

Terms of Reference

Inquiry into Environmental Volunteerism

The Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity will inquire into and report on matters relating to environmental volunteerism in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), with particular reference to:

1. 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:
 - biodiversity conservation and enhancement; • parks and conservation;
 - environmental protection;
 - climate resilience;

 - **wildlife protection**; • landcare; and
 - other areas;

To provide some background to my submission...

In 2021 the volunteers and staff of ACTW responded to almost 13,000 phone calls from members of the public regarding wildlife issues. Many of these are resolved with advice from our phone operators.

Almost 3,000 animals were brought into the care of our volunteers and almost 50% of those were released after being rehabilitated.
40% died or were euthanased.

We recognise that the nature of wildlife interactions with the urban interface means that the wildlife will come off second best. Animals are hit by cars as they move around their environment, they hit window of buildings, lose their tree hollows to clearing and storms, are taken by domestic animals or come to grief when they set up their homes in a human habitat. Many of the injuries are such that it isn't possible to save and rehabilitate the animal so that it can be successfully released.

There are a further unknown number of animals that our volunteers don't see, that are taken directly to a vet by a member of the public who finds the animal. A still incomplete survey of local vets indicates that 4 vets saw 83 animals over a 6 week period in May and June. Of these 64 died or were euthanased and 5 were passed on to our carers.

These numbers serve to give some scope to the size of the problem faced by ACT Wildlife volunteers with regard to their unmet need for access to vet treatment for the animals that come into the care of our volunteers.

We run the very real risk of our volunteers experiencing compassion fatigue when, in spite of doing everything they can to rescue and provide the best rehabilitation practices for injured wildlife, they are unable to have timely access to vet support. We rely on the good will of local vets who are already at breaking point themselves.

You can see from the case studies that I provided in my original submission the situations that our carers face.

This is in no way a reflection on the support offered by our local vets. They are doing the best they can. But this isn't their job. Many have no experience of the specialised care needs of our wildlife, and again, this isn't their fault, it's just the way it is. I had a quick look at the course outline for Veterinary science offered by The Charles Sturt University and it doesn't contain any units on Wildlife health.

The ACT government relies on ACTW volunteers to actively support its Animal Welfare goals for wildlife welfare, but the volunteers are doing it without the support of a dedicated wildlife vet.