

Gary Flaws Submission

Survey Name:	Draft NSW Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy: Public consultation
Submitted On:	18/04/2019 9:58:36 PM

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in response to the above public consultation into the Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector.

I have been involved in the rescue and care of wildlife in NSW and elsewhere for many years. I am very pleased to see the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage take an interest in improving the way that it can support this sector. (I'll leave my concerns about the devastation of habitat and the clearing laws in this state for another day). When you consider the amount of time and resources put in by individuals and groups, it is a significant but largely unseen part of the economy and the community.

One thing that has concerned me for a long time is the absence of serious veterinary support, other than some lone individuals. Many people are under the impression that veterinarians are generally kind and compassionate and injured wildlife passed on to them would be properly treated but it is frighteningly too often the opposite. My experience is that the majority of animals handed to veterinarians are simply euthanised without proper care or attempt at rehabilitation. Then there are many cases where veterinarians, due to the insistence of carers or members of the public, do 'treat' an animal, but again too often the animal is returned without any proper examination or basic first aid, no pain relief, and where treatment has been attempted, it has been a poor quality job that no paying pet owner would put up with.

As such, I would be very concerned if the veterinarian community as a whole was put in charge or had a strong influence on any strategy as a whole, they have so far failed to meet a proper standard for humane treatment.

Having said that, the wildlife carer community is desperate for proper veterinary support. They cannot diagnose and assess patients (even though some, foolishly, may think otherwise) nor provide proper treatment without skilled veterinary advice. This is where the government can assist, by providing a mechanism to ensure veterinarians do their job properly and the carers are supported and therefore not tempted to take matters into their own hands.

Another issue is avoiding red tape. Most carers are individuals or part of poorly financed groups and are not able to spend what little time they have left on paperwork. It would be a terrible tragedy if the government, with the intention of improving things, created a situation where carers gave up, good organisations folded, good people continued under the radar 'illegally', and groups with poor track records could flourish because they put profit ahead of care. Any reform needs to cater for those who, under other laws, would not need insurance or incorporation, simply to provide a tick box in a column in a database.

Overall, this is an overdue review but one that could go horribly wrong. In my opinion, the only veterinarian who has consistently provided proper care for wildlife is Dr Howard Ralph from Southern Cross Wildlife Care. Carers travel hundreds of kilometres to see him and his team as they know their animals will be given full assessment and treatment. Too often this involves trying to fix the damage done by other veterinarians who have given inadequate treatment. If there was any training to be given to veterinarians, Dr Ralph should be part of it as he sees the full spectrum of issues and species and where gaps exist. I have attended training he has given in the past and learnt a hell of a lot and it also gave me confidence to continue being a wildlife carer. More attention should also be

given to veterinary students who obviously finish their studies with little understanding of how wildlife can be rehabilitated.

The fundamental issue is simple – animals are being rescued every day, people wish to help them, people are prepared to spend considerable time and money doing so, proper veterinary care can save lives, and proper first response and follow up care with wildlife carers who have veterinary support can complete the rehabilitation of a majority of patients. The NSW government has an important role in bringing all the components into a workable strategy that is not a repeat of the current flawed system.

Yours sincerely,
Gary Flaws