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Queanbeyan Inc

Wildcare

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Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy  
National Parks and Wildlife Service  
Biodiversity and Wildlife Unit  
PO Box 1967  
Hurstville, NSW 1481

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to comment on the NSW Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy. We are deeply appreciative of the time and consideration that has gone into the production of this document and the three supporting documents.

Our comments on the strategy will be provided in accordance with the Strategies "Visions".

**"People who participate in Wildlife Rehabilitation are acknowledged, respected and supported."**

**"Wildlife Rehabilitation is recognised as part of the Governments chain of services for delivery of natural resource management objectives."**

**"Services delivered to the community are undertaken in accordance with agreed standards."**

Wildcare strongly supports a more flexible policy framework as detailed on page 21 of the Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy consultation document.

"A more flexible policy framework The Office of Environment and Heritage Rehabilitation of Protected Fauna Policy has successfully supported the delivery of wildlife rehabilitation in New South Wales. The policy will need to align with the introduction of accreditation and enable providers to have more flexibility in how they operate. To achieve this the Office of Environment and Heritage intends to: • Retain its preference for services to be provided by groups but allow greater flexibility in where members of groups can reside. We will do this by allowing up to 20% of a group's members to reside outside their boundary without requiring a memorandum of understanding with the neighbouring group."

The current restrictions around out of area members negatively impacts Wildcare and the number of members that Wildcare can grant an authority to operate to. Wildlife need every

volunteer possible, to help offset the negative impact that human transport and human development/habitat destruction is having on wildlife each and every day.

I am also a volunteer with the NSW Rural Fire Service. A person can volunteer for any brigade that they want to. For example, a friend of mine who lives in Numeralla, had issues with some members of the Numeralla brigade, so he simply went and joined the Peak View brigade. If the Rural Fire Service had an address based rule, my friend would no longer be a volunteer for the Rural Fire Service. In the Rural Fire Service, your address does not restrict your ability to become a member. In the area I live in, we also have people who live full time in the ACT and just have a holiday property at Peak View. The fact that their address is in the ACT, does not impact them in any way, they can join the NSW Rural Fire Service Peak View brigade no problem at all. I do think that the current OEH policy is too restrictive and does negatively impact on people's ability to volunteer. This is counter productive, as it does reduce the capacity of wildlife rescue groups. I also think it does not cater for the fact that people who live in the ACT, can have a property in NSW that they visit regularly and would be an asset to have as active Wildcare members, with an "Authority to Operate". If we could give them an "Authority to Operate", they could rescue wildlife during travel to and from their NSW property and while they are staying at their NSW property. There are many people who work in the ACT from Monday to Thursday and spend every weekend at their NSW rural property, Wildcare needs these extra hands to help us rescue wildlife in need. Many people who live in the city do not have facilities or time to rehabilitate wildlife but they are fully capable of rescuing wildlife and we need to be able to give these people an "Authority to Operate". Without an "Authority to Operate" Wildcare members would not be covered by our insurance if they got hurt during a rescue. This is a significant issue for Wildcare because the ACT is in the middle of our area.

The Transitional Accreditation Supporting Checklist provides organisations such as ours with a framework to evaluate our current procedures around training, governance, and day to day operations. The criteria within these standards will help us determine whether our members are feeling acknowledged, respected and supported by our group.

However, with limited financial resources, we are frequently unable to provide the level of support we would like. Most current funding opportunities are for targeted projects such as release enclosures, etc, rather than being for day to day expenses. Typically, it is easier for our organisation to fundraise for these targeted items as well, leaving a financial hole around vet expenses, food, medication etc. These are generally the areas where members require help and support, yet members are providing time and resources freely, to support government services, at their own expense.

Recurrent, non-targeted funding is required to enable services to reach their full potential. It would cost the government much less than if they had to pay for the services of wildlife rescue volunteers in full. It would also enable organisations to be better prepared for disasters that are becoming more common due to climate change, such as bushfires and floods which cause large influxes of injured animals associated with these events. It would also reduce the financial pressure on vets, who provide "\$1.8 million worth of free products and services annually."

If recurrent funding is not possible, then better coordinated financial advice and assistance in securing government funding / grants is required.

We would also like more information in relation to the remediation process, if a wildlife rehabilitation service fails to meet the standards necessary for accreditation?

Government also needs to be more aware of the impact changes to regulations have on wildlife rehabilitation groups. For example, the changes to rules surrounding the culling of Eastern Grey Kangaroos has resulted in more juvenile kangaroos coming into care, and more phone calls to rehabilitation groups due to more animals found suffering from gunshot wounds and requiring a wildlife rehabilitation euthanasia volunteer to end the animals suffering. There has been a significant increase in animal cruelty due to the rule change, which allows kangaroos to be shot without the need for each culled kangaroo to be tagged. The process of tagging each kangaroo also made sure that the kangaroo was actually dead! Without tagging, many more kangaroos are being left wounded and not properly checked. This rule change has not only increased our volunteer workload, but it has also caused our members considerable distress to see these badly wounded and suffering animals. These wounded kangaroos are often still mobile and can require multiple car trips, over a number of days, to successfully locate the kangaroo and euthanise it. This greatly increases fuel costs paid for by volunteers. These real animal cruelty, financial and emotional costs, should be included as part of government policy costings prior to policy & regulation changes.

As wildlife rehabilitation groups are at the coalface, dealing 24/7 with the impact our society has on native animals, they are an untapped knowledge base, that could be better used by each level of government federal, state and council, to make more informed decisions relating to both policy and development applications.

Thank you for your consideration,

James Fitzgerald  
President,  
Wildcare Queanbeyan Inc.