

# Environment and Communications References Committee

## Threat of marine plastic pollution in Australia

**26 February**

*Eric Woehler / BirdLife Australia*

During my appearance, I was asked two questions on notice - one dealing with BirdLife Australia's research funding and the second on estimates costs associated with research program on marine debris and shorebirds.

The CEO of BirdLife Australia sent me this:

Thanks Eric

The \$2,349,579 of research income in 2014 is actually for our bird conservation projects. This is primarily funded by government (state, federal, NRMs), along with grants from foundations and corporate sponsorship.

It is not research in a strict definition - it includes structured bird surveys and analysis to inform conservation, but is primarily community education/engagement and on-ground practical conservation work involving volunteers.

Donations fund our long-term conservation programs (beach-nesting birds, migratory shorebirds, woodland birds), along with advocacy and campaigns. Some donations (about \$50k a year) specifically fund student research grants.

As a note of context, BirdLife is temporarily funding conservation from reserves because of significant government cutbacks in environmental funding. It is also very difficult to fund research through philanthropy because most donors prefer to finance on-ground outcomes such as improved breeding rates, population size and distribution etc.

The National Environmental Science Programme (NESP) is a key source of federal funding for environmental research.

I hope that help!  
Paul Sullivan  
Chief Executive  
BirdLife Australia

As for the second question, dealing with estimated costs of a research program, I note the US has a dedicated funding program of c.\$500k/annum, approximately equal to an ARC (Australian Research Council (<http://www.arc.gov.au/>) grant. However, it is critical to note ARC grants do not include funds for salaries - it is assumed the grantee has a paid position with a university etc. In order to provide continuity in the research on microplastics and shorebirds (for example), an annual funding level of c. AUD\$650,000 - AUD\$700,000 would provide sufficient funding for staff and expenses.