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Whilst I sent you the Strategy with my comments inserted I think on reflection I should provide you with a formal submission. As a general comment, the focus of the strategy and the planned actions are welcome. However the following are some proposed actions/outcomes that are of concern.

### **Volunteer support and Culture**

- Facilitating a unified peak body and new strategic agenda. This focus area seems fine. Our preference would be to have one body representing wildlife carers in NSW, but if WIRES and NWC aren't prepared to be unified then an advisory board might well be the way to go. Issues of membership of such a body should be subject to further discussion if an advisory board is the final outcome.
- Developing strategies that increase volunteer participation in the sector including opportunities for participation from a wider demographic group. The reality of volunteering outside the N,S,W geographic areas is that most volunteers are women and from age groups that can make the time to commit to volunteering. We have no difficulty with increased diversity in regard to most categories but the lack of public transport, combined with the need to put food on the table, care for either dependent children or ageing parents or relatives, plus competing opportunities for volunteering that doesn't require as much physical work make looking for younger volunteers challenging. We have some younger volunteers, particularly more recently, and whilst some are students at SCU who come and go depending on their study, more recently we've had new volunteers who are younger and there appears to be an increase in males volunteering. We think our community education campaigns, and particularly workshops under our Koala Watch project, is at least partially responsible for that.
- Promoting more efficient management of wildlife rehabilitation organisations' fiscal and volunteer services. We're in the process of doing this ourselves and it will be challenging for most relatively small groups. For those with employed staff it is even more onerous so assistance here is welcomed.
- Introducing a volunteer wildlife rehabilitator of the year award. Whilst it seems that many organisations do have individual awards, from my perspective awards based on an individual seem like a good idea but run into the problem that rewarding one amongst many leaves a bad taste in the mouths of others who may see themselves as just as worthy. We have an awards system and people have different perspectives on it, with some saying that having been thanked is the only reward they would like but others seeming to appreciate the award, but these are based on years of service and therefore are not competitive.
- Improving the sector's access to funding. This is essential if the standard of service provided by wildlife organisations is to be improved – and it needs to be, particularly in an environment when large, staffs organisations are competing for the very scarce donation \$s as they have much wider networks and substantial resources.
- Developing joint applications from wildlife rehabilitation providers that seek to deliver benefits at a regional scale. We support a regional approach to applications, and this approach has worked well for SOS projects such as the NE Hinterland regional koala project in the Northern Rivers but this may be difficult in some areas of the State.
- We will also seek to secure a patron to help advocate and promote the services of the sector. Wonder whether a Patron for the whole wildlife sector is feasible, as the prime responsibilities of a Patron are to fundraise and network. Would such a Patron be able to take all that on for all wildlife species, and who would determine which wildlife to promote?

### **Standards of care and training**

In general, we support the outcomes in regard to standards of care and training but see the following:

- Mentors and species coordinator support: A great idea. I'm assuming informal mentor groups would be encompassed under this outcome and definitely assistance with training in regard to teamwork and communication is highly desirable.

### **Promoting stronger compliance**

- We will develop and make available to the sector standard templates: That's a good outcome but please also do remember that unlike paid employees many volunteers are time and cash poor and often focused on the practical work of the organisation. The idea of templates is positive, but bear in mind that in regional areas away from N, S and W and the limited time many volunteers have even for their volunteering work, carrying out audits is challenging, and maintaining a record of compliance may see some leaving the sector.

### **Knowledge and information access**

Most of the outcomes in this focus area are supported with several presenting some concerns - see comments below.

- Post-release monitoring: This has been a wish of ours for years and we were involved in a study with Ross Goldingay from SCU some years ago. However the cost is significant no matter what type of monitoring is carried out e.g. scats, drones, sound monitors. We'll be interested to see the research proposals that come from the Koala sector).

### **Community awareness and recognition**

Generally happy with the content in regard to outcomes except for the vexed issue of a single wildlife rescue number.

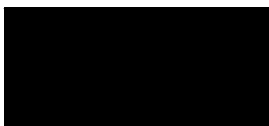
- We understand that the Northern Rivers is going to present complexities for the algorithms, but our concerns are that Peter Stathis said at the last NWC meeting this was only for people travelling through areas or who don't know the appropriate rescue group (and we have had enough calls on our rescue hotline re various birds, snakes and even turtles to agree that this is important). However, there are two issues that are concerning. The first is that in this proposal the caller will not be speaking to a person but pushing buttons, and a series of them as we understand the system. This is likely to frustrate some people who may give up and try to locate local Rescue phones, causing a delay which can have fatal outcomes for some animals. The proposal for 'standard road signage' rings bells of alarm. We have signage on highways and main roads with our Rescue Hotline number and we've invested heavily in promoting that over the years. Either the intention is to have only the proposed Rescue number on any highways – and it seems to us that's the intent – or having different numbers has the potential to confuse the public as they will see various signs for particular species such as ours that they will pass on the major highways. A single Rescue number, presumably paid for by the government, may well be attractive for some groups, particularly given Telstra's removal of the free call-forwarding service that was very easy to use. This has resulted in some wildlife groups now having to pay a substantial amount each month to NBN, however several groups up here have gone to a VOIP service through MyNetFone, which works well and we are only charged for calls made from the Rescue Phone (which we don't do). Our concern is that our Rescue Hotline works well and has for many years. It is staffed 24/7 every day and the proposed single Rescue line has the potential to make things worse for our koalas, not better.

### **Government support and regulation**

We generally agree with the outcomes and support accreditation but this is a big ask for small wildlife organisations.

As I said at the beginning, we support the intention and most of the outcomes in the strategy. Working through concerns and having input into consequential redrafts would be appreciated.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Roslyn Irwin**  
**President**

12 April, 2019