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# HARNESSING THE POWER OF MASCOTS

A Richmond Football Club and WWF-Australia partnership case study  
by Sports Environment Alliance

# THE POWER OF MASCOTS

**M**ascots symbolise teams, a community, and a culture; but Richmond Football Club, a proud member of the [Sports Environment Alliance](#), is taking their mascot to a new playing field - with tiger conservation. In partnership with WWF-Australia, the [Richmond Football Club's](#) mascot now works to bring awareness to protecting the endangered tiger. Already in its third year, this partnership is helping to increase the global number of wild tigers and serves to inspire other #SEAMembers to engage in similar work.



**IN THE PAST 120 YEARS, THE WORLD'S WILD TIGER POPULATION HAS DECREASED BY 95%. LESS THAN 4,000 NOW LIVE IN THE WILD. CONSEQUENTLY, TIGERS HAVE BEEN LABELLED AS ENDANGERED BY THE INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION (IUCN).**

## HIGHLIGHTS

#SEAMember Richmond Football Club has:



Worked with a group of coterie members who have funded a Tiger Patrol Unit in Malaysia



Grown awareness of the WWF '[adopt a tiger](#)' campaign in the sporting community



Partnered with a non-government conservation organisation to provide ongoing support to wild tigers



This partnership is breaking boundaries with what is possible to achieve by engaging with the Australian sporting community and encouraging people to #SEA\_theChange. By engaging in this important work, Richmond Football Club can influence their members, fans, #SEAFamily peers and beyond to follow their lead.



**“The tiger is an iconic animal special to our Club. This partnership has given us the privileged opportunity to raise awareness and ultimately support programs that assist wild tigers to thrive in the wild.”**

**BRENDON GALE,**  
CEO, Richmond Football Club



2021 Richmond Football Club WWF-Australia team photo.

# A BOLD ALLIANCE & A STRONG FIGHT



## The Richmond Football Club / WWF-Australia partnership

The cooperation of the two organisations used the strengths of each to spread the key messages related to the plight of wild tigers. While WWF has international resources and knowledge of the issues, the Richmond Football Club has access to a large and passionate community in Australia. This is a perfect match, like a strong footy team, using the strength of each player to win the game.

A close collaboration between the organisations saw the development of a working timeline, KPIs and attainable goals, resulting in the partnership

becoming normalised into the daily routine of the club and has since provided a space for innovation in tiger conservation efforts.

This partnership is the first of its kind in Australia to promote conservation through a mascot. With no rule book to follow, this sport organisation and NGO partnership relies on trust, clear communication, and determination as they step into new territory. The dedication they have given each other, and the cause has led to an incredibly successful partnership.

# A GREEN PAW

The partnership's impact on conservation



Members of the Tiger Patrol Unit, funded by RFC Coterie members, in Malaysia.



Nick Vlastuin in Madhya Pradesh, India.

## HOW HAS A MASCOT BEEN ABLE TO PROMOTE THIS ACTION?

The mascot's message is an important factor in this project's success story. Mascots can take a large environmental problem and simplify it into one, relatable animal. While tigers are targeted by poachers, their habitat is also under threat from timber extraction, forest clearing, road development, urbanisation and loss of biodiversity. By supporting one animal, an entire ecosystem is also supported, making mascots an effective element of the overall branding strategy. Therefore, by drawing on empathy to engage audiences in complex environmental issues, mascots have the potential to support large awareness campaigns when used effectively.



**POACHERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR A 50% DECREASE IN TIGER NUMBERS. ONE TIGER PATROL UNIT, FULLY FUNDED BY A GROUP OF RICHMOND FOOTBALL CLUB COTERIE MEMBERS, HAS CONTRIBUTED TO NO SNARES HAVING BEEN SPOTTED IN THE AREA RECENTLY.**

To date, the largest achievement of this partnership was the funding of a Tiger Patrol Unit in Belum State Park, Malaysia by a group of the Club's coterie members. This unit is made up of indigenous Orang Asli people from the area and is using local knowledge to remove snares, monitor tiger numbers, and disrupt poaching activity in an area which has seen a 50% decrease in tiger numbers since 2010. With the help of 14 other patrol units, there is hope that the Malayan tiger will rule the jungles once again.

# PLAYING AS A TEAM

## Mobilising the community & raising awareness

The tiger represents strength, power, and a fierceness, which resonates with the Richmond Football Club's membership and fan base, with the initiative reaching over one million digital impressions across the Club's channels.

Richmond Football Club has set up several awareness raising initiatives to support the global commitment to the [TX2 campaign](#) (Tigers Times Two: double global wild tiger numbers by 2022). Support and funding are important in this initiative and having the highest number of members in the AFL, at 105,000 in 2021, Richmond has a strong audience to whom they can promote the cause. This number reflects the club's unique position to communicate environmental issues to a large and engaged audience - through sport. Some of these awareness initiatives have included a 'Junior Tiger Cub' competition, creating several entertaining and informative videos starring players and advertising the ['adopt a tiger'](#) program.



**SINCE 1885 (RICHMOND FOOTBALL CLUB'S FORMATION) THERE HAS BEEN A 95% REDUCTION IN TIGER NUMBERS.**

Richmond fans may recall the two excursions to Sumatra and India with player ambassadors Nick Vlastuin, Jack Graham and Toby Nankervis, with both trips receiving Australian news coverage in 2018 and 2019 respectively. The group learnt about different tiger management strategies, what threatens tiger's lives and caught glimpses of the creatures they are working to protect.

*Richmond players and partnership ambassadors Toby Nankervis and Nick Vlastuin.*



These activities have all supported the essential awareness raising component of conservation, but also created unforgettable memories for those who went. Memories of these enriching opportunities have sparked motivation for those individuals to become spokespeople for the cause in the years since, something many fans have responded to with admiration and high esteem.



**“Our participation in sport provides us with a unique platform to be able to raise awareness of the plight of the majestic, however critically endangered, tiger. In partnership with WWF-Australia, we are able to focus our attention and efforts where it is needed most and where it can make a tangible difference in saving tigers.”**

**AIRLIE JOHNSTON,**  
Senior Partnerships Manager,  
Richmond Football Club

# CHANGE OVER BRIDGES

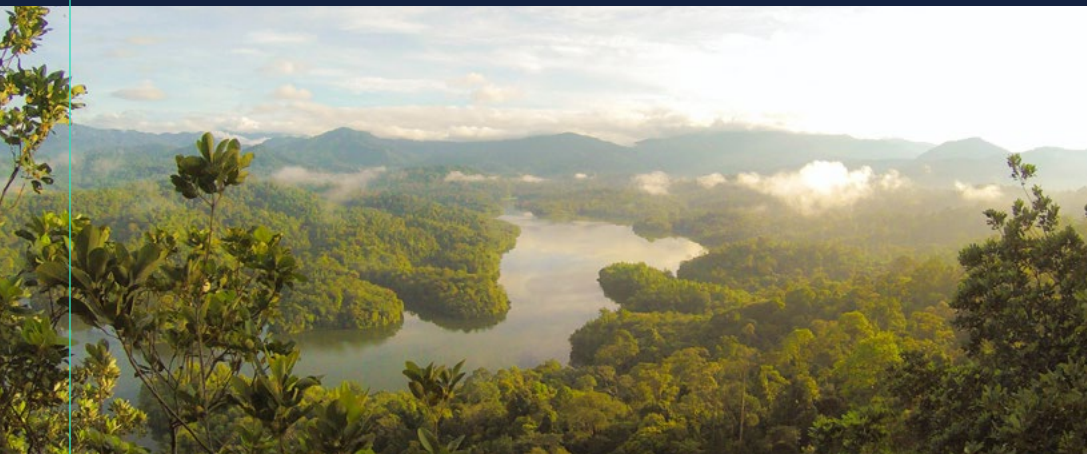
The importance of location in making change.

While tigers may not be a native Australian species, these pre-established community structures and systems have brought the TX2 campaign to the football grounds of the loyal supporter, bridging the gap of thousands of kilometres between Australian football fields and the tiger's landscape. Traditionally, proximity to the problem has enhanced environmental change; in a world fighting the oncoming threat of climate change, environmental destruction and a pandemic, the ability to enact change from far away locations is more important than ever. As shown by Richmond Football Club's actions, it requires collaboration, dedication, and innovation, but it is possible, and it gives us a fighting chance. While such

campaigns have occurred before; save the whales, save the elephants, save the orangutans, and even save the mascots (in the US), never have these campaigns involved an Australian sporting community so closely. This partnership between a sport organisation and NGO is new and unique, breaking barriers in the business community as well as globally.



**FOR THE FIRST TIME IN RECORDED HISTORY, TIGER NUMBERS HAVE BEEN INCREASING SINCE 2010.**



# A BRIGHT HORIZON

Plans for the future

Richmond Football Club is looking forward to continuing its partnership with WWF-Australia. They hope that in the future they will be able to return to Malaysia to see the impact of the [Tiger Patrol Unit](#) (TPU), and continue their support to fund more TPUs in Malaysia and possibly Sumatra, Indonesia. Richmond Football Club is also set to launch an exciting new 'Tiger Conservation Membership', with funding going towards setting up a Tiger Patrol Unit in Malaysia. Both partners are enthusiastic and committed to saving the tigers, knowing there is still a long, but exciting journey ahead.

In the words of Dr Ashley Brooks from WWF Tigers Alive: "This is one of the most unique partnerships for conservation in Australia, and yet the fact that it marries Australia's great passions - sport and nature - shouldn't be such a surprise. The partnership between WWF-Australia and the Richmond Football Club is already strong and will grow into something enduring and impactful both on the ground and within the Australian public. I've no doubt it will become the template for future similar partnerships across the country."

This initiative is bold and brilliant and has had an immediate impact. It is also a great example of how #SEAMembers strive to be ecologically connected

on their {sport & planet} journey, while inspiring others to do the same. Its genius is that it combines pre-existing systems and structures to challenge a critical issue, while its successes demonstrate the potential to lead a new wave of environmental alliances.

*The Richmond Football Club is an official member of the [Sports Environment Alliance](#) and a signatory to the United Nations Sports for Climate Action Initiative.*



Dr Ashley Brooks



*If you want to join SEA's growing {sport & planet} family, visit [www.sportsenvironmentalliance.org](http://www.sportsenvironmentalliance.org).*