

Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy
National Parks & Wildlife Service
Biodiversity & Wildlife Unit (level 3)
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Dear Wildlife Rehabilitation Strategy Team

Re: NSW Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy – Consultation Draft

I apologise for submitting these few comments on the Strategy slightly past the deadline and trust you will still give them your consideration.

First, I would like to sincerely congratulate the Team on its open and collaborative approach to the Strategy's development and on its format, which manages to present useful but little-known information about the sector while outlining its future direction.

Having worked as a volunteer wildlife carer and manager over these past 20 years I have no doubt that the Strategy and its underpinning review and other documentation will leverage better understanding and recognition of our contribution to the welfare and conservation of NSW's wildlife and their habitats.

I am heartened by the Strategy's vision and guiding principles and I enthusiastically support, by and large, its focus and planned actions, so I trust that the few comments below will be taken in the spirit in which they are offered.

Volunteer support and culture

Improved standards of governance: working with the sector to adopt *Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement* is certainly welcomed but why stop there? In my opinion Volunteering Australia is too often constrained by its human services focus so perhaps you would also work with the sector to broaden Volunteering Australia's understanding of the full gamut of volunteering in Australia?

Facilitating a unified peak body and new strategic agenda; whether or not WIRES can be persuaded to return to the NSW Wildlife Council (and I sincerely hope they can), I believe that to fulfil the strategic function so vital to the sector a broad advisory board would be of benefit. In the very early days of the NSW Wildlife Council, which of course included WIRES, various models including one with a similar membership to the proposed advisory board, were put forward for consideration before the present one was adopted.

We will also seek to secure a patron to help advocate and promote the services of the sector: undoubtedly the sector needs champions but whether a single patron could do the job effectively may be problematic.

Knowledge and information access

We will explore opportunities with research institutions and wildlife rehabilitation groups to undertake post-release monitoring...: Friends of the Koala is one of only two groups I am aware of in NSW that has instigated post-release monitoring of koalas. Our published study of 12 animals between September 2008 and January 2011 was dependent on volunteer trackers and limited to urban Lismore. These days tracking options have expanded but may be more expensive – we'd love to monitor animals released in a variety of areas across the Northern Rivers and will soon be submitting a funding application which we trust will be favourably considered.

Community awareness and recognition

A single wildlife rescue number: You will be well aware of my grave concerns regarding this action because I have voiced them on many occasions. Basically, the window for potential koala recovery is usually very tight and we have a system in place for koala rescue across the Northern Rivers that works well. I appreciate that a single rescue number may be an improvement in some parts of the State but I cannot see it improving service in the Northern Rivers. I can only trust that the principle of 'co-design and collaborative implementation' will be observed as promised to ensure that our present standard is not eroded.

In conclusion then, the intentions spelt out in the Consultation Draft are exciting and, in my view generally augur well for the sector's future. I thank the Team for its confidence in the sector and in the folk who dedicate so much of their lives working for the welfare of individual animals and for the conservation of our precious wildlife. I look forward to the final Strategy's release and to moving on with implementation.

May I also suggest that the finalised Strategy be made available in hard copy for distribution to all members of the NSW parliament, those agencies that have an interest in the sector including the National Parks & Wildlife Service, major media outlets and interested commentators, submission writers, as well as to rehabilitation groups to be used as a tool for communicating to a broader audience the important contribution that the sector makes to the Government's conservation and natural resources management objectives.

Yours sincerely

Lorraine Vass
14 April 2019

[Past President & Patron,
Friends of the Koala, Inc.
Australian Wildlife Society's
Serventy Conservation Award
Recipient, 2018]