

With my comments on the draft strategy, I am coming from a perspective of volunteering as a wildlife carer, working as a vet nurse and as working as a manager for wildlife hospitals. I also have extensive experience in volunteer management and fundraising. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I have had a lot of great experiences volunteering with [REDACTED] yet I have seen the struggle wildlife care volunteers do go through with the current systems so I am excited to see OEH come in to implement the strategy. I am sure you may have already consider many of my suggestions/points below yet I hope some of the constructive criticism of the current system can still be of assistance. Please contact me for any further information.

NSW Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy Document

P6. Recruitment and Retention of Volunteers

- I believe burnout happens because many people think no one else will step up to rescue or take on an animal. Having more volunteers would address this issue. In the groups, the leaders of the groups will scramble to ensure the tasks in front of them is taken care of and not take time to plan out what activity may be for the greater good of the organisation. I hope to see focus in the strategy on helping these leaders take a step back from animal action and focus on volunteer management. Not just teaching them how to manage volunteers, but also stressing the importance of delegating time to help the sector grow.
- I see an ever reoccurring issue with having most of the leaders in care groups are animal people and not 'people people' so maybe not best suited for a role of managing people/volunteer. Some species coordinators would tell you their selves that are not be keen on managing people and instead are more keen on managing cases. I would like to suggest you keep the species coordinators as people managing the care/reporting YET require a volunteer coordinator role to be designated by each group [REDACTED] [REDACTED] – someone who is more people orientated and can deal with the bigger picture issues and not necessarily animal care issues. This person can do check ins with volunteers, recruit new volunteers, ensure there is individual recognition being done and be a friendlier face for new volunteers. It is nice for volunteers to have that someone local to speak with about mental issues or personal conflicts they are dealing with. The volunteer coordinators can be nominated by OEH (through application process) & report directly to OEH & charities' head office. It would be a great way to monitor the culture of the groups without interference of non-people persons who have just been there the longest and ended up in certain roles. I would like to see this role as paid personally to ensure professionalism and bring a higher standard of expectation/representation to the sector – but not sure if that is realistic at these stages. This could address a lot of the 'issues' mentioned in the strategy.
- Volunteer Training costs and scheduled times has an impact on demographics of volunteers. It could be constructive to have training NOT only offered on the weekends. All [REDACTED] [REDACTED] are on the weekends [REDACTED] makes it hard for people who do shift work to attend. This also makes it difficult to recruit people who might be able to help rescue on week days (which is when we struggle the most to find rescuers).

P6. Lack of Funds

- Can the strategy help groups come up with ways to ensure funds are distributed to assist the majority of members. Certain members get reimbursed for things when others don't which causes conflicts within groups. Coming up with a proposed financial plan (if funds are increased) that will result in encourage volunteers to stick with volunteering would be a great start.
- I could see value in having less care groups so there is less competition with funding. This also means less duplicated efforts – admin, website, data management, recruitment, etc.
- Operating in two different areas of NSW I have found different care groups have to cover different expenses from vets. In some areas, carers pay for full expenses minus staff time where as others vet may cover full cost of meds/treatment. Keep that in consideration when addressing vets and or allocating funds.

P7. 64% said volunteering has a positive effect on their mental health

- I think 64% is too high. It seems as if most people start off enthusiastic but then it soon turns into an obligation to rescue/rehab since no one else is doing it (they feel). This becomes exhausting physically and mentally. The lack of positive reinforcement and recognition one gets from group leaders is extremely disappointing – I have heard this from multiple carers throughout my experiences. When you are dealing with animal deaths constantly you need positive leaders to ensure the culture of the group stays positive and motivated. I think these are internal issue of the care groups since I think each charity should be responsible for giving recognition to their volunteers (not really OEH's responsibility). However, there should be a strong intervention of OEH on this matter –continuous volunteer management assistance from OEH even after 3 year time period is over?
- Working on a different wildlife animal rescue program in Australia we had an overabundance of applicants for volunteers due to the recruiting team – so many interested parties that we had to turn people away. This makes me question why there was a lack of volunteers signing up for [REDACTED]. There is a lot of psychological work that goes into recruiting and retaining volunteers. I don't see this as something that every group or supervisor will actually be able to learn from any form of accreditation – I can see it improving their skills potentially but it won't give them the skills nor the personality to really make a large impact on the sector ---- can you hire someone on specifically to help with care network recruitment for the whole state or per area? There is so much potential to solve so many issue mentioned in the strategy by purely having more volunteers involved.

P9. Table

- Improve Standard of Governance
 - o I know I have mentioned paid volunteer coordinating roles but has there been any consideration in putting paid care group management roles in each region of the state that could help address many of the strategy's desired actions? – this would allow more groups to have someone dedicated to tap into funding sources, gain local support, do education, ensure community was aware of wildlife care groups efforts, recruit more volunteers, manage volunteers, ensure positive work culture and ensure volunteers are get recognition. If these roles were funded initially by a

strategy like yours, I would find they could be eventually financially self-sustaining via the programs they would set up. For success, this would not be an 'animal care role' but the person would have to be extremely familiar with the sector. [REDACTED]

P. 10 The recruitment and retention of home-based carers is likely to be challenged in the medium to long-term by changing social demographics. Where possible, more centrally-based wildlife rehabilitation facilities should be encouraged and integrated within the current NSW model.

- It would be great to have more resources put into the idea of building centrally-based centres. Once up and running I believe they can be financially self-sustaining. Having a base would allow for more community involvement (education/volunteering) and more funding programs to be developed. I am currently writing a plan for a start up in Byron and able to help other groups interested in similar endeavours in different areas.

P12. Helping new leaders adjust to their roles

- I would like to see more regulations/qualifications put in place for species coordinator roles. I found some people fell into these roles since they were just active at that time and no one else would do so. Some of these people may have only had experience with this species for a few months – this is a concern that these people are giving other newbies advice on animal care. If volunteers were actually required to record how many hours they have done as carers, I would like to see a minimum experience required for people whom take on these roles for ALL species or some sort of regulation that is stricter than current system. (I am not sure if this rule already exists in some groups?)

P13. Develop strategies that increase volunteer participation in the sector including opportunities for participants from a wider demographic group.

- Our demographic in wildlife care groups is different from demographics seen in other volunteer groups because of the unique nature of the tasks at hand with home care. This means our target audience for recruitment might be extremely different than survey results from 'general volunteers in Australia.' I find it odd to be the comparison and something to strive for. I believe consulting with people who specialise in Animal Volunteer Management will be key in the success of this initiative. Caring for animals in your home requires the right schedule and fitting home base. Not many people in the younger demographics are going to have a house that would allow animal care activities. A house with small children may not be suited for potentially dangerous animals. Targeting the right audience for the right task will be your key at getting more engaged volunteers. We would not want carers that are young and busy and not in animal friendly housing to house animals at their home. However, they would be great to do ONLY rescues. The awareness that there are a lots of different ways to get involved in these wildlife groups is something that many community members are not aware of – they don't realise admin work can be just as much a contribution as caring for an animal. Can we 'market' the volunteer positions differently? Right now it seems like they are a blanket recruitment for 'animal care/rescue volunteers.' It would be effective to recruit for different positions within the organisations (e.g. rescue volunteers, data entry volunteers).

- To get younger people involved, I believe the centralised centers will be the key. The centers allow for people of any age to get involved at an external location regardless of their home life or financial situation. Assisting these places with their volunteer program might be beneficial for this initiative.
- I know people who are younger (18-40) that are on disabilities pension, how can we get them involved? They can't afford the food or enclosures, but they have the time and heart.

P14. Mentors and species coordinator support

- I personally have not seen the current mentor program through [REDACTED] work well and am excited to hear it will be adjusted. Most volunteers are unconfident after initial training and it seems they either shy away from taking on animals of their own and we lose them – or they are experimenting on their first few cases they get in. I would like to see mentors give hands on training outside of the courses and offer volunteers to come to their home for training. Only people wanting to take on mentoring should be designated as I have seen people disinterested fail people. Again it may come back to the mentor being too busy to think about big picture and instead just keeps focus on the animals in front of them. Can mentors be required to be assigned to each new volunteer and have reviews, check ins and training that is required? Maybe it already is but not implemented? Random surveys of new volunteers might assist with ensuring these steps are being taken.
- In another place I lived, the mentoring method was treated similar to how people get their drivers licence here in Australia ('L' platers have to drive with someone coaching them). You had to log XXX amount of hours volunteering with a licenced rehabilitator in order to qualify to get your wildlife rehab licence. This way people went into caring confident and full of knowledge. I valued this learning system and went through it myself.

P15. Wildlife care training for vets and vet nurses

- I would like to see the training put together for vets and nurses to be accredited for their further learning requirement (if possible). If offered for FREE it would encourage vets and nurses to take part. There are some vets/nurses that would be enthusiastic about learning about how to deal with wildlife BUT there are the majority who wont put the time into unless it has a benefit to them in more than just an educational way. There are courses out there available for vets to take at the moment and have been offered for free in the past but I found these to be ridiculously underutilised.
- I would like to see a resource center that is for vets which contains quick reference items that stay updated such as drug dosages per species, suggested treatment plans for common cases (birds caught by cat), vet training videos (intubate koalas), aesthetic details per species, what injuries on birds should result in euthanasia – maybe quick reference sheets they can print? Hopefully these things are already on the agenda 😊
- Ensure vets actually get the details about the resource center. Vets get so many emails it might be discarded if info about the new resources are just emailed to the masses. Would recommend having care groups follow up with individual vets to ensure all reviewed/received info.

P15. Updated triage and treatment protocols

- This is a great initiative. If it will be an online resource center, please ensure it is easy to navigate (good search bar or quick reference tiles or species navigation route). When you are sitting with a patient, the last thing you wish to do is comb through heaps of documents. I do hope there are lots of quick reference sheets. So many groups are so busy tending to animals, they forget to research what methods/research has surfaced since they have started rehabbing so this will be phenomenal. Plus it is hard to convince the group of taking on new findings even if many other care groups are doing it. I hope all your findings will be based on research and fact. I hope the strategy will designate someone to keep these resources up to date with new findings and present them to each group as they arise (somewhat like the Koala Hub who sends out newsletters to subscribers so they can read about the latest news with koala research/care).

P16. Streamline reporting and improved access to data

- I'd like to comment on data I feel goes missing with the home care system set up. I think some carers would be excited to have the opportunity to report on certain things if asked. Can there be a place in the resource portal that tells us what information you are interested in collecting? Or what we are required to collect per species? For example, we found a very fresh dead koala and we were told to toss it in the trash. I was confused that we didn't collect any information from it (besides its location) before disposing of the body. Certain information on sensitive species could potentially be a beneficial for the overall health of the species and I believe that our care networks would be willing to help with this if asked/directed.

P18. A single wildlife rescue number

- I think the one number for wildlife rescues is GREAT and needed. Please don't set it up like [REDACTED] Phone system. [REDACTED] phones are known for keeping people on hold for long periods of time – long switch board questions also turn the public off and they end up just hanging up. We often see reports on facebook about a person who tried to report an animal but couldn't get through (frequent issue). After hour reporting is also impossible for the [REDACTED] (unsure of other areas) and many animals go unreported because of it. Hope there will be a 24/7 phone line which I would hope would be doable if phone efforts were combined by all groups.