

# Annual Review

## 2019-2020

Protecting, promoting and restoring wilderness  
and natural processes across Australia for the  
survival and ongoing evolution of life on Earth.

View online at [annualreview.wilderness.org.au](https://annualreview.wilderness.org.au) or scan the QR code

Image: Ben Baker





# A year like no other.

This year has required resilience, adaptability and persistence—from all of us—dealing with climate-driven catastrophes, a pandemic and extreme environmental, social and economic challenges.



*Stuart Baird*  
**Stuart Baird**  
Co-Convenor,  
on behalf of the Board  
The Wilderness Society



*Leanne Craze*  
**Leanne Craze AM**  
Co-Convenor,  
on behalf of the Board  
The Wilderness Society

Our staff and governance, grassroots organising groups, supporters and donors have risen to these challenges—we've all personally sometimes stumbled or become overwhelmed—but supporting each other is what makes our organisation strong.

In 2019 we also saw change in our leadership team. Campaigns Director Lyndon Schneider stepped down after more than 20 years of campaigning with the Wilderness Society. Matt Brennan assumed the role of CEO toward the end of 2019, recruiting a new Chief Financial Officer, Jen Rowe, and leading the recruitment for Lyndon's replacement.

Our own Amelia Young was appointed National Campaigns Director after an Australian and global talent search. She stepped straight into a period dominated by cataclysmic bushfires and her deep experience was integral in shaping how our organisation immediately responded. She has since taken a deep dive with the national campaign team to evaluate where we are most effective, to agree on a national plan and articulate the way we as an organisation work together. We have continued to campaign throughout the challenges of 2020 and are now prepared to take on the long-term, continent-level changes our environment and communities need.

Similarly, our Movement For Life grassroots organising has continued to grow, even as COVID-19 forced them to an online-only meetings and organising model. During this time groups continued to meet local politicians, made hundreds of submissions to the EPBC, bushfire and Pilliga reviews and recruited hundreds of new members.

As the country, environment and communities have faced numerous challenges, our donors, supporters and volunteers have been there throughout. This has allowed us to continue to hold government and vested interests to account and continue to see change, including our stunning win to safeguard the Great Australian Bight as Amelia highlights in this year's Annual Review.

On a personal note, while things at a political and national governmental level may look grim for climate and the environment, we are heartened by a community groundswell from people of all ages to make a change. We've seen individuals and groups persistently working to hold our governments accountable and to demand action from corporations to preserve and protect wildlife, nature and the environment we all share. Working together we can make sure the responses, the proposed solutions, are not allowed to be 'business-as-usual'.

Finally, our huge heartfelt thanks to all our supporters and volunteers for continuing to make it all possible, for continuing to give nature and wilderness a voice.

*We recognise the Traditional Owners of Australia and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge that this land was never ceded and welcome actions that better seek to identify, present, protect and conserve cultural heritage.*



**A year ago unprecedented—but not unanticipated—bushfires started burning vast areas of Australia's forests and woodlands. Places we love were changed forever.**



*Amelis Young*

**Amelis Young**  
National Campaigns Director

To hear more from me what happened last year, and our plan for 2021 and beyond, please go to: [annualreview.wilderness.org.au/Campaigns](https://annualreview.wilderness.org.au/Campaigns)

In the face of the devastating wildlife losses during the bushfires, restrictions on travel due to COVID, and a rush from governments to reboot the economy at all costs, our focus on protecting wild places has not wavered. And we've taken the opportunity to plan for the future—because nature deserves nothing less. We have secured some important progress and some outstanding victories throughout 2019/20:

- After we took legal action, Norwegian oil giant, Equinor, abandoned its plans to drill in the Great Australian Bight. Now, together with our allies and in support of the Mirning Traditional Owners, we are working towards World Heritage protection for this marine wilderness.
- The once-in-a-decade review of our national nature laws, was a key moment of our long-running new nature laws campaign. Through our Movement For Life community organising program, hundreds of supporters wrote submissions calling for a strong national environment act that actually protects the environment, and an independent watchdog to enforce it.
- In Tasmania we are defending World Heritage in the courts. In this case, opposing plans to privatise a whole island in Lake Malbena.
- For over a decade in the Pilliga we've supported thousands of people to stand with Traditional Owners and farmers, culminating in a landslide of opposition to the Narrabri

gas project before an assessment by the NSW planning commission gave it the nod. Aside from its disastrous impacts on the environment and local communities, now there remain big questions about the project's economic viability.

- Decades of work to protect Victoria's iconic tall, wet forests paid off in 2019 when the state government announced an end to native forest logging by 2030. Now we need to close the gap between then, and what the science shows forests and wildlife need—a gap even more stark after recent bushfires, which burnt 84% of East Gippsland's magnificent forests.
- This year, for the first time, using state of the art satellite analysis we determined the main driver of deforestation in Australia: beef production. We also used the same technology to identify that 300,000 hectares of known koala habitat was cleared in Queensland between 2013-2018.

In 2019, I was honoured and humbled to be invited to step into the role of National Campaigns Director for the Wilderness Society. As for all of us, 2020 has not been the year we were expecting. I'd like to pay tribute to the organisation's outgoing National Campaigns Director, Lyndon Schneiders, who led the Wilderness Society for a decade of strong action for nature and climate.

2021 can, and must, be a better year for nature, and community.

**I've been reflecting on the role of the Wilderness Society in light of Australia's largest bushfire season and a globe-altering pandemic.**



*Matt Brennan*

**Matt Brennan**  
Chief Operating Officer

Following the bushfires' immediate devastation we responded by calling for the protection of both burnt and unburnt forest, to save habitat vital for the recovery of many endangered species. We also made it clear that we need strong nature laws and resources to cope with the increasing threat of climate change. Something we detailed in our submissions to the EPBC Act review and Royal Commission into the bushfires.

In response to COVID-19 we rapidly shifted operations online to keep our staff and volunteers safe. This included our Wilderness Defenders, whose face-to-face work with the public was suspended. They have continued to reach out to our supporters and public, via phone, letters and video.

Our adaptation during this turbulent period has allowed us to continue to deliver for nature. We forced Equinor out of the Great Australian Bight and more recently mobilised people all over Western Australia to force the Government to withdraw oil drilling rights near the World Heritage sites of Ningaloo Reef and Shark Bay. Earlier in the year, Bunnings announced it would no longer take wood illegally sourced from Victoria's native forests; the culmination of many years of work by the Wilderness Society. These are just three examples that highlight our ability to keep pressure on government and corporations to make change.

But we can't fix everything. Nature seems to be under threat like never before. We need to be more effective than ever in working with communities to stem the tide of environmental degradation.

To achieve this I believe there we must keep improving a few key things that we're really good. First, we're exceptional strategic campaigners. You can't defeat the likes of fossil fuel giants Equinor and BP without having some really deep strategic nous.

The second thing is our deep love of nature. We understand that we won't survive without protecting our intact natural spaces and biodiversity. We have to find a sustainable way to exist on this planet. We cannot allow the need to sustain, protect and restore the natural world to be ignored in any plans for a pandemic economic recovery.

Finally, we have to keep reflecting on our role in communities. We are not a group that goes and tells communities what to do. We actually work alongside a community to achieve a positive outcome for our shared environment. We need to make sure that we strike a dialogue with every sector of a community, not just those who are our immediate allies.

If we focus and improve these strengths, then together we can be a more effective force for people and nature for years to come.



# A turbulent, successful year.



See [annualreview.wilderness.org.au](https://annualreview.wilderness.org.au) for an in-depth look at this year's key events.

## September

The bushfire season started worryingly early in spring, with fires starting in East Gippsland in September. As summer unfolded, the true extent of the bushfire season became apparent; megafires take hold along the entire Eastern seaboard, from East Gippsland, South Coast NSW, the Blue Mountains and up into rainforest in South East Queensland. Communities are devastated and the toll on wildlife is unimaginable. The Wilderness Society resolves to redouble efforts to safeguard burnt and unburnt habitat and address the root causes to mitigate bushfires happening on this unprecedented scale again.



Image: Nick Clemann, ARI

## 7 November

### A future for Victoria's forests

There is a major shift in the outlook for Victoria's native forests, with the Andrews Government announcing an end to native forest logging by 2030. Then in 2020 there is a major court win in support of forest habitat and Bunnings declares an end to stocking VicForests' dodgy timber. It's been a dramatic year of events for Victoria's forests, as campaign manager Richard Hughes reveals.

[annualreview.wilderness.org.au/vicforests](https://annualreview.wilderness.org.au/vicforests)

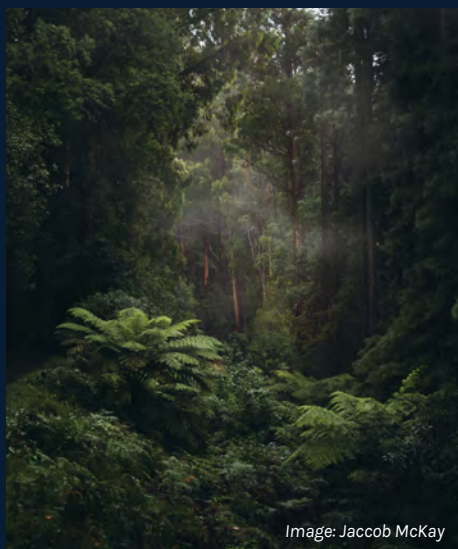


Image: Jaccob McKay



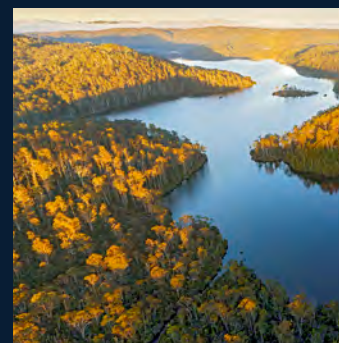
Image: Meg Bauer

## December

The Wilderness Society marshals its supporters to push for a strong Draft South East Queensland Koala Conservation Strategy. The following year our recommendations are implemented by the Queensland Government.

## 6 December Malbena court win!

The wilderness values of Lake Malbena Tasmanian World Heritage Wilderness Area are protected from a reckless tourism proposal. The approval in the Federal Court explains the wider significance of the area, although there is much work to do. See [annualreview.wilderness.org.au](https://annualreview.wilderness.org.au).



Peter Owen Lawrie, and  
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## 22 January

Wilderness Society launches  
a legal challenge to Equinor's  
environmental approval to drill for oil  
in the Great Australian Bight.

## The fight for strong nature laws

Campaign manager Suzanne Milthorpe works tirelessly behind the scenes and sometimes in front of the camera to guide a national push for new nature laws. She reveals how the mobilisation of our Movement For Life groups around the country galvanised communities to call for strong new nature laws, with hundreds of submissions sent into the once-in-a-decade review process for the EPBC Act.

[annualreview.wilderness.org.au/EPBC](https://annualreview.wilderness.org.au/EPBC)



A Leadbeater's possum.  
Image: Parks Victoria.



## March

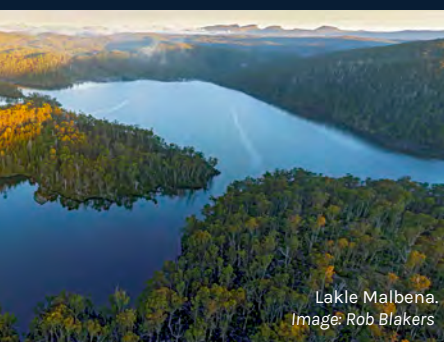
### Adapting to a world-altering pandemic

The story from the people on the ground. Wilderness Defenders—whose work is hampered by the effects of COVID-19. The Wilderness Society has to adapt quickly, embracing new technologies and work practices to support staff and stay connected with supporters.

[annualreview.wilderness.org.au/WildernessDefenders](https://annualreview.wilderness.org.au/WildernessDefenders)

Malbena, deep in the heart of the  
Wilderness Area are under threat by a  
Wilderness Society challenges its  
plans and wins. Campaign manager Tom Allen  
leads the case; a crucial victory for nature  
to be done.

[annualreview.wilderness.org.au/Malbena](https://annualreview.wilderness.org.au/Malbena)



Lakle Malbena.  
Image: Rob Blakers



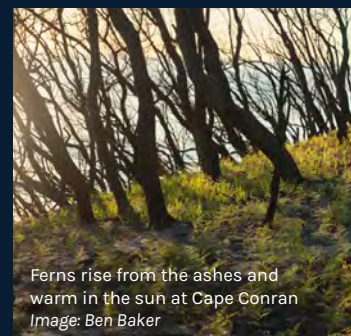
Lindy and her daughter Freya, who  
tirelessly campaigned against Equinor.  
Image: Micaela Jemison

## 25 February

### Fight For the Bight success!

Marking one of the Wilderness Society's greatest victories to date, Equinor announces that it is withdrawing plans to drill for oil in the pristine waters of the Great Australian Bight. It followed the Wilderness Society's legal challenge to Equinor's environmental approval to begin operations. Local activists Lindy and Freya speak of their relief that Equinor was finally sent packing. Watch a video celebrating the success.

[annualreview.wilderness.org.au/FightForTheBight](https://annualreview.wilderness.org.au/FightForTheBight)



Ferns rise from the ashes and  
warm in the sun at Cape Conran  
Image: Ben Baker

## March

We visit the bushfire-affected Cape Conran  
to hear how people are recovering and  
what they feel needs to change. On that journey,  
director Amelia Young speaks with  
Regional Advocate, Matt Stephens, about  
what can be done to move forward. Read  
the full story.

[annualreview.wilderness.org.au/CapeConran](https://annualreview.wilderness.org.au/CapeConran)





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## May

The Wilderness Society makes its submission into the bushfires Royal Commission 2020. It calls for a range of measures: having the resources in place to quickly put out fires when and where they start; the establishment of a climate disaster recovery fund; endangered species recovery plans and World Heritage/National Heritage management plans are updated to account for climate impacts; and more besides. In wake of the devastating bushfires, business as usual simply cannot continue.

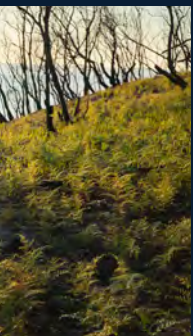
Throughout the year, Wilderness Society supporters write 1735 submissions into the NSW Independent Planning Commission's review of the Narrabri Gas Project. Elle Lawless looks at where the campaign to stop the disastrous development is at now: [annualreview.wilderness.org.au/Narrabri](https://annualreview.wilderness.org.au/Narrabri)



## The power of Movement For Life

Throughout the year, teams of the Wilderness Society's grassroots organising program continue to achieve incredible results within their communities. However, they also spearhead action in two national campaigns, opposing the destructive Narrabri Gas Project and being a powerful voice for new nature laws. And all under new working conditions brought about by the pandemic. Damian Odgen recalls an extraordinary year.

[annualreview.wilderness.org.au/M4L](https://annualreview.wilderness.org.au/M4L)



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## 21 May

We announce the shortlist for the 2020 Environment Award For Children's Literature. See: [wilderness.org.au/work/environment-award-for-childrens-literature](https://wilderness.org.au/work/environment-award-for-childrens-literature)

## June

The Wilderness Society launches a campaign to prevent the release of exploration licences for oil and gas on the doorstep of World Heritage Sites Ningaloo and Shark Bay. The campaign proves to be successful in August.



# Financial performance

In 2019-2020, the Wilderness Society achieved a surplus result that has strengthened our financial position. At the end of the prior financial year, the Board made the decision to restrict the operating budget for FY19/20 to build financial reserves following an expansive period to increase financial resilience.

This strategy held us in good stead when COVID-19 began to impact our financials from April 2020, and we faced a large and fast impact on our fundraising income. It continues to be of importance as we face the ongoing uncertainty and challenges of the global pandemic but moreover, the appropriate level of reserves provides a stable base for us to continue operations with financial confidence in years to come.

In 2019-2020, fundraising income increased slightly on the prior year, despite the final quarter of the financial year being adversely impacted by COVID-19, and notwithstanding a decrease in fundraising investment in line with other cost restrictions. Spend on our environmental campaigns and programs was almost exactly the same proportion of total spend as in the prior year. Our governance finance and operating costs however were further reduced to 10% of total expenditures, from 11.6% in the prior year. Together with the overall increase in income, this careful management of costs throughout the year, has resulted in a surplus result of \$1.958m (deficit \$1.892m\* in 2019). This surplus increases reserves in the balance sheet, strengthening our financial stability.

This financial information is extracted from the Full Consolidated Financial Report for the year ended 30 June 2020 which may be accessed at [annualreview.wilderness.org.au/finances](https://annualreview.wilderness.org.au/finances)

## Financial results (for the year ended 30 June 2020)

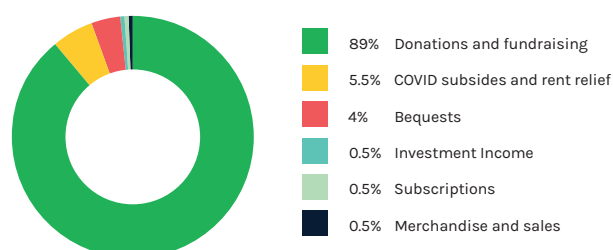
	2020	2019*
Income from fundraising, donations, bequests and grants	\$11,446,819	\$11,323,405
Investment and other non-operating income	\$713,237	\$72,023
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$12,160,056</b>	<b>\$11,395,428</b>
<b>LESS: EXPENSES</b>		
Environmental campaigns and programs	\$4,612,641	\$6,182,269
Fundraising Recruitment of new supporters	\$1,672,243	\$1,894,973
Fundraising Recruitment of new supporters	\$2,557,556	\$3,326,004
Governance, finance and operations	\$1,036,238	\$1,537,533
Depreciation and amortisation	\$300,989	\$311,290
Interest costs	\$21,574	\$35,391
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$10,201,241</b>	<b>\$13,287,460</b>
Net surplus/(deficit) for the year	\$1,958,815	-\$1,892,032
Other comprehensive income	\$-	\$305,000
<b>TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME</b>	<b>\$1,958,815</b>	<b>-\$1,587,032</b>

## Financial Position (for the year ended 30 June 2020)

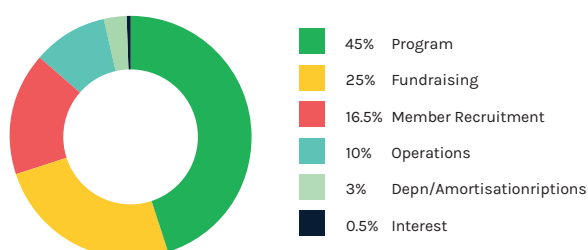
	2020	2019*
Total Assets	\$8,072,256	\$5,078,638
Less: Total Liabilities	\$4,017,500	\$2,774,432
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$4,054,756</b>	<b>\$2,304,206</b>
Accumulated Surpluses	\$1,651,640	\$1,243,695
Tied Fund Reserves	\$1,790,761	\$455,245
Revaluation Surplus Reserves	\$231,220	\$231,200
Non-controlling interest accum. surpluses	\$381,135	\$374,066
<b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>	<b>\$4,054,756</b>	<b>\$2,304,206</b>

\* 2019 figures have been restated due to an accounting treatment change as disclosed in Note 21 of the Consolidated Financial Statements

## Revenues



## Expenditure





# Meet the Board

The 2019-2020 Wilderness Society Board share their favourite Australian nature spots, while we welcome new member Lisa Roberts. You can read the Board members' full profiles online at: [wilderness.org.au/about/people](http://wilderness.org.au/about/people)



**Stuart Baird, Co-Convenor**  
Tasmania

"For me, Frenchmans Cap, with a walk that takes you through jewelled lakes, stunning wet forest, buttongrass plains and forever views from the mountaintop. Surrounded by birds, nature and wilderness is particularly special."



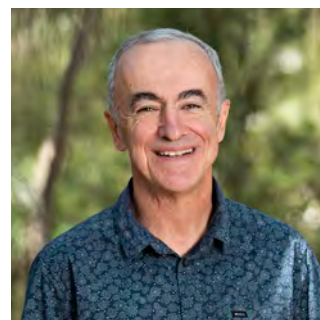
**Lisa Roberts**  
Vic; Elected 28 November 2019

"During COVID lockdown in Melbourne, my favourite outdoor space has been my backyard. I'm so lucky – I am surrounded by huge old native trees and my daily visitors include king parrots, crimson rosellas, black and white cockatoos, galahs, brush tail possums, echidnas and frogs."



**Amanda Branley**  
WA

"My favourite place is the Canning River Regional Park. Only kilometres from home, I get to experience woodlands, waterways and wildlife. Being close to nature brings me peace and calm."



**Sam Rando**  
NT and SA

"The Finke River, known to the Aranda as Larapinta, rises amongst the ridges of the MacDonnell Ranges in Central Australia. A tired old friend, this river snakes its way across sandplains of mulga. Cooling swims, blazing campfires, tucked up in our swags under star-filled skies; I love it."



**Coral Robinson**  
NSW and ACT

"Deep inside any old-growth forest is my favourite Australian nature spot. The mystery and beauty of these ancient places, from tiny mosses to soaring giants of trees, never fails to fill me with awe and a sense of calm while lifting my spirits."



**Craig Zanker**  
Victoria

"My favourite spot is Coral Bay, WA. The desert meets the sea here with beautiful dunes and landscapes rolling through to the water. Under the waves are hard coral gardens with amazing fish, sharks, turtles and mantas with incredible colours and light."



**Ben Holgate**  
Victoria

"My favourite nature spot is a small bend in the Yarra river near my house. It's a quiet and mystical section of Red River Gums near the historic Wurundjeri camping and eel ground at Bullen Bullen billabong. It has wallabies, kangaroos and the occasional tiger snake."



**Leanne Craze AM, Convenor**  
NSW and ACT

"One that I enjoy everyday at the end of my street is the Mini HaHa Falls walk in the Blue Mountains. There is so much diverse flora and fauna. There is a male bower bird who I swear is a mimic and who greets me everyday. And just now there are different orchids hidden and not so hidden."