

28 July 2004

## Media release

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# Pandering to the Government dollar

The Australian arm of the Worldwide Fund for Nature is being cynically used by the Howard Government to endorse unpopular environment policies according to a report released today by public-interest think tank the Australia Institute.

*Taming the Panda* by Institute Director Dr Clive Hamilton and researcher Andrew Macintosh examines the relationship between the Howard Government and World Wide Fund for Nature Australia (WWF). It follows an earlier Institute report, *Silencing Dissent*, which examined the means by which the Howard Government has attempted to silence its critics in non-government organisations.

The new study finds that WWF, known world-wide by its symbol of the panda, has enjoyed lavish financial support from the Howard Government with a funding boost of more than 500 per cent since 1996. Total grants over the period amount to more than \$15 million, with \$13.5 million allocated since 1998-99.

“Most of this funding is due to federal government largess,” Dr Hamilton said.

“The reason for concern is the extent to which WWF has reciprocated. WWF Australia has given generous endorsement to some of the Howard Government’s most contentious environment policies.”

Dr Hamilton said the Government had also frequently used WWF’s name and statements in an effort to give credibility to controversial government policies.

“In stark contrast, environment groups that have questioned Government actions have had their funding slashed,” he said.

Dr Hamilton said the issue is not one of who gets what but of whether a major environmental organisation, which many Australians have supported, was being cynically manipulated to promote uncomfortable policies.

“There is always an inherent danger for independent community-based organisations accepting government funding. Organisations that begin to see the world through the eyes of governments risk losing their capacity to make dispassionate assessments of what is in the interests of the environment,” Dr Hamilton said.

“Most organisations work assiduously to guard their independence and, at their best, governments accept this. In the case of the Howard Government and WWF Australia, it appears that the line has been crossed.”

The report can be read under What’s New at [www.tai.org.au](http://www.tai.org.au).