the top of the organisation. Reports from carers say that communication between members and branches is discouraged and HO correspondence often goes unanswered.

WIRES has expressed their plan to become a 'national organisation' but removed 'Rescue and Rehabilitate' from the proposed constitution, only adding this phrase back in after receiving much member feedback.

**The Animal Rescue Service-formally Animal Rescue Co-operative (ARC)** is another registered charity with strong ties to WIRES as a distribution hub who openly support the enforcement actions of the RSPCA; (ARS also advertise a corporate partnership with Petbarn).

ARC/ARS was the recipient of \$1m from WIRES in 2020; it's not known whether they have received further funding.

A Facebook page under the name of **Protect WIRES (PW)** is partially administered by the founder of ARC- - as a corporate partner of WIRES.

ARC's lawyer- is also involved with this page, along with members of WIRES; staff and board members are often seen to like and comment on posts and one senior branch member is the most prolific in her messaging in FB posts.

The PW page recently discussed the importance of the WIRES Animal Welfare Team with Tracey Burgess-now a board member-being provided the Register of Members when other members requested the register, but were denied. This highlights extreme bias and HO support for the Protect Wires messaging which worked to support current management. By allowing PW to continue misleading members, WIRES has exposed their members to psychological harm as members were unable to respond to the lies and bullying that has been propagated by the page. Members who attempted to correct misinformation were blocked with some subjected to a very personal hate campaign.

Emails to members from the register by Tracey Burgess were selectively sent so not all members received information which goes against the principles of the way in which a ROM can be used to inform members about the company restructure.

By ignoring the FB profile, WIRES management endorsed the messaging and have caused deep division in WIRES that will likely be impossible to repair; this despite the fact that the FB page goes completely against WIRES own social media policy.

The creation and use of this FB profile to run a campaign of propaganda to influence the voting process at numerous SGM's, initially using WIRES own logo, exposing intellectual property which only HO should be privy to, should also be the subject of investigation. This page speaks of WIRES future roles in wildlife welfare, supporting RSPCA inspections; those behind this page should be exposed.

**Inconsistencies between POCTAA legislation and the Biodiversity Conservation ACT of NSW** leave wildlife rehabilitators in a precarious situation. There needs to be a review of this legislation to reflect the reality that animals coming into care are already compromised and that the expertise of wildlife rehabilitators should be considered and respected.

Access to veterinarians with experience in treating all species of wildlife is extremely limited; making the role of the rehabilitator even more difficult.

WIRES's vet gave testimony at Tracy Dods' hearing saying that Tracy's animal should see a vet weekly however, this is not in the best interest of the wildlife (which become highly stressed at vet clinics) and is not in line with Codes of Practice. It's also totally unrealistic given the fact that vets are more often than not, not being reimbursed for their work with wildlife.

In summary, this brief overview of some of the many issues faced by wildlife carers and the sector in general reflects the need for systemic review.

Most concerning is the relationship between RSPCA, WIRES and ARC/ARS and the implications for volunteers who currently feel unsupported and threatened in their role.

Unless there is systemic change, the sector will likely continue to lose volunteers, wildlife rescue and rehabilitation across NSW will collapse and animals will continue to suffer.

Thank you for your consideration of my submission.

Kindest regards,

Sarah Hart