

Proposals for changes to the Tasmanian Nature Conservation Fund

Review Phase 2 Consultation – April 2024



Purpose

The purpose of this document is to set out the Wildcare Board's proposals for changes to the Tasmanian Nature Conservation Fund (TNCF) and the reasons for the changes.

These proposals follow an initial consultation phase which involved:

- consultation with a reference group comprising Wildcare branch leaders, member/s of the TNCF's Grants Assessment Committee (GAC), and the Wildcare office team
- release of an issues paper to inform discussions and submissions
- an online survey opened to all to share their views on key matters
- targeted consultations with key stakeholders.

Wildcare is now embarking on a second consultation phase as part of this review, seeking your view on specific proposals for change.

These proposals have been developed with the overarching aim of ensuring the sustainability and long-term success of the TNCF and Wildcare more generally.

The governance, policy and administrative arrangements reflect the new regulatory context, are fit-for-purpose, clear yet flexible and provide our donors and partners with confidence that the TNCF continues to be a sound investment. There are also several administrative aspects where greater clarity and consistency would aid the grants process for everyone, including the Grants Committee and our office team.

Other change factors include:

- increasing calls for the TNCF to fund projects that other organisations and grant programs might be better placed to support
- competition for attracting and retaining donors
- increasing workloads for the Grants Committee volunteer members
- increasing grants administration workload for Wildcare's small office team.

Background

Over many years, funds held in the TNCF have enabled many Wildcare branches and other key partners to make highly valued contributions to Tasmania's nature conservation efforts. The Wildcare Board has initiated a review to ensure the TNCF continues to support these efforts.

Wildcare Tasmania Inc. (Wildcare) is a registered charity and a deductible gift recipient (DGR) that operates a gift fund — the TNCF. The fund is open to tax-deductible gifts from members of the public to be used for Wildcare's principal purpose, that is:

to support communities and volunteers to contribute to conservation actions that ensure long-term protection of Tasmania's natural environment.¹

¹ See [Wildcare-Tasmania-Inc-Constitution-V5.0-April-2022.pdf \(wildcarea.org.au\)](https://www.wildcarea.org.au/files/Wildcare-Tasmania-Inc-Constitution-V5.0-April-2022.pdf)

1. Eligibility for grant applicants

Proposal:

Applicants must be a Wildcare branch or a Wildcare member (who is not an organisation), acting alone or in partnership with another organisation, or the Wildcare CEO².

Reasons for change:

The aim of this change is to emphasise the fundamental role of Wildcare's networks (as represented by our branches and members) in working to protect and conserve Tasmania's natural environment, either by themselves or in partnership with like-minded organisations (including land managers such as Tasmania's Parks and Wildlife Service).

While this change would tighten applicant eligibility (by removing 'not-for-profit organisations', 'established partners', and 'social enterprises' as, generally, these groups are organisations outside the Wildcare network), it would re-focus TNCF grants on Wildcare's purpose, as per our constitution. Wildcare branches and members could still partner with such organisations for a grant application.

An explicit reference to the Wildcare CEO is included, to confirm the ability of our CEO (on behalf of our organisation) to apply for grants that further our purpose and operating priorities.

2. Eligibility for projects

Proposal:

To be successful, an application must demonstrate how it aligns with Wildcare's purpose — that is, to support communities and volunteers to contribute to conservation actions that ensure long-term protection of Tasmania's natural environment. This would include conservation of Tasmania's wild places, wildlife, and reserves, including through fostering community interest or education.

Reasons for change:

This is largely consistent with the existing description of suitable project proposals. It aims to reinforce and align project eligibility with Wildcare's purpose and clarify the focus for grant funding. It also seeks to establish the TNCF as a unique grant offering, to maximise its potential impact and not overlap with other similar grant programs.

While not explicitly ineligible, projects on private land present a number of difficulties to receiving TNCF funding, and other grant programs, e.g. Landcare and NRM, are also available to support related projects on private land. Further detail is available in the (draft) TNCF Grant Guidelines, as part of this review.

Option for future consideration: Once the new Wildlife Network Tasmania Inc. is more fully established, this organisation may establish its own DGR fund to support individual wildlife carers with their own resourcing needs. Should this eventuate, Wildcare would aim to work closely with this organisation to support a seamless transition of grant opportunities for this highly valued volunteer workforce.

² A proposal to change the grant application assessment process is outlined in the *Governance* section of this paper. This proposal affirms that any grant application from the Wildcare CEO (on behalf of the Wildcare organisation) will be independently assessed, and accepted or rejected, by the Grants Committee.

3. Donations

Proposals:

- a) TNCF donations to be channelled into a single consolidated fund that can then be used flexibly to support worthy and eligible projects, based on merit and the available funds.
- b) The costs of administering the TNCF (including the grants program) will also be drawn from the TNCF.

Reasons for change:

Currently there are 11 'causes' which donors may choose from but at times they have reported confusion about which to select. The recent online survey neither indicated a strong preference from donors for the number of causes in future, nor that any change would materially affect their donations one way or the other.

A single funding pool would simplify the donation choice while still enabling similar activities to those currently supported to receive grants funding, namely activities involving nature conservation in wild places, care of wildlife and education and community awareness of nature conservation and wildlife in Tasmania.

Historically, donations in some 'causes' have not been used for lack of applications. A single pool facilitates funds being directed promptly to those who can best use them. It would also mean that eligible applicants would be assessed on the merit of their proposal, without grants being constrained by the available funds within each 'cause'³.

Donations can still be made direct to a Wildcare branch (rather than to the TNCF); however, donations of this type would not be tax-deductible, as they are outside our DGR gift fund. A further benefit of a single consolidated fund is to ensure that those branches that have a low public profile and may not receive direct donations are not disadvantaged.

Transition arrangements: This change would take effect from 1 July 2024⁴. All donations to the TNCF 'causes' prior to this time would continue to be directed to the relevant 'cause', consistent with the donors' original choices. The continuation of 'causes' would be for a limited number of grant rounds after which any unspent/uncommitted funds for the 'causes' would go into the single consolidated fund.

Option for future consideration: As noted above, should the new Wildlife Network Tasmania Inc. establish its own DGR (donations and grant) facility targeting care and rehabilitation for Tasmania's native wildlife, Wildcare would aim to work closely with this organisation to support a seamless transition of donation (and grant opportunities) for this highly valued volunteer workforce.

The second proposal is to recover costs from the TNCF to offset the increasing administrative demands (and costs) directly associated with supporting the TNCF that Wildcare is presently absorbing and which is no longer sustainable — financially or for our small office team in terms of workload. These administrative costs include accounting and audit fees, bank fees and significant staff time. This is a shift from our zero-fees policy which to date has been a point of difference from other organisations but, at a time of rising costs, we also need to ensure that Wildcare remains financially viable now and into the

³ Wildcare will continue its close relationship with Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary. Friends of Bonorong Ltd has now established its own DGR fund. Alongside Wildcare's single donations portal, we will continue to provide a direct link for Bonorong donors visiting the Wildcare site to the Bonorong DGR fund.

⁴ Timing is subject to supporting changes to Wildcare's website being implemented.

future. Recovery of the reasonable costs of the TNCF administration is already provided in the current (V4.0) TNCF Operating Procedures⁵. It is also consistent with similar not-for-profit organisations which offer grant funding. Cost recovery would also enable Wildcare to grow the support, fundraising and other services provided for our branches, members, donors and supporters.

As part of its regular financial oversight and operating budget setting roles, the Board will decide the actual amount of these administration costs to be recovered, following advice from our CEO.

4. Governance

Proposals:

- a) The current biannual (twice a year) grant application process will continue.
- b) The Grants Committee⁶ will continue to be responsible for assessing and accepting or rejecting applications for grants.
- c) The Grants Committee's role will be narrowed to focus on the application assessment process, rather than the full scope of grants administration.

Ahead of each application round (i.e. twice a year – usually in March and September), the Board will determine the overall level of funding available (including any application funding limits), and whether any general funding priorities are warranted.

Each year, the Board will approve recovery of the actual administration costs from the TNCF pool, with these monies to be redirected to the Wildcare office budget.

Changes to the constitution are also proposed to remove references to the GAC.

Reasons for change:

The Grants Committee — with expertise in nature conservation, reserve management and legal matters — will continue. The role of the Grants Committee will be narrowed somewhat to focus on its areas of expertise i.e. assessing (and accepting or rejecting) grant applications, with the Wildcare office fulfilling other grant administration responsibilities⁷. This role adjustment is expected to reduce some of the workload demands on the Grants Committee.

Changes to the constitution to remove references to the GAC are chiefly driven by changes in the regulatory environment.

The Board will (continue to) determine funding levels, and any general funding priorities, ahead of each grant application round. This biannual decision will allow for more timely funding decisions to reflect available funds and any emerging priorities (if/as relevant).

⁵ See TNCF Operating Procedures V4.0, clause 6.4.

⁶ The Grants Committee is appointed by Wildcare's Board and includes members with expertise in fields such as nature conservation, reserve management and legal matters. The Wildcare office supports and advises the Grants Committee.

⁷ The Board will determine the role of the Grants Committee and set these responsibilities out in revised TNCF Operating Procedures.

5. Operating arrangements and administration

Proposals:

- a) A tiered reporting and acquittal requirements will be introduced:
 - For all funded projects, an acquittal report will be required within two months of completion, containing a financial report and a summary (qualitative) story.
 - For those projects approved for funding above \$5,000, a quantitative report against key performance indicators (KPIs) will also be required, demonstrating the impact of the funded project. KPIs used for this quantitative report should be specific to the funded project, as set out in the application.
- b) A tiered approach to approving any variation to projects will be considered based on the potential impacts to expected project outcomes and approved funding:
 - A request to vary a grant where the overall funding remains unchanged, and the general use of those funds also remains within the approved project scope, should be sent to the Wildcare office for a decision.
 - Other (more) substantive requests to vary a grant, including those involving changes to the expected project outcomes, will be decided by the Grants Committee.

Reasons for change:

Tiered acquittal and reporting requirements, based on the level of funds approved, will continue to provide for accountability and transparency from grant recipients to donors.

Introducing quantitative reporting (against project-specific KPIs) will also serve to build the evidence of the on-ground impact and outcomes achieved by TNCF grant recipients. This growing evidence base will also be valuable in attracting and retaining donations and support, in the face of increasing competition for donations.

A tiered approach to the handling of variation requests, based on the materiality of the change request, is aimed at reducing administration for both project proponents and decision-makers, while supporting achievement of expected project outcomes.

Transition arrangements: any projects funded prior to the introduction of these changes will continue according to their previously determined grant acquittal and reporting conditions.

How to make a submission

Email office@wildcaretas.org.au

Contact 03 6165 4230

By 5pm, Friday 31st May 2024.

Next steps

Following this second consultation phase, a further phase of consultation with the TNCF Review Reference Group will take place. The Board will then finalise and release revised TNCF documentation.

A special general meeting open to all members will also be held to vote on proposals for related changes to our constitution.

It is anticipated the revised TNCF framework will be publicly released and apply to the second TNCF grant application round in later 2024.