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## Media release

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# WWF and the Forests - Concern justified

Claims by environment groups that the World Wide Fund for Nature has dumped on Tasmania's forests come hard on the heels of a report exposing an unhealthy relationship between WWF and the Howard Government.

*Taming the Panda*, a report just released by the leading public interest think tank, The Australia Institute, says the Australian arm of the Worldwide Fund for Nature is being cynically used by the Government to endorse unpopular environment policies.

Institute Director Dr Clive Hamilton and researcher Andrew Macintosh found that WWF had had lavish financial support from the Howard Government with a funding boost of more than 500 per cent since 1996. WWF received grants of \$13.5 million since 1998-99, mostly from the federal government.

"The reason for concern is the extent to which WWF has reciprocated," Dr Hamilton said. "Environment groups that have questioned Government actions have had their funding slashed but WWF has given generous endorsement to some of the Howard Government's most contentious environment policies.

"Tasmanian environment groups who have reacted with anger and dismay at what they say is a betrayal of Tasmania's Forests have therefore every reason for concern".

Dr Hamilton said the Government had used WWF's name to give credibility to government policies. He said the issue is not one of who gets what but whether an environmental organisation was being manipulated to promote uncomfortable policies.

"There is always a 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. Other environment groups are right to be concerned."

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