

Statement Pursuant to Standing Order 246A

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES

30 November 2017

The Committee is excited to be inquiring into whether the ACT should have a mammal emblem and if so which mammal should be our emblem.

The adoption of a mammal emblem is more than just the chance to talk about a cute critter. Having a mammal species recognised as an emblem raises awareness of that species. It draws attention to the mammal, its habitat and habits. Perhaps most importantly, where a species is endangered, naming it as your emblem presents a great opportunity to shine the spot light on that mammal and its plight.

This has been the case in Western Australia and Tasmania.

Western Australia adopted the Numbat as their emblem on July 25th 1973. The numbat has been listed as specially protected fauna that is rare or likely to become extinct under the WA Wildlife Conservation Act 1950 since 1973 and is ranked as Endangered in WA. It is listed nationally as Vulnerable under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act). An intensive research and breeding program since 1980 has succeeded in increasing numbat populations and reintroduction of the species into fox free areas has been undertaken. Perth Zoo has been closely involved in the conservation effort breeding populations in captivity for release into the wild.

Following a public consultation process, Tasmania formally adopted the Tasmanian Devil as theirs on May 22nd 2015. The Tassie Devil is the world's largest surviving carnivorous mammal and is endangered within Tasmania which is the only place it survives in the wild. Populations of the Tasmania Devil have been impacted over years by human activity and now the aggressive devil facial tumour disease threatens the remaining population. The Tasmanian Government noted in adopting the mammal as its emblem, the Devil is recognised across the world as uniquely Tasmanian and choosing it as our State emblem will help to promote the State around the world as well as raising awareness of the difficult challenge the Devil faces in combating disease. While the insurance population program has been a resounding success we must continue to do all we can to encourage support in the fight against disease and to secure its future in the wild.

Perhaps more so than whether the ACT should adopt a mammal emblem the greater concern is which mammal should we adopt?

The debate is already underway on which mammal we should adopt as our emblem. I know in this age of public polls, we are all weary of the Boaty McBoatface saga, or perhaps of more relevance, the push to have the bin-chicken recognised as bird of the year. So let's consider what animals might be suitable for our emblem and before highlighting a few options, I would like to note this list is far from exhaustive. In fact the 2015 ACT State of the

Environment Report lists 47 mammals native to the ACT, all of which I'm sure could be options for an emblem.

So to highlight a few options.

The Tasmanian or Eastern Bettong was once found in the ACT region. However, for over a hundred years, it has only been found in the eastern part of Tasmania. In 2011 the first bettongs arrived at Tidbinbilla, as part of a collaborative effort to reintroduce them into the area. In 2012 Eastern Bettongs were reintroduced into Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary. Bettongs are important in the health of ecosystems. By eating underground fungi, they are able to disperse the spores, and increase with nutrient exchange between the soil and plants.

The Southern Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby is known to be very shy. It is estimated there is less than 40 Southern Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies left in the wild in Australia. Tidbinbilla National Park currently has around 70 per cent of the captive breeding population in Australia. The breeding program has been successful, with captive-bred Southern Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies being reintroduced into the wild in Victoria as part of a national recovery breeding program.

Perhaps shier than the rock-wallaby is the Spotted Tail Quoll. The Quoll is also a part of the reintroduction strategy taking place at Mulligans Flat. The species is primarily a carnivore that preys on medium-sized mammals including possums, gliders and rabbits. Other prey includes small mammals, birds, reptiles and invertebrates and is also known to prey on domestic poultry and to scavenge on carrion.

The Echidna, one of only two monotremes, or mammals that lay eggs, making it a truly distinctive creature. The echidna is the oldest surviving mammal, and one of the few native species whose population is not currently under threat. Their ability to survive in extreme temperatures and adopt to local conditions through the density of their fur is no doubt a reason for their longevity and stability.

Often not instantly thought of as a mammal, bats are extensive throughout the ACT, which is home to at least 18 species. Perhaps the most notable is the White-striped Free-tailed bat, The White-striped Free-tailed Bat is the largest of all the free-tail bats and is one of the few microbats with calls that can be heard by humans. They are known as freetail bats because part of their bony tail extends beyond the tail membrane.

The Smokey Mouse is listed as threatened in the ACT although it hasn't been observed since 1987. The illusive mammal is about the size of a small rat and can survive in a wide range of vegetation from coastal heath to dry ridgeline forest, sub-alpine heath and fern gullies. It likes sheltering in ground cover such as dense low vegetation or grass tussocks, rocks, logs or leaf litter. It eats legume seeds, epacrid berries and bogong moths when it can, and truffle-like fungi when it needs to. Many die in spring when food can be scarce.

Again I reiterate this is by no means an exhaustive list of possible emblem worthy mammals, rather it is just a few examples to get the discussion started and the Committee looks forward to the Canberra community putting forward many more suggestions.

We anticipate a number of people within the Canberra community will have a view on this topic and we encourage everyone to submit to the inquiry.

We have already had some school groups enquire with us about making a submission.

The submission period is now open and will close on COB Friday 23rd March 2018.

The Committee will present its report to the Assembly by September 2018.