



Port Stephens Koalas

Port Stephens Koala & Wildlife Preservation Society Ltd

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Care. Education. Research.

Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy
National Parks and Wildlife Service
Biodiversity and Wildlife Unit

17 April 2019

Re: **NSW Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Strategy**

Dear sir/madam,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to be able to respond to the many hours of effort by OEH staff in order to publish these 4 documents. We appreciate the dedication of OEH staff and their ongoing lateral thinking and being open to suggestions and information over the last few years. It does feel as though we are more effectively partnering in the State's responsibility towards conserving threatened species these days.

No doubt you've heard from other wildlife groups that volunteer wildlife rehabilitation organisations are stretched to the limit in trying to achieve our aims. That's certainly true of Port Stephens Koalas (PSK), and perhaps explains the style of this submission. Please accept that this letter is a kind of draft response. I don't have the time to address each component of your documents as if this were a thesis. There is always so much to do! However, we must honour your effort with a response.

The Accreditation Document overall looks reasonable and is well set out. The Checklist makes it quite clear what will be required. I'm proud to say that it won't take much tweaking for PSK to meet all these requirements, even though some changes will be required and will take some time to implement.

We are already well advanced in our aim of "**augmenting home-based care with enclosures built by wildlife rehabilitation providers on government or corporate owned land**", so we naturally support this statement. In our case we do so very much appreciate the \$3million grant through the NSW Koala Strategy to get us underway. It is an enormous task, but one we are capable of achieving. I believe you are aware of our progress, since OEH staff including Peter Stathis, Penny Vella, Ron Haering, Hannah Ryan and Shona Lorigan visited last week (12/4/19), so I will not go into further detail.

We have already provided copies of our **training manuals** for volunteers to Shona Lorigan, and we are now working on the final volumes 6 and 7 which we will send to Shona and Hannah when they're ready. The overview document is in Appendix 1 for your reference. We have chosen to have different levels of Carer qualifications, which amount to a formal mentoring system.

There is mention that wildlife organisations should adopt the **Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer involvement (NSVI) standards**. I am not familiar with these standards, nor am I aware whether they make a good fit with wildlife rehabilitation. However we have a growing number of volunteers, and we wish to treat them with respect, courtesy and in every way possible build up their knowledge of koala rehabilitation to support them in helping our aims even more than they initially agree to do. Many are not interested in caring for the animals for a variety of reasons (family commitments, illness, disease or even being allergic to ticks is an issue), but people are generally willing to support us raise donations or promote PSK by selling raffle tickets, on social media, or another of a myriad of ways that our volunteers help eg washing our rescue vehicles, or doing the shopping for us, planting trees, watering and weeding the plantation, etc. Perhaps only one third of PSK volunteers are involved in the 'direct' care of koalas ie Carers, Rescuers and Leafers. We don't want to make the requirements on people wanting to help raise funds too strict. I would need to know more about NSVI before I could comment properly. We are wary about having practices that are too demanding at an individual level for volunteers, because our aim is to involve more volunteers and keep them, not reduce the number of people interested in volunteering.

PSK totally agrees that a **unified peak body** is vital for the sector into the future. NWC has been providing awesome networking opportunities and has been very effective in producing Codes of Practice, but the split in the sector is obvious, unfortunate and needs to be remedied. New blood including others integral to the sector such as OEH staff will be vital to the group achieving more.

PSK totally supports that **Vets** supporting wildlife rehabilitation should be funded in recognition of their work. We have recently been told that our vet bill will be rising. Noahs Ark have calculated that we have been gifted \$48,000 worth of free vet care over just the last 18 months, so we will need to pay more. As to how the vets may be compensated, it would be a more difficult question to answer. Whatever that is, I do hope that the vets will realise they are receiving the funds because of their support for the local wildlife rehabilitation organisation – that the funds are not seen as something automatically provided to all vets by the government. We need vets to support us in our work for the best possible standard of care and successful rehabilitation to be achieved, and we need a good relationship with vets for that to happen.

Knowledge and information access. The PSK board determined at its last Board meeting on 10 April to spend \$5,000 on a new web-based records system. It will build upon the FAWNA system but be altered to suit our own data set and requirements. It will also allow live sightings by the public to be captured and be able to be accessed using a mobile phone. We have kept excellent records and intend to do even better. We understand how crucial data can be for habitat conservation.

State-wide phone number. We support the idea that a state-wide rescue line may help injured/sick/orphaned wildlife to be rescued sooner, if it's easier for people to know who to contact. Having many groups make this quite difficult – especially for tourists. If the new system enhances, and not hinders the public from reaching us, we support it. This new number must be adequately resourced and be 24x7. The strategy does not address how all the signage will be changed across the state but this would appear to be a mammoth task and should include media coverage. Many of the signs in our area have faded or been damaged, so new signs will be welcome from that point of view.

The PSK board also determined at its last Board meeting to get our own rescue number. Our application is underway, but we believe our number will be **1800 PSKOALAS = 1800 775625**. We hope it will help us respond to rescues more quickly, as we will be able to divert it to the people rostered, and change those rosters fortnightly, or more often if required. The PSK rescue number should make it easier for NATF and WINC who usually pass on koala rescue calls to us to action. They will not need to update their volunteers with our changing roster or need to know who in PSK might know the answer to a miscellaneous enquiry. Of course there will be costs to us in this change, but now that we have a system in place for rostered Rescue Phone Operators (RPOs) it's time for us to have our own number. Hopefully, it will aid in the OEH plans for a state-wide number to direct koala rescue calls directly to us.

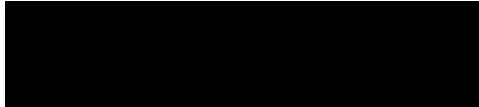
Service Capacity – Our RPO program supports this new strategy requirement. Over the last 6 months we have increased the number of Trainee Rescuers who will provide us with the ongoing ability to respond in the timeframe set. While it will mean we need to log the time of calls we receive and the timeframe it takes us to respond to report this. We are already quick to respond, and meet this 1-2 hour criteria – but, if the distance is great, we may be underway to the rescue, rather than having affected it. Rescues of some koalas that are high in a tree may take days to achieve.

PSK was pleasantly surprised and support the suggestion that up to **20% of a group's members** could reside outside their boundary without a MOU. We already have people volunteering with us who live outside our area. Some of these are members of other groups, and so we are simply working cooperatively (eg with rescuers) but others want to volunteer at the hospital on a rostered basis, or support us from where they live (eg our webmaster lives in Sydney). We welcome this flexibility. A standard or draft OEH MOU might also help groups start to work together more cooperatively. Drafting legal documents is not something that is easily achieved by volunteer organisations.

It will be a huge task (and expense) for OEH to implement the **welcome kit** and ensure that organisations have enough of these on hand to meet their demands, and keep it up to date. It sounds good, but perhaps just some help with what we should cover might be best. It certainly puts volunteers off if they have to do too much reading of rules before they can start being helpful. We think we have struck a good balance with our Active Volunteers induction already. It takes 2 hours which is the maximum time that most people can concentrate and retain most of the information. After this, they know we follow the OEH Code of Practice for Koalas and have policies for volunteers to follow, understand generally what PSK is aiming to do, and have some basic understanding of koala behaviour and have a quick tour of our facility and an explanation of where we are heading, as well as a chance to offer their help in their area of interest.

Port Stephens Koalas aims to provide the world best practice standards of care to sick, injured and orphaned koalas to give them the best opportunity to be returned to the wild, while supporting research and collaboration to preserve their habitat to ensure that future generations may continue to enjoy seeing wildlife in their natural setting. We look forward to achieving that with additional support and recognition from the community and all levels of government.

Yours sincerely,



Carmel Northwood

President

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Phone: 

APPENDIX 1 - PSK TRAINING PROGRAM OVERVIEW – December 2018

Step	Title	Who	Format	Pre-requisite
1	Volunteer Welcome	All	Email	Induction session
The following volumes will be completed by those interested in the relevant areas				
Volume				
1	Active Volunteers	All	PSK and Site Induction: Group – verbal 2 hours	By appointment. Membership and volunteer application. Includes Hospital Site Induction
2	Maintenance	All Hospital volunteers	Written and assessment	Volume 1
3	Leaf Picker	Leafers	Written and assessment	Volume 1
4a	Rescue Phone Operator	RPO's	Written and assessment, training session	Volume 1
4	Rescuer	Rescuers	Written and assessment	Volume 1
5	Support Carer	Trainees	Written and assessment	Volume 1 & 2
6	Carer	Support Carers	Written and assessment	Volume 1, 2 & 5
7	Senior Carer		Experience and good conduct	Volume 1, 2, 3 & 5

Volume	Topics
1	Active Volunteers – Introduction to PSK Legislation and Policy, Overview of PSK Organisational Structure and Roles, Koala Behaviour and Characteristics, Growth of the Koala, Diet, Koala at Risk, Rescue Hotline To Release Zoonotic Diseases, Veterinarian Protocol, PSK, WINC & NATF boundaries, PSK Hospital Rules and Guidelines
2	Maintenance - Koala related activities – cleaning and maintenance, hospital site activities cleaning and maintenance. Includes general guidelines on appropriate methods
3	Leaf Picker- What to expect, what to bring and wear, food trees, leaf collection and storage, safe work practices (extract from existing PSK volume 1 manual plus some amendments and extract from code of Practice for Koalas 2018), PSK Leaf Cutter checklist, PSC letter and Crown Lands Licence extract.
4	Rescuer – rescue process, handling and rescuing, transporting a koala, safe work practices, protocol for rescuing, veterinarian protocol (extract from existing PSK volume 1 manual plus some amendments), PSK, WINC & NATF boundaries, extract from Code of Practice for Koalas 2018.
4a	Rescue Phone Operator – process, Call from NATF/WINC, Call MoP, Decision and Action, Donations and General Enquiries, PSK, WINC & NATF boundaries
5	Support Carer - koala biology and behaviour, behaviour by carers, zoonoses, diet, supplementary feeding, care facilities, yard procedures, record keeping, Health Checks, Transporting a Koala, vet protocol, forms.
6	Carer - Existing PSK Volume 2 training module excluding supp feeds and some other elements now in Support Carer training. Include here cots and cages and need for DNA samples
7	Senior Carer - Work Experience – same as current, hand raising joeys, intensive care