

Submission
No 30

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

Name: Name suppressed
Date Received: 31 October 2025

Partially
Confidential

Cover Letter

31 October 2025

To: Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW
NSW Parliament
Inquiry into the Operation of Approved Charitable Organisations under the POCTA Act

Dear Committee Members,

Please find attached my formal submission to the Inquiry into the Operation of Approved Charitable Organisations under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979.

As a WIRES volunteer since 2019, I have been directly involved in the rescue, treatment, and rehabilitation of over 650 native animals. My submission outlines serious concerns regarding WIRES' governance, transparency, treatment of volunteers, and operational practices. It also includes recommendations for reform that I believe are essential to restoring trust and improving outcomes for wildlife and the volunteers who care for them.

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry and respectfully request that my submission be considered in full.

Yours sincerely,

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1. Departure from Mission and Misuse of Funds

Since receiving a substantial windfall of donations following the 2019–2020 bushfires, WIRES has undergone significant structural changes. Unfortunately, these changes have not translated into improved outcomes for wildlife. Instead, there has been excessive spending on middle management, consultants, and administration, with less than 20% of funds reportedly going directly to wildlife care. The expansion of staff and bureaucracy appears unsustainable and has diverted focus from the core mission of wildlife welfare.

2. Toxic Organisational Culture and Volunteer Bullying

There is growing concern among volunteers about the culture within WIRES, particularly under the leadership of the current CEO, who has longstanding ties to the RSPCA. Numerous volunteers have reported feeling bullied, targeted, and silenced when raising legitimate concerns or advocating for better animal care practices.

3. The Case of Tracy Dods – A Disturbing Precedent

The prosecution of Tracy Dods, a long-serving WIRES volunteer, is a deeply troubling example of how WIRES has begun to act more like an enforcement agency than a support organisation. Tracy was convicted of aggravated animal cruelty for her care of an injured kangaroo named Dolores, despite her extensive experience and dedication.

Tracy should have received mentoring and support from WIRES' Volunteer Support Managers. She was one of our most expert, knowledgeable macropod fence-hanger rescuers and rehabilitators. During COVID, she was interviewed via Zoom by WIRES' welfare team regarding one of the kangaroos in her care—a case she had willingly taken on at WIRES' request, at her own expense and in her own time. Tracy was open, honest, and pleased that the organisation was showing interest in the animal's welfare.

However, after the Zoom call, Tracy received no follow-up communication from WIRES coordinators or the welfare team. Two weeks later, the RSPCA arrived at her property and seized three kangaroos. Tracy was never advised that WIRES had concerns about her rehabilitation plan. She received no mentoring, no verbal or written notice, and no opportunity to respond or adjust her care practices.

Instead, WIRES' CEO contacted her former colleagues at the RSPCA, resulting in what many volunteers view as a targeted attack on a kind, gentle, compassionate, and highly knowledgeable carer. This case should never have been taken to court. It represents a tragic misuse of public funds and resources, and it has financially and emotionally devastated a dedicated volunteer.

4. Workplace Culture and Inspector Safety

In January of this year, I wrote a letter to the WIRES Board of Directors expressing concerns about health and safety in the field, and the urgent need for emotional support for volunteers who regularly face dangerous and distressing situations.

These include attending to severely injured animals with no access to a qualified person to euthanise them humanely. The emotional toll of witnessing prolonged suffering, combined with the isolation of working in remote areas, creates a high risk of moral injury.

There is a clear need for 24/7 counselling services so volunteers can access immediate mental health support when dealing with traumatic incidents.

As a vaccinated bat carer, I have frequently encountered situations where there are no vaccinated veterinarians available to treat or euthanise the bats I rescue. This has led to heartbreaking dilemmas where animals suffer unnecessarily because no one is legally or medically able to intervene.

Despite the seriousness of these concerns, I received no response from the Board for over three months. I was not contacted by any member of the salaried Volunteer Support Team to discuss the issues I raised. I was simply told that my letter had been referred to the Large Mammals Team. After three months, I received a single email from a Board member, which lacked empathy and offered no meaningful follow-up. Nothing came to fruition.

I later discovered—by accident—that WIRES employs four salaried staff members in the Volunteer Support Team. I came across an internal email listing their names, job titles, and email addresses (but no phone numbers). The email explicitly stated to Branch Chair personnel that “there is no reason why these names and contact details should be circulated more widely.”

Eventually, I managed to contact a new member of staff in the Volunteer Support Team by mobile phone. She was of enormous assistance to me mentally and emotionally, and she promised to take my concerns to the Board and leadership team. She did so, but was promptly dismissed from her position just days after giving her presentation—told she was “not the right fit.”

I also recommended that WIRES engage Frances Carlton at Wild Talk, a provider of 24/7 phone counselling tailored specifically to wildlife volunteers. This recommendation was overlooked. Instead, I was told I could access free counselling through the Black Dog Institute. However, I have attempted to use this service and found the process lengthy and unsuitable for urgent emotional support.

In addition, our region desperately needs an emergency response vehicle to attend to wildlife cases that are currently going untended. We did have a driver for approximately nine months, but she was promptly dismissed after WIRES discovered she had set up a GoFundMe page in support of Tracy Dods.

5. Governance and Volunteer Representation

In 2024, over 1,000 WIRES volunteer members were effectively dismissed from voting rights during an internal governance process. Volunteers were sent an email asking them to tick a box to retain their status as voting members. If they did not respond or tick the box, they were automatically reclassified as “authorised authorised” members—stripped of their right to vote for the Board of Directors or have any say in the organisation’s constitution.

In spite of two passionate volunteers taking WIRES to the Supreme Court over this action, WIRES repeated the same process again in August of this year. The salaried CEO, management, and leadership staff are not being held to account. They appear to be making up their own rules and exploiting good-hearted volunteers who remain only because of their deep commitment to wildlife welfare.

6. Governance and Ethical Leadership

WIRES promotes strong messaging against the use of barbed wire fencing, due to the horrific injuries it causes to native wildlife. It is therefore deeply concerning that a high-profile former WIRES Board member has recently installed barbed wire fencing on her second property in the Blue Mountains. All members—especially those in leadership positions—should be practising what they preach.

7. Operational Effectiveness – Rescue 101 Initiative

WIRES introduced the Rescue 101 initiative to help alleviate the logistical challenges of wildlife rescue. However, in practice, this initiative has proven ineffective. The names and contact details of Rescue 101 members are not shared with other volunteers, meaning carers cannot reach out for help when they urgently need transport support. Many Rescue 101 members report that they are never contacted or given opportunities to assist, making the initiative feel tokenistic rather than functional.

8. Endorsement of Misinformation and Online Harassment

Another concern relating to ethical leadership involves the endorsement by several former WIRES Board members of a Facebook page titled 'Protect WIRES'. This page was used to spread misinformation and foster division within the volunteer wildlife community.

The page was administered by an individual who posted aggressive and divisive comments. Despite the toxic and divisive nature of the content, WIRES took no action to distance itself from the page or to request its removal.

It is particularly troubling that the administrator of this page was ultimately successful in her campaign and is now serving as the organization's Treasurer. The fact that former Board members publicly supported this page raises serious questions about the ethical standards and governance culture within WIRES.

8. Operational Effectiveness – Rescue 101 Initiative

WIRES introduced the Rescue 101 initiative to help alleviate the logistical challenges of wildlife rescue, particularly the difficulty in finding transporters. However, in practice, this initiative has proven ineffective. The names and contact details of Rescue 101 members are not shared with other volunteers, meaning carers cannot reach out for help when they urgently need transport support.

Many Rescue 101 members report that they are never contacted or given opportunities to assist, making the initiative feel tokenistic rather than functional.

9. Recommendations for Reform

Based on my experience and the concerns outlined above, I respectfully recommend the following actions be considered by the Committee:

- Voting in of a new CEO by all members
- Emergency response vehicles in the Central West and other remote, regional areas that are operated by specialist wildlife veterinarians and darters who can carry out sedation, euthanasia's and emergency triage.

- Open communication between all branches and members
- Review of salaried staff roles
- Replace Volunteer Support Team with Frances Carlton's Wild Talk service
- Streamlined program to employ and deploy more licensed shooters so animals are not suffering for days unattended
- Salaried Marketing and fundraising staff to raise funds for branch vet bills, rather than expecting wildlife volunteers to be actively running Bunnings BBQs during their weekends.

10. Vision for WIRES' Future

I would like to see a future where donor funds received by WIRES are used directly to help wildlife and to support volunteers in carrying out the organization's core mission of wildlife rescue, care, and rehabilitation. This includes having emergency response vehicles employed in remote areas, taking the pressure off volunteers and reducing the likelihood of work health and safety incidents. Every volunteer should be treated with dignity, respect and support in sharing their knowledge and expertise. A cultural shift and financial overhaul are needed to restore WIRES to its original purpose and values.