

11 May 2023

Productivity Commission
Level 8/2 Melbourne Quarter
697 Collins Street
Docklands VIC 3008

Re: Productivity Commission inquiry into philanthropy

Wettenhall Environment Trust (formerly The Norman Wettenhall Foundation) is a public fund and perpetual charitable foundation and was entered into the Register of Environmental Organisations in 1996.

The Trust was established “exclusively for the purposes of supporting and encouraging research into, education about, recording of and publication of such things as are desirable to or which will promote the protection maintenance and understanding of Australian living nature and the environment and habitat within which it exists with particular emphasis on bird life” (Trustee Deed, 1996).

Our Trust is small, but has made over 650 grants all around Australia totalling approximately \$5.4m. We specifically fund groups and individuals to carry out nature conservation projects. We are one of the very few philanthropic organisations set up to just fund the environment sector and who don’t require DGR status.

We have been funding environmental projects for 26 years, and here are some trends/issues that we’ve noticed over time in environmental philanthropy:

- there has been an increase in funding to the environment sector
- there has been an increase in funders in the environmental philanthropy space, as seen by the steadily increasing membership of the Australian Environmental Grantmakers Network (AEGN)
- there has been a rise in PAFs
- there has been a rise in interest in funding climate change issues and advocacy campaigns
- it feels as if this rise in interest in climate change has negatively affected funding to the nature conservation space which was the more traditional way of supporting environmental issues
- grassroots conservation groups are always chasing core funding for wages and although this remains the case today, there are now more funders who are willing to support core costs which are essential for groups to remain viable and active
- we acknowledge the increase of social enterprises, start ups, and social impact investment into the sector.
- only a small number of environmental organisations (top 10%) receive most of the donations and bequests (approx. 94%), which means the bulk of grassroots environment groups are missing out on philanthropic support.

Giving more

WET would like to see environmental giving increase, and organisations like the Australian Environmental Grantmakers Network (AEGN) are helping environmental funders know what kind of projects to fund, where to look for impact in a project, and what organisations need support.

Better government collaboration with philanthropy could help increase giving to the sector. Environmental funders are not here to fill 'gaps' left by government. By working together, environmental funders can help government find suitable projects to support, and work together through co-funding initiatives to bring about change. Our Trust has spent \$1.4m supporting grassroots landscape restoration projects. We give out grants to support workers, increasing the capacity of these organisations to apply for large government funding for on-ground works. The groups we have supported have leveraged our small funds to receive well over \$12m from government sources.

Wettenhall seeks collaborative relationships with other philanthropic organisations and private funders, so that our funding can go a lot further. Strategic relationships between small and large philanthropists can bring more money into the sector and offer more support to environment groups. These relationships are often facilitated by membership to groups like Philanthropy Australia and the AEGN.

We would like to see a more equitable spread of funding from philanthropy to the wider environment movement – people are working at different scales to achieve protection for habitat and native species, and grassroots conservation efforts are essential if larger advocacy campaigns are going to have an impact. We support policy changes and tax reforms that allow Australian giving to be made easily and equitably.

We support a national initiative to foster a more generous giving culture in Australia, and especially in a time of climate and biodiversity crisis, an increase in support to the environment sector.

Yours faithfully

Elizabeth Mellick (Beth)
Executive Director