SENATOR THE HON. RICHARD COLBECK

Liberal Senator for Tasmania

4 August 2026

Dr Caralee McLiesh PSM
Auditor General
Australian National Audit Office
GPO Box 707
Canberra ACT 2601
AUSTRALIA

cc: ag1@anao.gov.au

Dear Dr McLiesh,

I write seeking review of the grant program "Support Plantation Establishment" operated through the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and in particular the grant GA560313 to Tasmania Natural Asset Trust of $8,806,511.43, to support the planting of 9,000 hectares on the property known as *Rushy Lagoon* in Northeast Tasmania.

There are a number of anomalies with this particular grant -

> Grant guidelines require the applicant to demonstrate "the applicants long term access to the land", whilst at both the date of closing applications for Round Three, Batch Six and the date of approval, the proponent was unable to demonstrate this condition as approval for the sale of the property had not been granted or agreed through the Foreign Investment Review Board Process.
>
> Section 4.3 of the guidelines declares the following as Not Eligible to apply for a grant:
> Corporate Commonwealth Entity
> Non-Corporate Commonwealth Entity
> Non-Corporate Statutory Authority
> The Tasmanian National Asset Trust (Registered 31 October 2025) is 49% owned by the Commonwealth through the equity investment of $69 million from the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, effectively the largest individual shareholder of the Trust if public commentary can be relied upon.

It is of note that an Order for Production of Documents passed by the Senate on 30 June 2026 for compliance by 1 July 2026 remains, unusually, without any response.

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The Australian Government granting itself \$8.8 million to support a project that it has already made a \$69 million equity investment in does not align with Section 4.3 of the guidelines.

Section 5.3 of the grant guidelines state "You may apply for funding for your project under multiple Commonwealth grant programs, but if more than one of your applications are successful, you must choose either this grant or the other Commonwealth grant".

\$69 million of taxpayer's money has been invested to support this project – why \$8.8 million more?

One of the greatest difficulties in compiling this reference has been the lack of information supporting either investment decision.

As noted, the government has not complied in any measure with the Notice to Produce Documents passed by the Senate on 30 June 2026, and numerous items of correspondence to the Treasurer, Finance Minister, and Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry seeking information and documents remain unanswered.

I see little choice but to seek your support in examining both the circumstances of Grant ID GA560313 to the Tasmania Natural Asset Trust of \$8.8 million – the largest grant by a factor of multiples from the program, and the management of the entire program.

Yours sincerely,

Senator the Hon. Richard Colbeck.