

2 August 2018

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary,

Thank you for giving the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) the opportunity to provide public comment to the inquiry into the 201819 Budget measure, the *Great Barrier Reef 2050 Partnership Program*. During the Brisbane public hearing, ACF took several questions on notice. We write to provide you with answers to these questions.

Question 1: Contact with the Foundation

CHAIR: Has the ACF had any engagement with the foundation to date, either after the announcement of the partnership program or prior as a stakeholder in conservation and protection of the reef?

Mr Rose: We definitely haven't had any talks with them following the budget measure. I'd have to take on notice if we did beforehand. From my experience—I've been at ACF for almost 3½ years, and we haven't had any contact with them in that time. But I'll take it on notice and get back to the committee.

...

Senator DUNIAM: Thank you very much, gentlemen, for coming along today. Given the concern you've expressed around the fact that the government has devolved funding to a third party—an external entity—and going back to one of Senator Whish-Wilson's earlier questions about contact between the ACF and the foundation, can I just clarify: have you contacted the foundation to talk through these concerns at all, given the size of ACF, as outlined in answers to Senator Whish-Wilson?

Mr Rose: I certainly haven't. I'm not aware anyone has. I'm happy to take that on notice.

Senator DUNIAM: If you could. Given the concern you've expressed, I imagine that you've volunteered—there might be ways to manage the large amount of funding they've been provided. If you could take that on notice it would be great. Thank you.



CHAIR: I'll just say you certainly made public comment through your submission to this committee nearly a month ago, so you've certainly made your points public. We're here to discuss them today. Did you want to say something, Mr Slattery, before I asked my question?

Mr Slattery: I may just add that I think it's important that public accountability processes are maintained and that contact from, for example, the public sector or civil society organisations ought not to replace parliamentary scrutiny. We will absolutely take on notice the senator's question about whether ACF has contacted the foundation, but I do think that it's important to underscore the primacy of those parliamentary scrutiny procedures.

Senator DUNIAM: Thank you. The only reason I ask is that, given the amount of concern you've shown, I assume that there has been formal contact around some of the workings.

Answer –

ACF did not contact the Foundation after the funding announcement. To the best of our knowledge, we have not been in direct contact with the Foundation at any time prior to the funding announcement.

ACF has engaged with the inquiry through providing a written submission and verbal evidence at the public hearing. Scrutiny by civil society organisations should not be expected to substitute ordinary parliamentary processes. As we made clear in our submission, ACF is deeply concerned that many of the standard tools of accountability are not applicable to the Foundation. This includes Senate estimates questioning, freedom of information requests and oversight by the Australian National Audit Office and Commonwealth Ombudsman.

Question 2: Work and Investment Plans

CHAIR: I'd like to perhaps also add to ask a question I asked earlier about whether you'd seen the grant details, which are now public. Could I perhaps ask you to take on notice whether you think the annual work and investment plans that the foundation is required to submit to the environment department are adequate to allay any of your concerns. I will, obviously, say they haven't been made public. They don't need to be completed until March 2019. It is odd the money's been allocated before these plans have been constructed, so we don't know any of the detail, but could you please have a look at that submission and let us know if that at all changes your view?

Answer –

As the annual work plan and investment plan are not currently available it is difficult to assess these arrangements. We expect that these plans will be made public in the interest of transparency. At this stage ACF's view has not changed based on an assessment of the grant agreement.



Question 3: Reef 2050 Plan Spending

***CHAIR:** In your submission, you said that the \$444 million for the foundation had been provided in the last financial year. Your submission describes a disconnect between spending on the Reef 2050 plan actions and the accounting of the reef funding in the budget. Could you expand on those concerns. Is there potentially a gap in funding on the projects if the money's been allocated in the previous budget but they don't actually start spending the money until 2019?*

***Mr Rose:** On the first part of the question, we were just describing the fact that the money's essentially banked in that year but the spending happens over the next six years. That's the disconnect we're talking about. There's still some money rolling out; I don't know exactly what the profile looks like over the next years. I can take that on notice. But our concern was that, in a budget process kind of way, it's a lump of money in that financial year that's actually going to roll out over the next six. So, if you want to see when the money hits the ground, it really shouldn't be all in that year; it should be across the next six years.*

Answer –

The 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17 Budgets each had \$3.125m grants to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation. It is unclear whether all this money has been spent on projects or is yet to be rolled out.

Kind regards,

Matt Rose
Economics Program Manager and Economist

Christian Slattery
Senior Stop Adani Campaigner

