

Attn: npws.bwt@environment.nsw.gov.au

12 April 2019

RE: Submission to the NSW Volunteer Wildlife and Rehabilitation Strategy

This is a submission to the NSW Government Office of Environment and Heritage in response to the publication and call for consultation on the following four documents which were published on line on in Mar 2019:

NSW Wildlife volunteer Sector Draft Strategy

A Review of the Wildlife Sector

Accreditation Arrangements

Audit of 2016 outcomes.

Introduction

Well done to the staff which have spent the time to articulate the detail of what is a hidden and underground sector that rarely gets recognition and acknowledgment. The intertwined relationship between the services provided by the volunteers of this Wildlife and Rehabilitation sector and the general business of government are rarely given much air time. The depth and extent of work and the difference that thousands of volunteer, who are spending thousands of dollars, doing has not had such a well expressed, factual basis before now. So thankyou specifically to Peter Strathis and Ron Haering and any others behind the scenes. Well done. It means a lot to have this information available.

Two Green Threads is a registered not for profit specifically aimed at providing support to the carers of the Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector which is being launched in May 2019. It is in this context that these documents have been reviewed and the consultation comments below are made. That is, the documents and proposed actions and outcomes have been viewed with a lens of how they will provide value and assistance to the actual people involved in this sector who are working for the best outcomes for native wildlife.

Balance on Tangible Volunteer Assistance

Two Green Threads theory of change is that if we build a supportive community of resilient mental and physical individuals then we can care for and make a difference to the welfare and existence of our native animals for longer. It is recognised that effective governance and structures, policies and procedures make for a stable environment with which people within a community group can gain clear direction, and can influence the culture and leadership of an organisation. There is also a need though given the type of community service that wildlife rehabilitators undertake, to also ensure there is an equal balance and investment in the people or social capital side of being part of such a community service. Any comments provided herein are not about arguing that it's about governance and paperwork actions OR people actions, this is about working out tangible actions and creating a strategy which can support and respect both. At the moment the documents are weaker on tangible practical actions which target social capital investment and there is a strong focus on governance and procedures.

To that end then the Focus Area of ‘Volunteer Support and Role’ within the Draft Strategy document could have more depth on practical aspects that would provide tangible value adding meaningful difference to a wildlife carer and lessening the potential negative impacts of this volunteer service. More actions which recognise the priority of this focus area as an important enabler to respond to the various statistics which emerged from the review of the sector (mental and physical health impacts, need for stronger leadership, greater and clearer communications etc).

<u>Analysis of Planned Action under OEH Volunteer Wildlife Rehab Sector Draft Strategy</u>		
Focus Area	Planned Actions	Capacity of Action to have an early impact/help to an individual or wildlife group
		Orange: Indirect impact which may or may not eventuate
		Green: Direct impact and difference within short term which can greatly impact on the satisfaction and wellbeing of an individual or group
Volunteer Support and culture	Improve standards of governance	Orange
	Help new leaders adjust to their role	Green
	Attract younger participants to the sector	Orange
	Facilitate a unified peak body and new strategic agenda	Orange
	Improve the sector's access to funding	Green
Standards of care and training	Standard induction and specialised species training for volunteers	Green
	Enhance mentor and species coordinator support	Green
	Wildlife care training for vets and vet nurses	Green
	Update triage and treatment protocols	Green
	Create service provider access to standard compliance assessment tools and continue random audits	Orange
Knowledge and information access	Streamline reporting and improve access to data	Orange
	Connect volunteers to other professional networks	Orange
	Conduct post-release monitoring of rehabilitated animals	Orange
Community awareness and recognition	Introduce a single wildlife rescue number	Orange
	Guide community education about wildlife	Orange
	Promote awareness about volunteer participation in wildlife rehabilitation	Orange
Government regulation and support	Introduce a system of accreditation for volunteer wildlife rehabilitation organisations	Orange
	Implement a more flexible policy framework	Orange
	Provide ongoing strategic services	Orange
		6 Green and 13 Orange

Recognising Volunteer Capacity

The three points espoused in the Vision statement of the Draft Strategy document are reasonable but it is suggested that the second point needs additional words (added in green) so it reads:

Services delivered to the community are undertaken in accordance with agreed standards which respect volunteers capacity.

This suggestion is in line with the problem that much of the documents, and especially reflected in the accreditation arrangements, aren't picking up on the disparate nature of

this sector and the differences that this then drives. So the easiest example of this is that there can be one wildlife group covering 10,000sqkms with 200 members and there can be another group covering 100,000sq kms with 20 members. The assumption is that some assistance to wildlife is better than none and its an equally reasonable assumption that much greater assistance can be provided where the distance covered is smaller and the numbers of volunteers are higher.

The accreditation arrangements should respect emerging versus established groups and especially those smaller ones with less volunteers covering vast distances. Assistance and a greater level of group support for the smaller capacity groups should be a principle. Service capacity as the accreditation documents states it, should reflect this geographical and inherent group challenge rather than to paint one brush across the state. Especially so when a smaller group, may not be a reflection of a poor attraction and retention strategy but instead the very size of the area and the population base from which to draw volunteers. Whilst admiring the benefits and focus on consistency there needs to be some greater finessing applied which can account for the drivers for why groups may need differing shades of actions, investment and focus.

A framework for Prioritising and Reviewing the Planned Actions

In reviewing the planned actions contained with the Draft Strategy a framework as follows was used:

What actions would have the biggest impact on an individual or a group?

What actions would have the biggest impact on the quality and depth of care and rescue services for native wildlife?

What actions would require a medium to large amount of volunteer time effort to bring about?

On that basis there are a number of actions that stand out that don't fall within the sweet spot of 'better for people' + 'better for animals' + 'minimum effort to have happen'. The adoption of the National Volunteering Standards does not rate highly on these three frameworks criteria and there should be greater consideration as to what tangible benefit this might have at the workload cost it comes with. It also depends on the nature of the word 'adopt' in relation to these standards and what is meant by that. For example whether set as a helpful document for committees versus compliance and audit on meeting the standards.

The investment in research on post release outcomes comes out reasonably on only of the three framework criteria, animals but that's only if there is the capacity to link the post release monitoring outcomes to actual factors that were missed or could be improved whilst in rehab. Using the word 'success' for release needs to applied with care. If an animal is predated upon within 3 months of release is this the natural cycle of nature or somehow a measure of success of release? The issue that is completely missed/forgotten in the identification and suggestion of this post release monitoring planned action is the very large funnel which exists at the start of the wildlife rescue cycle. That is, if there was at least equal if not greater investment into research as to why the wildlife is coming into

care and what actions might lessen and prevent this then both the animals and people are assisted before there is a need to evaluate the release.

The central phone number ranks weak against all three framework criteria especially in light of the extensive basis of statistics that were provided in the Review documents from OEH which contained no evidence for there to be a problem with the call in, call redirect or timeliness of response to wildlife calls as a result of where the call came from. Recognising the optics looks good for simple communication to have one number there is a very high risk that a poorly planned project will substantially impact the quality, timeliness and community ease of service with high negative consequences on the people and wildlife within this sector.

It may be useful to adopt this three question framework in working out post the release of the final Strategy and its Planned Actions, the priority of which actions or indeed new ones to focus on in the short term.

Conclusion

Thankyou for the work by OEH done to date but it seems I have run out of time as a volunteer juggling multiple things, to continue to offer thoughts which help frame the final Strategy and planned actions for this sector. I am sure to wish I had said much more as I reach the deadline for submission and press send on this. I am happy to offer to continue any dialogue which can only better the outcomes for the amazing volunteers of this sector and the native wildlife that we are seeking to assist.

Thankyou

Suzy Nethercott-Watson


Founder Two Green Threads Ltd