

Submission  
No 38

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

**Name:** Name suppressed  
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Partially  
Confidential

# Submission to the 2025 Inquiry into the Operation of Approved Charitable Organisations under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979

## From:

Former WIRES Branch Chair (4 years), Species Coordinator, and long-serving volunteer (7+ years)

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## Introduction

My name is [redacted] I have volunteered with WIRES for over seven years, serving as [redacted] for four of the most challenging years — including the disruption of COVID — and continue to serve as a [redacted]. I work professionally in the conservation sector. I submit this evidence out of concern that WIRES, once the flagship of community wildlife rescue, has lost its moral and operational compass.

Behind the polished brand lies an organisation increasingly preoccupied with self-preservation, consultancy and marketing — at the expense of the very animals it claims to protect. The cultural and financial trends revealed in its 2025 accounts confirm what many volunteers have witnessed on the ground: a headquarters growing rich and insulated while front-line welfare withers.

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## 1. Financial drift from welfare to bureaucracy

WIRES' latest figures (FY ending June 2025) reveal a stark mismatch between rhetoric and reality:

Category	FY 2025	FY 2024	Change
Consultancy fees	\$2.72 m	\$2.14 m	+26 %
Salaries & employee benefits	\$8.28 m	\$7.76 m	+7 %
Grants paid	\$2.45 m	\$2.97 m	-17 %
Veterinary costs	\$448 k	\$457 k	-2 %
Fundraising & PR	\$697 k	\$552 k	+26 %
Animal food costs	\$509 k	\$422 k	+21 %

Despite operating reserves of **\$63.6 million**, including **\$32 million** in the Wildlife Protection Grant Fund, the organisation spent barely **\$1 million** on direct animal care (food + veterinary) while channelling over **\$11 million** into staff, consultants and marketing.

That imbalance cannot be reconciled with WIRES' public messaging of "every dollar for wildlife." Branches continue to fundraise for basic supplies while headquarters accumulates assets and outsources work to consultants. This pattern reflects mission drift and a failure of stewardship.

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## **2. Welfare standards undermined by culture and control**

The financial priorities mirror a deeper cultural rot. The internal climate within WIRES has become one of fear and retaliation. Volunteers who raise legitimate concerns about welfare practices or governance are bullied, marginalised or expelled. Senior leadership's intolerance of scrutiny has hollowed out the organisation's skill base: experienced carers and coordinators — the people capable of mentoring new rescuers and maintaining standards — are leaving in droves.

The "WIRES 101" initiative epitomises the problem. Marketed as a rapid-response network for simple rescues, it routinely dispatches inexperienced volunteers to complex or unsafe situations without local branch oversight. This top-down model prizes optics and call-volume metrics over animal outcomes. When welfare mistakes occur, accountability is deflected rather than addressed.

An organisation can replace volunteers on paper, but not decades of accumulated animal-handling knowledge. The exodus of trained carers is already degrading rescue quality across NSW.

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## **3. Governance and accountability failures**

WIRES' governance has been manipulated to shield those in power rather than serve members or wildlife:

- **Constitutional irregularities** — A constitution lodged in 2024 without proper member approval was later withdrawn only after exposure. Throughout a "consultation" period of three years, the Board failed to conduct timely elections, remaining in office beyond its term under the 2007 constitution.
- **Opaque decision-making** — Branches are excluded from policy development and funding decisions, reducing a once-federated network to passive compliance.
- **Conflict-laden complaint processes** — Bullying and misconduct reports are "investigated" internally, if at all, by individuals with direct involvement in the disputes.

Such behaviour would be unacceptable in any publicly funded entity. Yet under s 34B of POCTA, approval confers both authority and apparent immunity. Without independent oversight, WIRES has become accountable to no one but itself.

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#### **4. Weaponising animal welfare through the RSPCA**

Another area of grave concern is WIRES' increasingly questionable relationship with the RSPCA. Instead of collaboration focused on animal outcomes, this relationship is at times used as a tool of intimidation against WIRES' own volunteers.

Experienced carers who fall out of favour with management, or who raise concerns about welfare practices or governance, are being threatened with RSPCA prosecution under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*. These threats are issued without any prior attempt to offer support, retraining, mentoring, or assistance with facilities — and often in the context of overwhelming unpaid workloads that WIRES itself has imposed.

This is not accountability; it is the weaponisation of animal care against those perceived as dissenters. It erodes trust, silences experience and breeds fear within the volunteer community.

There are documented instances of experienced carers — once publicly celebrated for their dedication — being reported to the RSPCA without prior engagement or internal review. Such referrals appear to serve an administrative agenda rather than any genuine concern for animal welfare. The outcome is reputational destruction of individual carers and a chilling effect on others who might otherwise speak up.

This misuse of regulatory power not only destroys lives but corrodes the ethical foundations of wildlife rescue in New South Wales. It is an abuse of the authority entrusted to WIRES under POCTA and must be subject to urgent independent scrutiny.

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#### **5. Data privacy and trust breaches**

In 2025, volunteers across multiple branches received unsolicited text messages urging them to join a campaign defending current WIRES leadership. An affiliated organisation that has enjoyed pecuniary benefits from WIRES later admitted sending these using its own database, implying unauthorised access or sharing of member information. WIRES offered no transparent explanation and targeted those who questioned it. Such behaviour violates basic ethical standards and further undermines confidence in the organisation's integrity.

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## 6. Absence of external oversight and systemic regulatory failure

Perhaps the most disturbing reality exposed by WIRES' ongoing dysfunction is not merely its internal decay, but the failure of external oversight systems that should have intervened long ago.

Over the past several years, numerous well-substantiated complaints have been submitted to SafeWork NSW, the Fair Work Commission, the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). Each has received credible evidence of bullying, data misuse, unsafe practices and breaches of governance and charity law. Yet none has taken decisive or transparent action. Investigations have been deferred, dismissed or closed on technicalities, while the same harmful behaviours persist unchecked.

The result is a regulatory vacuum that emboldens misconduct. WIRES continues to operate with public endorsement and generous tax concessions as an “approved charitable organisation” under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*, but without meaningful accountability for how it treats its volunteers or demonstrates responsible stewardship of donor funds.

Volunteers who have attempted to raise legitimate concerns have been publicly targeted. An anonymous social-media campaign, operating under the WIRES name and initially using its official logo, has engaged in ongoing defamation of members who hold reformist views — branding them as “troublemakers” or “rotten apples.” The organisation’s failure to condemn or act against this campaign amounts to tacit endorsement.

Others have been forced into costly and exhausting legal battles simply to defend themselves or to hold WIRES to its obligations, spending tens of thousands of dollars on lawyers to contest baseless allegations or governance breaches that should have triggered official intervention.

This is not the hallmark of a healthy charity. It is the anatomy of institutional capture — an organisation shielded by inertia, protected by regulatory fragmentation and sustained by the very volunteers it mistreats.

The system has failed not through lack of evidence, but through lack of courage. Parliament must not allow this culture to continue unexamined. Approval under s 34B should carry enforceable standards for governance, transparency and volunteer welfare. Without such reform, the cycle of abuse, intimidation and silence will persist — and the true victims, as ever, will be both the volunteers and the wildlife they serve.

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## **7. Consequences for wildlife**

Every inflated consultancy invoice and every silenced volunteer carries a hidden cost measured in suffering animals. When expertise is driven out and funds diverted from care to self-promotion, the impact is felt in slower response times, inexperienced rescuers and preventable deaths. WIRES' narrative of unity and compassion has become a façade maintained by fear and PR. Its claim to act "for wildlife" rings hollow when the welfare line items shrink while headquarters grows richer.

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## **8. Personal testimony: lived experience of intimidation and harm**

My determination to speak out stems from direct experience of the culture described above. During my tenure as \_\_\_\_\_, I was subjected to an incident of serious aggression at a branch meeting — shouting, swearing and a finger jabbed inches from my face. The behaviour was so threatening that I sought assistance from venue security and later police advice.

The individual responsible was never held to account. Instead, Head Office enabled and empowered them — providing legitimacy to their ongoing dissemination of misinformation and defamatory claims about my leadership. Over subsequent years this narrative was repeated and amplified, contributing to a sustained campaign of reputational damage against both myself and the \_\_\_\_\_.

When I sought resolution through proper channels, including a meeting with the CEO, I encountered a pre-determined bias. The leadership's instinct was to protect the aggressor, not the victim. What followed was a pattern of escalating hostility: selective enforcement of rules, deliberate marginalisation and public misrepresentation of facts designed to discredit those calling for reform.

Most recently, my personal data was compromised, resulting in a late-night text message from an account styling itself as "WIREScarers." The message — signed "PW" and referencing the social-media page responsible for targeting volunteers who have consistently sought good governance and accountability — contained a veiled threat referring to my professional life. This was not only a breach of privacy but a direct act of intimidation: the moment institutional negligence crossed into personal harm.

No volunteer should ever be forced to fear for their safety, privacy or livelihood because they have spoken truthfully about governance failures or animal-welfare concerns. Yet this is precisely what WIRES' culture now produces: punishment for integrity, protection for misconduct and silence enforced through fear.

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## 9. Systemic stagnation: a sector unprepared for the present, let alone the future

The crisis within WIRES cannot be viewed in isolation. It reflects a deeper paralysis across the wildlife-rescue and animal-welfare sector. The volunteer ecosystem that once thrived on community trust and practical compassion has become entangled in bureaucracy, ego and risk aversion.

Most major organisations — including other wildlife groups and the RSPCA — are struggling with the same inability to evolve. Their structures are relics of another era: centralised, defensive and dependent on unpaid labour while resisting the participatory governance and volunteer engagement that define successful charities elsewhere. The result is a generation of frustrated, disillusioned volunteers walking away.

The “WIRES 101” program was a superficial attempt to capture the modern “experiential” volunteer but without the infrastructure to sustain them. These volunteers are isolated from local support networks, given minimal guidance and denied any sense of ownership. Millennials and Gen Z, who crave authenticity, collaboration and purpose, find themselves trapped in a system built for obedience rather than empowerment.

The sector’s failure to modernise is not merely administrative — it is existential. Australia’s wildlife-rescue landscape is collapsing under the weight of outdated governance and fear of transparency. Until our major organisations confront not just the future but the present reality of what modern volunteering has become, they will continue to bleed people, credibility and purpose.

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## 10. Recommendations

1. **Independent governance and financial audit** of WIRES and other s 34B-approved charities.
2. **Mandatory expenditure disclosure** distinguishing animal-care spending from administration, salaries and marketing.
3. **External whistle-blower protections** for volunteers and staff raising welfare or governance concerns.
4. **Regular independent welfare-practice review** with results tabled publicly.
5. **Tighter oversight of data handling and affiliate relationships** to prevent misuse of member information.
6. **Independent review of referral practices to the RSPCA**, ensuring such actions are based on verified welfare concerns, not internal politics.

7. **Creation of a unified oversight mechanism** for wildlife charities under POCTA to close the current regulatory gaps.

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**Conclusion**

WIRES' volunteers remain extraordinary people — compassionate, capable and resilient. They deserve leadership that mirrors their integrity. Instead, the organisation has evolved into a self-serving bureaucracy insulated by wealth, fear and regulatory complacency.

For too long, the silence of institutions has enabled the silencing of individuals. The cost has been paid in lost trust, lost expertise and lost lives.

Reform will not come from within; the culture of denial is too entrenched. It requires the firm hand of Parliament to reclaim what WIRES once stood for — compassion without coercion, care without fear and truth without retaliation. Approval under s 34B must once again mean accountability, not immunity.

Parliament now holds the opportunity to repair a broken system and rebuild trust in the charitable sector. Thoughtful reform — grounded in transparency, accountability and respect for volunteers — will strengthen the institutions entrusted with our wildlife for generations to come. The choices made here will determine whether Australia's compassion for its wildlife is matched by the integrity of those charged with their care.

I am willing to provide supporting documentation and evidence upon request.

and long-serving volunteer

Sydney NSW  
31 October 2025