



Discussion paper

Review and report into the NSW wildlife rehabilitation sector

Department of Climate Change,
Energy, the Environment and Water



Acknowledgement of Country

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

This resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

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Artist and designer Nikita Ridgeway from Aboriginal design agency Boss Lady Creative Designs created the People and Community symbol.

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About the review

The Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment, Ms Trish Doyle MP, is leading the NSW wildlife rehabilitation sector review (the review). The review will provide recommendations to the Minister for the Environment, the Hon Penny Sharpe MLC, on opportunities to improve support to the wildlife rehabilitation sector and associated veterinary sector. The review will be completed, and a report submitted to Minister Sharpe by 30 October 2025.

The review involves consulting with stakeholders in the wildlife rehabilitation sector and veterinary practices who provide essential support. Through this consultation process, the review will:

- examine current practices
- evaluate previously implemented strategies
- identify ongoing challenges
- discuss areas of future opportunity.

In 2019, an extensive review of the wildlife rehabilitation sector was published. The review formed the basis for the 2020-2023 NSW wildlife rehabilitation sector strategy, for which a 3-year implementation report was prepared and implemented. Commitments have been made to continue to engage with the sector to discuss future strategy and ongoing support arrangements, to facilitate support of this critical work.

- [Review of the NSW volunteer wildlife rehabilitation sector](#)
- [Wildlife rehabilitation sector strategy](#)
- [NSW volunteer wildlife rehabilitation sector Strategy 3-year report: 2020 to 2023](#)

Other related documents include:

- [NSW Koala Strategy](#)
- [Independent Review of Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016](#)
- [Wildlife in Emergencies Subplan 2023](#)
- [Veterinary workforce shortage in NSW 2024](#)

Process for this review

Date	Action
9 September – 30 November 2024	Discussion Paper public consultation (submissions open)
November – March 2025	Engagement with stakeholders via roundtables and site visits
1 December – 28 February 2025	Survey open to all members of the rehabilitation sector
February – May 2025	Consideration of submissions, surveys and meetings to collate review report
June - September 2025	Compilation and approval of report
October 2025	Review report provided to Minister for the Environment

Background

The NSW Government recognises the valuable contribution of the wildlife rehabilitation and veterinary sectors in NSW. Wildlife rehabilitation groups are primarily made up of volunteers and provide important services to sick, injured and orphaned native animals across the state. Veterinary hospitals support the wildlife rehabilitation sector by providing largely pro-bono animal triage and treatment services.

The NSW wildlife rehabilitation sector is large and diverse and spreads across the state. Forty wildlife rehabilitation providers rescue over 110,000 animals a year from 500 different species. They respond to more than 180,000 calls from the community each year about wildlife. The wildlife activities of the rehabilitation sector are regulated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

NSW has different types of wildlife rehabilitation service providers. They can be:

- home-based and part of an overarching organisation (such as WIRES)
- a central facility where volunteers go (such as Friends of the Koala),
- part of an exhibited animal facility (such as Taronga Conservation Society)
- a sole operator at home (that is an individual licence holder).

Five facilities have a veterinary wildlife hospital attached.

Wildlife rehabilitation groups face a range of challenges including:

- changing social demographics that affect volunteer participation
- mental health and wellbeing of volunteers
- funding of rehabilitation services
- resources to support volunteers
- shortage of skilled vets and veterinary nurses
- the need for secure buildings and facilities.

The sector relies on volunteer labour and support, community fundraising and community in-kind donations. The work of wildlife rehabilitation sector volunteers was estimated to be worth around \$27 million a year, according to the results of a survey of wildlife rehabilitators.

NSW leads the wildlife rehabilitation field in Australia with an organised sector to do this critical work. An integrated, future focused continuing strategy is needed to support the sector, and ensure the sector is well connected so that care for native wildlife is available in all parts of the state.

How to have your say

Stakeholder participation is vital to the success of the review, and you are invited to make a submission on this discussion paper.

Throughout this discussion paper we share some messages from recent stakeholder consultations. These messages are indicative, not a complete representation of the views or issues, which will expand as the consultation continues. The government shares these messages to promote consultation and seek your reactions. They do not necessarily reflect the government's position.

The discussion paper outlines questions for you to consider when making your submission. The questions are a guide to particular issues, but you are welcome to comment on other aspects of the sector. If you have relevant examples, data and research, ideas or issues you would like to raise as part of the review, please include them in your submission.

The government looks forward to hearing from you about what is and is not working well, and where the review should focus its attention.

Making submissions

Email your submission to review.wildliferehab@environment.nsw.gov.au

Post a written submission to:

Wildlife Rehab Sector Review
Locked Bag 5022
Parramatta NSW 2124

How submissions will be used (privacy statement)

The review experts and the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) will use your submission to inform the review analysis, final report and recommendations to government.

Providing a submission is entirely voluntary. Submissions will be published on www.environment.nsw.gov.au along with your name or the name of your organisation. Other personal information, such as your address and contact details, will be removed before publication.

Submissions requested to be 'anonymous' will have identifying information, such as your name, removed before publication. Submissions marked 'confidential' and those that raise legal or other concerns such as those of privacy or defamation will not be published. Views presented in submissions are the responsibility of the author.

There may be circumstances where the government is required by law to release the information in your submission, even if marked confidential, such as for law enforcement purposes or under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*.

Terms of reference

To facilitate a focused approach for this review, terms of reference have been identified to define key areas of examination and discussion. The following 7 terms of reference outline what the government has heard from the sector to date, and asks questions for consideration, discussion and response.

1. Challenges for the sector, including future trajectories and risks

Messages heard to date

- The sector has broad support needs, which vary by the size of the licensed party (from independent operators through to centralised facilities and display establishments).
- Socioeconomic factors are playing a role in leadership succession planning and attracting and retaining volunteers due to the rise in the cost of living.
- Issues related to volunteer burnout, conflict and expectation management are ongoing, resulting in high attrition. Causes and management approaches are complex and inconsistent.
- Volunteers are providing a community service and need to be acknowledged and supported, including with trauma and mental health support, respect and funding. Volunteers need to feel part of a supported team.
- Finding effective people to do management and administration roles voluntarily is challenging.
- There are issues around the availability and consistency of training courses within and between groups.
- The government needs to provide more comprehensive training for internal operational areas and rangers who are responsible for compliance and enforcing quality assurance standards.
- Groups are not well advised or equipped to apply for funds or grants, and the sector has not previously been strategic in its funding bids. Funding, if available, is often project-based and not geared towards helping volunteers meet operational expenses.
- Further work needs to be undertaken to provide quality control in data collection and management to provide more meaningful statistics.
- The volunteer engagement model may work better if it includes regional oversight with less fragmentation of groups around New South Wales.

Focus questions for the review

- What are the most critical challenges facing the wildlife rehabilitation sector in NSW?
- Have these challenges changed over time?
- Are these challenges improving or declining?
- What are the future issues and risks that the sector is likely to face?

2. Connections within the sector

Messages heard to date

- Collaboration between key stakeholders and peak bodies in the sector could be improved, and sometimes results in fragmented communication and standards.
- Private investment and linkages with conservation programs by other service providers to the rehabilitation sector could be explored. Engagement with these organisations is likely to provide better overall wildlife outcomes.
- There is some excellent collaboration beginning for shared training and phone networks. This could be expanded as it is not currently enough for consistency across the state.
- Shared reporting on species, outcomes and care standards by groups would create a more holistic outcome for the state.
- There is some overlap in groups' zones of operation. Sharing of resources including assets, mentors and coordinators could be facilitated which would be beneficial.
- Collaboration in the sector could help reduce conflict, create cultural change, reduce geographic isolation and allow a combined effort to improve chances of accessing grant funding.
- Greater connectivity with veterinary and scientific professionals would help wildlife rehabilitation groups keep in touch with advances in best practice.
- More webinars and events that link vets with volunteers and science professionals would be welcome.
- It would be good to increase collaborative training opportunities and meetings across the sector as a whole.

Focus questions for the review

- How are wildlife rehabilitation groups connected to each other?
- Do they communicate and work together in training, mentoring and sharing of resources?
- If not, what benefits could exist from ongoing connection?
- Are there barriers to this occurring? What are they?
- How could the government assist communication and collaboration across the sector, including interactions with local veterinary hospitals?

3. Service gaps and duplication

Messages heard to date

- The dashboard for the wildlife rehabilitation sector with yearly reporting is providing insight into trends, member distribution and species coverage. There could be more work done to provide further information for greater planning.
- Shared knowledge of volunteer specialities may facilitate streamlined services across the sector, for example, intensive care, pre-release
- There is disparity in the sector. It is easier for larger groups with a huge workforce and influence to access support than it is for small groups that are strong but know less about how to access support. There is a need to increase the knowledge of smaller groups to create consistency across groups and standards to allow growth in known geographic areas and decrease knowledge gaps.
- Distribution of wildlife rehabilitators reflects the volunteer base, not necessarily the need or demand. Groups may benefit from being merged.
- Wildlife rehabilitation is mainly located around population centres and the east coast. There are obvious volunteering and veterinary support gaps in western regions.
- It would be helpful for duplication to be considered across parameters such as training, compliance, supervision, mentoring, phone services and bulk goods purchases. There is significant duplication of cost and effort resulting in confusion in the community about who to call to rescue wildlife.
- There are issues around availability and accessibility of specialist resources, such as for euthanasia for larger animals. Sharing these resources between organisations could provide efficiencies across the sector.
- How can peak bodies provide more effective services to their members? Could peak bodies develop better governance tools, common policies and procedures and mediation services?

Focus questions for the review

- What is the focus of each organisation and is this complementary to other organisations?
- Is there duplication within geographic areas, when diversification could be more beneficial?
- Where could future investments in wildlife rehabilitation assets be deployed?
- How could all organisations collaborate more effectively?

4. Involving wildlife rehabilitation groups in emergency response or significant wildlife events

Messages heard to date

- The sector would like to provide more input into emergency management arrangements and their integration with wildlife considerations during an emergency.
- The sector is concerned not enough recognition is given for its role in emergency response, and the wildlife rehabilitators' expertise could be sought in planning for the future or on-the-ground access in emergency events.
- The wildlife rehabilitation sector is seeking to be better informed about government plans for emergency response where there are potential impacts on wildlife.
- Wildlife Emergency Response Taskforce (WERT) teams are doing a great job, particularly with successful testing of the program in 2 recent bushfires.
- Groups would like to provide onsite triage centres and utilise 'televet' services when emergency events occur.

Focus questions for the review:

- Is there clarity over the role of rehabilitators in emergency response?
- Are there other ways to formally include wildlife rehabilitators in emergency response?
- How would this be best facilitated as a whole-of-sector response?
- Are there opportunities to better support the sector to respond to significant wildlife related events, such as heat stress in flying-foxes?

5. Administrative arrangements and legislative provisions relating to rescue and rehabilitation

Messages heard to date

- Substantial amendments to the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (BC Act) would better support the rehabilitation sector requirements and future planning.
- The independent review of the BC Act found that regulatory management of human interactions with native plants and animals, including wildlife rescue and rehabilitation, is complex and overly burdensome, and it is not always clear under what legislation the issues are intended to be addressed.
- Transparent monitoring and enforcement are vital to ensuring the aims and objectives of the BC Act are being met; existing compliance frameworks could be improved.
- Codes of practice are not always followed, and regulation of the rehabilitation sector based on the codes of practice is needed.

- The *Veterinary Practices Act 2003* (VP Act) for the licensing of hospitals and vets has intersection with the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* and BC Act, which creates confusion and blurred lines of responsibility. In addition, there are no provisions for vets under the BC Act.
- Different types of legal entities in the sector are regulated under different legislation, requiring diverse support systems. Incorporated associations are regulated under the *Associations Incorporations Act 2009* administered by the Department of Fair Trading, and companies with limited guarantee are regulated under the *Corporations Act* administered by the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC).
- Inefficiencies in implementing the *Associations Incorporation Act 2009* requirements results in no common constitution, policies and procedures to help navigate group management and sector continuity.

Focus questions for the review

- How do current arrangements, including legislation, administration, governance and policy and reporting frameworks for the wildlife rehabilitation and associated veterinary sectors meet the needs of the sectors and government?
- How could these areas be improved for better outcomes into the future?
- What possible amendments to legislation or regulation could assist the rehabilitation sector to better contribute to the achievement of national and international biodiversity targets?

6. Resourcing for the wildlife rehabilitation sector

Messages heard to date

- The most requested form of support from the sector is funding. This varies from large investment to build new dedicated wildlife hospitals and facilities to reimbursement of ‘out-of-pocket’ expenses incurred by individual volunteers. While significant funding has been allocated, there is a view that we need to reconsider how funding is allocated.
- It is a challenge for smaller groups to tap into grants programs. The government needs to provide support and education to make the processes transparent and fair.
- The grant programs have provided substantial support within the sector; however, they have been primarily based on wildlife hospitals and koala strategy.
- There is a need to establish partnerships with the private sector, NGOs and philanthropic organisations to create a diverse funding base.
- The end of the Wildlife Heroes program has left a gap in support and recognition in the sector.
- New codes of practice and quality assurance requirements for licensing have improved standards. There could be more improvement in this area.

Focus questions for the review

- How is the wildlife rehabilitation sector resourced and what current and future resourcing gaps exist?
- What opportunities are available to establish new methods to supplement support and build a sustainable model for the sector?

7. Supporting accredited wildlife hospitals and veterinary practices to treat injured wildlife.

Messages hear to date

- Lack of time, facilities, staff knowledge and resources, and the increased cost of treatment, were identified as key constraints affecting the delivery of veterinary services to wildlife rehabilitation.
- Regional vets do not get the support they need. A model based on regional ‘advisory hubs’ could help create more accessible support and resources for vets and wildlife carers.
- The wildlife training course through Taronga Zoo has been well received with 1806 veterinary professionals completing the course. The support and funding for this course should be continued. Due to the differing roles of veterinary nurses, the potential to offer targeted training based on specific roles could be explored.

Focus questions for submissions

- How can wildlife hospitals and other veterinary practices be supported in providing critical wildlife assessment and treatment services?
- What are the barriers to this occurring?
- What approaches might be suitable for resourcing these services?
- How can the data acquired from veterinary hospitals be integrated into a wildlife rehabilitation data management system?