



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY
Dr Marisa Paterson MLA (Chair), Ms Jo Clay MLA (Deputy Chair), Ms Leanne Castley MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Environmental Volunteerism in the ACT

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ACT Wildlife
Inquiry into Environmental Volunteerism
The Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity
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LCommitteeECCB@parliament.act.gov.au

“the type and nature of volunteerism in the environment sector in the ACT and the existing or potential benefits and **challenges** they bring to Canberra’s:

- wildlife protection”

Firstly, I must thank the ACT Government for the recent funding of ACT Wildlife which will be used to provide much needed administrative and other support for our volunteers. However, there is still a great unmet need in the area of specialist wildlife veterinary support for injured and diseased wildlife that comes into our care.

Volunteers with ACT Wildlife spend huge amounts of their own time training to rescue and rehabilitate injured and orphaned wildlife. Many of them take on very long term care commitments to ensure the animals in their care are rehabilitated according to the best practice guidelines in the Code of Practice that governs our day to day procedures.

However, we do much of this work relying on the goodwill of local Private Vet practices who provide veterinary care for injured or sick wildlife at little to no cost to ACT Wildlife. All too often that vet care involves the euthanasia of animals whose injuries are not compatible with rehabilitation and release. But also, that euthanasia takes place because those vets are not trained to meet the specific medical needs of our unique wildlife or would need a surgical treatment that takes vets away from their core business, which is their paying customers. And also, due to time pressures on busy veterinarians, these injured animals may wait several hours before a vet can assess them and euthanase or treat them.

Our volunteers are exposed daily to animals in pain and distress, with no way to expedite pain management, let alone have access to diagnostics and treatments.

I will not present data and numbers to support this request. At my previous attendance at the ECCB Committee inquiry on November 11 last year I mentioned this need and I understand that in response to that the following has been recommended;

Recommendation2

22. 2.22 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government explore quantifying the injured and the loss of wildlife in the territory

I will await the results of any inquiry into this issue with interest.

Instead, I will give three brief case studies to demonstrate how this lack of a wildlife vet impacts on our “environmental volunteers”.

Case study 1

One of our carers has been caring for a tiny swamp wallaby joey for about three months. This is 24 hour round the clock care. When he recently became unwell she took him to a local vet who diagnosed coccidia and treated him accordingly. But this vet was unaware, however, that the usual treatment for coccidia in other species is fatal to macropods. The carer spent the next 10 days desperately trying, unsuccessfully, to save the little joey from his inevitable death. This is in no way a criticism of this vet, rather a reflection of the state of affairs.

Case study 2

In the last few months our volunteers have attended two rescues of brushtail possums that were trapped in the mechanism of electric garage roller doors. Both animals were so severely injured that our volunteers had to call in the services of a mobile veterinarian to sedate the animal so it could be released without causing further pain and injury. One possum is still in care, the other had to be euthanased because of its injuries. Our concern is that this vet is also doing this work at great expense to herself as she did not charge us for her services. There are many occasions when we could free entangled animals more easily with a vet in attendance to manage pain, however, it would not be fair to ask this vet to give more of her time. Disentangling possums from the mechanisms of garage doors is one of the worst types of rescues our volunteers do.

Case study 3

We have several times brought a large, injured wombat into care so that we can take it to a vet for an examination under anaesthetic to determine if its injuries are treatable as this is outside the scope of rangers. This requires our volunteers having to wrangle a very large animal into a crate and transport it in their car to a vet. This frequently takes place at night. On three such occasions last year the wombat required euthanasia. One of these wombats had two broken legs and a broken pelvis. Another had a severely infected pouch and could not keep her joey inside. We were unable to get a vet to see her that night and she had to spend the night in my enclosure before being captured and transported to a vet the next day. With a dedicated wildlife vet it would not be necessary to submit these sick and injured wombats to this level of handling and transport. It could be sedated and assessed in the field, then euthanased on site if necessary.

This is just a snapshot of this type of situations that our volunteers are exposed to frequently. It takes its toll and contributes to compassion fatigue. And while our volunteers do an amazing job of managing the treatment and rehabilitation of wildlife in their care they frequently have to manage the care of their animals without the professional care and advice of a vet due to the difficulty of accessing vets who are already busy in their private practices, under their own pressures and who may not be confident with the special needs of our unique wildlife.

We very much support and hold the ACT Government accountable for its vision to make the Territory become an Australian leader in animal welfare and management practice (Animal Welfare & Management Strategy 2017-22, page 15)."

To that end I would like to formally raise the need for a specialist Wildlife vet to support our volunteers in meeting the medical needs of approximately 1500 native animals that we care for each year.

Lindy Butcher
President
ACT Wildlife

