



Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

NSW Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy

2020-2023



Foreword



Unprecedented fires in New South Wales at the end of 2019 have starkly revealed the vital role our wildlife rehabilitation volunteers and veterinary professionals play in New South Wales to rescue and rehabilitate wildlife in distress. Images of burnt koalas howling in pain before being tended by the caring hands of a committed wildlife rehabilitator are hard to forget.

These images awaken in us a realisation that wildlife rehabilitation volunteers, with the support of veterinary professionals, are providing a critical service to the animals and people of New South Wales. They are also investing considerable emotional effort, time and resources providing humane treatment to help them recover so they can be released back to nature.

They are first responders to native animal emergencies, like the current fire crisis, often working in challenging and confronting circumstances and bearing significant personal cost and stress.

Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (the Department) vision for the more than 5600 volunteers in New South Wales is that they are better supported to continue to deliver this important service, especially in times of emergency. We want volunteers to feel prepared, understood, respected and appreciated and be equipped with the necessary skills and resources to perform their role. Their work provides a significant public good and is of high value to the community, government and the environment. It is invaluable to the hundreds of thousands of wildlife they respond to each year which would simply perish without them.

The NSW Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy is a three-year plan to support and improve wildlife rehabilitation in New South Wales. The strategy will be implemented by National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in partnership with the sector and the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife and the Environmental Trust. Through the NSW Koala Strategy, \$4.05 million has been committed by the NSW Government to implement this strategy. This will be augmented by an additional \$2.47 million of funding provided by the Environmental Trust to underpin the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife 'Wildlife Heroes' program and support the rescue and rehabilitation of sick, injured and displaced wildlife affected by bushfires.



The strategy contains actions that will benefit volunteers and the organisations that support them and improve community recognition and acknowledgement of the sector. It is part of a longer-term objective to strengthen the ability of the sector to support its volunteers and deliver on-ground services into the future.

The strategy accords with recommendations of the 2014 Independent Biodiversity Legislation Review Panel review into biodiversity legislation in New South Wales. It also aligns the sector with regulatory requirements subsequently established under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. A key element of the strategy will be the introduction of a system of accreditation for volunteer wildlife rehabilitation organisations that is underpinned by consistent standards of operation.

The strategy also incorporates relevant recommendations of the *Final Report into the NSW Bushfire Inquiry* and a 2020 Upper House inquiry into Koala populations and habitat in New South Wales.

Implementation of these recommendations is already well underway and will improve the sector's ability to work within emergency management structures and effectively respond to, rescue and rehabilitate wildlife injured in emergency events.

The strategy is the result of extensive collaboration with the wildlife rehabilitation sector including volunteers, wildlife rehabilitation service providers, the NSW Wildlife Council (peak body) and veterinary professionals, who shared their ideas and provided the evidence base for guiding our actions.

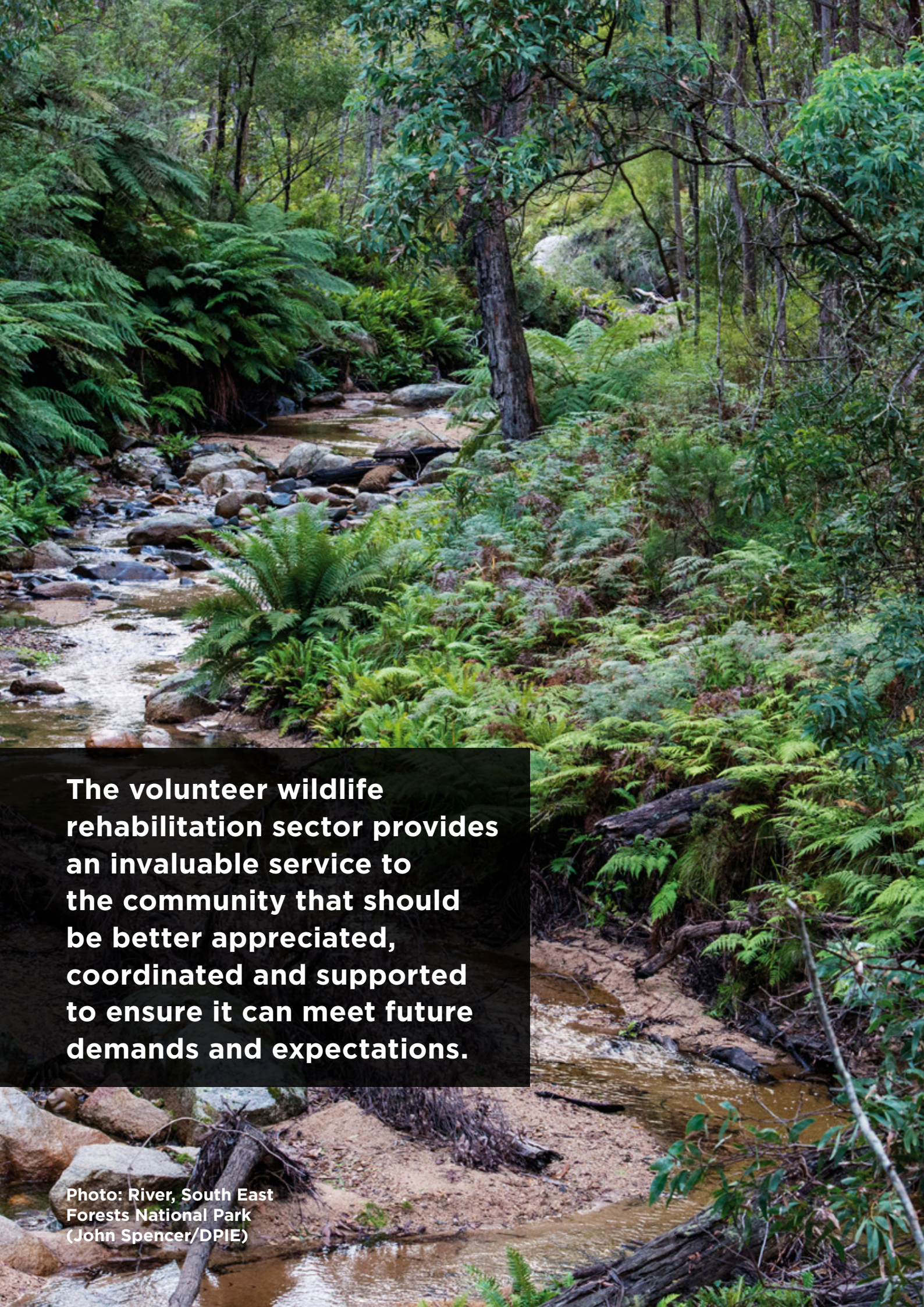
I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this strategy and those who will be working with us to implement it.

The Hon. Matt Kean, MP

Minister for Energy and Environment



Photo:
Wallumatta Nature
Reserve
(John Spencer/DPIE)



The volunteer wildlife rehabilitation sector provides an invaluable service to the community that should be better appreciated, coordinated and supported to ensure it can meet future demands and expectations.

Photo: River, South East Forests National Park (John Spencer/DPIE)



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Wildlife rehabilitation in New South Wales

Volunteer wildlife rehabilitators are passionate about helping native animals in distress and making a positive contribution to the environment. They have rescued on average more than 104,000 animals each year over the last four years, often in difficult and stressful circumstances. Service providers annually receive over 180,000 calls for assistance and help educate and inform the community about ways to prevent future harm to wildlife.

The provision of wildlife rehabilitation services in New South Wales relies heavily on volunteer participation and pro-bono services from private veterinary practices. The NSW Government regulates the sector and is responsible for providing consistent standards of operation that support the functions of local providers of wildlife rescue and rehabilitation services. A peak body, the NSW Wildlife Council, which is independent of government represents about half the volunteers and its stated mission is to optimise outcomes for Australian wildlife. WIRES, the largest single rehabilitation group in New South Wales, with almost half the sector's volunteers in its membership of 2500, is not a member of the peak body.

Volunteers contribute on average about 898 hours each year (17 hours each per week) and active carers spend about \$4000 per person each year helping wildlife. It would cost a minimum of \$27 million to replace the time and resources spent by volunteers each year on wildlife rescue and rehabilitation.



5600

Volunteer wildlife rehabilitators in NSW



\$27 million

minimum value of volunteers' annual contribution each year

Photo: Volunteer with wombat.
(Philip Machin/Wildcare
Queanbeyan)



Volunteers are dispersed across New South Wales and are mostly members of independent wildlife rescue and rehabilitation organisations. Most people involved rehabilitate animals in their own homes. This service is augmented by a small number of central facility-based organisations and wildlife hospitals attached to exhibited animal facilities, and individual licence holders.

Private veterinary practices and wildlife hospitals are also crucial partners in the assessment and humane treatment of native animals in distress. Our veterinarians and veterinary nurses treat over 21,000 free-living native animals and provide more than \$1.8 million in free services and products to wildlife each year. Balancing the running of a private practice with the lack of time, facilities and resources for treating free-living wildlife is very challenging.

Recognition of volunteer wildlife rehabilitators is slowly increasing as is our understanding of their contribution to emergency response and the Government's broader conservation and natural resource management objectives.



minimum value of free veterinary services to wildlife each year



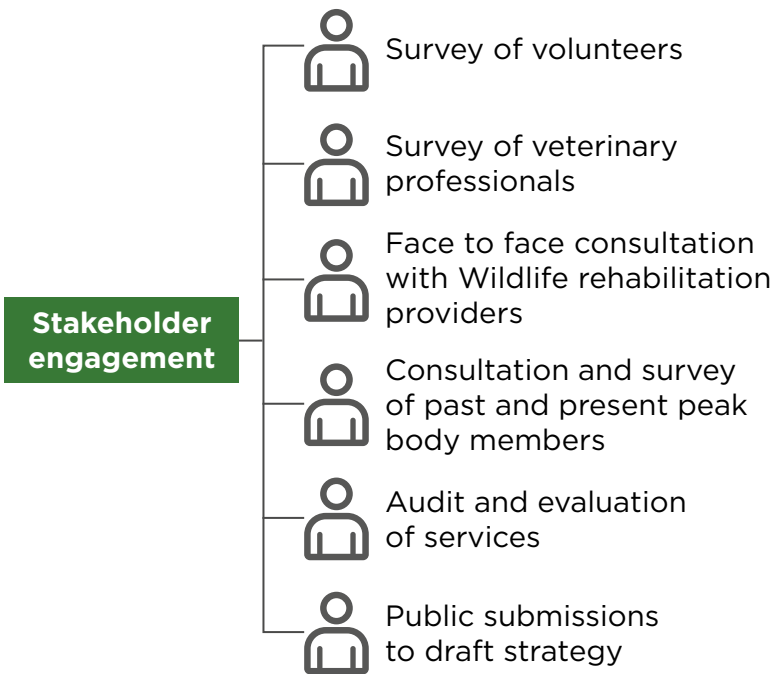
average volunteering hours per survey respondent in the past year



Photo: Native vegetation, Wallumatta Nature Reserve (John Spencer/DPIE)

Development of the strategy

We listened carefully to the wildlife rehabilitation sector to form the evidence base for the strategy.



Feedback

53 Submissions to our draft strategy

970 Responses to our volunteer survey

150 Responses to our veterinary survey

54 Audits undertaken

24 Service providers consulted

23 Responses to our peak body survey

'There is a strong expectation from the community that the service provided by wildlife rehabilitation groups to sick or injured individual animals is valued and maintained.'

*Independent Biodiversity
Legislation Review Panel*

Timeline for development of the strategy



More information

Information about the strategy can be downloaded along with the support documents from our website (www.environment.nsw.gov.au). It includes the following resources:

1. *Review of the NSW Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector: An evidence base for guiding future reform*
2. *Accreditation of volunteer wildlife rescue and rehabilitation services in New South Wales*
3. Wildlife rehabilitation compliance audit - an independent audit into compliance of the sector with Department standards of wildlife care
4. Submissions report: NSW Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy



Photo: Carer Sue Johnson with echidna. (Jan Pilgrim/Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers)

Challenges and aspirations

We undertook an extensive review of services across the sector to help identify good practice and focus areas for reform. Volunteers and veterinary practitioners also told us about the challenges they face and their future aspirations for wildlife rehabilitation.

Recruitment and retention of volunteers

Nearly 90% of volunteers who responded to our survey said finding and keeping new volunteers was very important to them. Also, only 64% said volunteering in the sector benefited their mental health. Factors affecting participation included changing social demographics, time and financial demands, group politics, conflict and burnout.

Succession planning

Participants in the sector comprise an older demographic when compared to other volunteering pursuits. Leaders of wildlife rehabilitation groups are concerned there will be no one to replace them, leading to loss of skills, fragmentation of effort and less community support.

Consistent standards of operation

About 75% of volunteers said stronger standards of care are very important to them as was better mentoring and support. Sector-wide training standards and greater access to and sharing of resources will help improve animal care.

Strategic support

Almost half of the people who responded to our surveys said they did not know what the peak body did or is meant to do and less than 25% were satisfied with the support provided by Government. A more representative peak body, stronger advocacy, leadership and greater access to funding opportunities were identified as important to volunteers.

Lack of funds

About 96% of volunteers reported incurring expenses in the year prior to the survey. These funds pay for operational capacity, wildlife emergency preparedness and group administration costs.

'My life is not my own...I am referred to as the glue that binds it all together - but I would really like a succession option going forward - but it just doesn't seem likely in the short term'.

Wildlife rehabilitator



64%

said volunteering had a positive effect on their mental health

Although organisations have received donations from government and the community to help respond to the recent fire emergency. The sector would benefit from more assistance with developing funding bids and greater access to funding opportunities to help improve standards and service delivery.

Veterinary assistance

Veterinarians and veterinary nurses told us that most aspects of their formal education were not very useful for dealing with free-living wildlife. The most common complaints received from veterinary respondents about the wildlife rehabilitation sector were about volunteer response times and the behaviour of volunteers and their group leaders.

Value and relevance

Volunteers consider their work to benefit the environment. More effective collection and use of the data generated by the sector will contribute to stronger wildlife and threatened species management outcomes, as will research into post-release outcomes.

Acknowledgement and expectation management

About 85% of volunteers said it was very important to them that the community better understands they are not paid staff and are limited in their capacity. Volunteers and veterinary staff seek greater acknowledgement and appreciation of their service.



Photo: Sea eagle (Mark Kelly)

The strategy at a glance



Vision

- People who participate in wildlife rehabilitation are acknowledged, respected and supported.
- Services delivered to the community are undertaken in accordance with agreed standards.
- Wildlife rehabilitation is recognised as an important contributor to the delivery of Government's natural resources management program.



Principles

- Wildlife rehabilitation is an important and valuable service that provides benefits to people, the environment and community.
- The Strategy is a living document focused on continual improvement in volunteer support, standards of care and delivery of services.
- The planned actions in the Strategy will be co-designed and implemented in collaboration with participants in the wildlife rehabilitation sector.

Photo: Barrington Tops
moss-covered trees
(John Spencer/DPIE)



Focus areas	→ Planned actions	→ Expected outcomes
Volunteer support and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve standards of governance • Help new leaders adjust to their role • Attract younger participants to the sector • Facilitate a unified peak body and new strategic agenda • Improve the sector's access to funding and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sector has a positive culture and is buoyed by the intake of younger participants • Providers are well-represented by an effective support network • Volunteers have capacity to meet the demands of wildlife care including their response to wildlife emergencies
Standards of care and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard induction and specialised species training for volunteers • Enhance mentor and species coordinator support • Wildlife care training for vets and vet nurses • Update assessment and treatment protocols • Create service provider access to standard compliance assessment tools and continue random audits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers are skilled and capable to meet minimum standards of care in the sector • Volunteers can safely access fire grounds to rescue injured wildlife • Vets and vet nurses have the skills and resources to treat wildlife • The sector has access to tools for ensuring standards are adhered to
Knowledge and information access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamline reporting and improve access to data • Connect volunteers to other professional networks • Conduct post-release monitoring of rehabilitated animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collected by volunteers is utilised for wildlife management and research purposes • Better understanding gained of the success of wildlife rehabilitation
Community awareness and recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide community education about wildlife • Promote awareness about volunteer participation in wildlife rehabilitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community access and understanding about native wildlife is enhanced • Community recognition and appreciation of wildlife rehabilitation volunteers is improved
Government support and regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a system of accreditation for volunteer wildlife rehabilitation organisations • Implement a more flexible policy framework • Provide ongoing strategic support services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services across the sector are consistent, reliable and in accordance with set standards • More effective regulation and support for the sector



Photo: Kangaroo
(Philip Machin/
Wildlife Queenbeyan)



The five focus areas

Over the next three years NPWS will partner with the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife, the Environment Trust and the sector to implement actions in these five focus areas:



Volunteer support and culture



Standards of care and training



Knowledge and information access



Community awareness and recognition



Government support and regulation

Volunteer support and culture

Outcomes



- **The sector has a positive culture**
- **Providers are well represented by an effective support network**
- **Volunteers have more capacity to meet the demands of wildlife care**

‘An organisation that is able to demonstrate compliance with the standards is well positioned strategically to recruit and retain more volunteers, as well as attract funding or sponsorship for new initiatives’.

Volunteering Australia

Wildlife rehabilitation relies on volunteers and we want to ensure they are well supported. We also need to be certain that wildlife rehabilitation organisations have capable leaders and tools to adequately manage their volunteer workforce. The organisations themselves must be well represented and effectively coordinated to communicate their interests and meet the strategic challenges of the sector.

Improved standards of governance

We will work with the sector to adopt Volunteering Australia’s National Standards for Volunteer Involvement and identify and develop skills and resources that help wildlife rehabilitation organisations meet the standards relevant to their operations. We will first work with the sector to create a register of agreed shared resources that represent good practice in the sector. The national standards will be used to help improve and augment these resources. We intend to embed these skills by sponsoring a series of governance workshops with the sector.

Also, we will help develop a ‘Welcome Kit’ for new volunteers to complement their induction training. The objective of the kit is to orientate volunteers to the ethics and values of wildlife rehabilitation and the policies and procedures of their organisation. A short video outlining our appreciation and expectations of new volunteers will be included in the kit.

Helping new leaders adjust to their role

To transition the next generation of volunteers into leadership roles within their organisation. We will help provide online training resources that enhance their skills in leadership, communication, conflict resolution and teamwork. We intend to complement these tools with targeted workshops for leaders particularly in areas such as conflict management.



Facilitating a unified peak body and new strategic agenda

A key priority of the strategy is to ensure the interests of wildlife rehabilitation organisations are well represented by encouraging the creation of a unified peak body. We will seek to do this by encouraging the two main bodies representing wildlife rehabilitation volunteers in New South Wales to reform into a single peak body. Alternatively, we will consider creating an advisory board comprising members from government, existing wildlife rehabilitation organisations and non-government representatives from the animal welfare, veterinary and natural resource management sectors.

NPWS will partner with the newly configured peak body (or Advisory Board) in the development of a plan that meets the ongoing strategic priorities of the sector over the next three years. Key initiatives would include:

- co-designing standards to be adopted by the sector
- developing strategies that increase volunteer participation in the sector including opportunities for participation from a wider demographic group
- establishing resources to manage volunteer stress including reviewing conflict resolution guidelines
- improving the capacity and effectiveness of wildlife rehabilitation organisations to participate and respond to wildlife emergency events
- enhancing support for mentors and species coordinators
- developing a charter for volunteer engagement with veterinary practices
- creating a list of trainers endorsed to deliver speciality species training to the sector and developing resources to help train new and inexperienced trainers within wildlife rehabilitation groups
- connecting the sector with other participants in the wildlife and natural resource management sector such as Landcare
- promoting more efficient management of wildlife rehabilitation organisations' fiscal and volunteer services
- exploring opportunities to augment home-based care with enclosures built by wildlife rehabilitation providers on government or corporate owned land
- introducing new forms of recognition for volunteer achievement in the sector
- We will formalise this new relationship with the coordinating body with a new 'Service Partnership Agreement'.



**\$1.47
million**

Foundation for
National Parks and
Wildlife 'Wildlife
Heroes' program

Ongoing reliable funding

The NSW Government through the NSW Environment Trust has dedicated \$2.47 million in new funding toward volunteer wildlife rehabilitation. Approximately, \$1.47 million of these funds has been awarded to the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife Service to pilot a three-year 'Wildlife Heroes' program to help promote, support and develop wildlife rehabilitators and provide them with the skills, knowledge and tools to continue their important work rescuing and rehabilitating native wildlife. Funding will be allocated toward four complementary action areas:

1. Development of sector resources and dissemination of training standards

- This will include dissemination and communication of training standards via workshops, face to face training opportunities and online webinars.
- Development of sector resources that help support volunteer well-being and leadership succession planning.
- Development of a resource portal for the sector to access training standards and resources and engage with the wider wildlife rehabilitation community.

2. Grants to wildlife rehabilitators and veterinary practices

- Small grants up to individual volunteers to help offset costs borne for operational expenses such as cages and specialist feed.
- Specialised grants to mentors and species coordinators to help develop their skills and retain them in the sector.
- Small grants to veterinary practices to help offset their pro-bono work with sick and injured free-living wildlife.

3. Emergency response planning and support

- Review and development of wildlife emergency response plans that involve wildlife rehabilitators. Training days will be held to help the sector develop targeted emergency response skills and networks.
- Emergency grants for fuel, food, equipment and other resources needed for volunteers to rescue and provide immediate care to wildlife. Funds will also be made available for vaccinations for specialist volunteers to ensure there are enough volunteers to respond to emergencies such as flying-fox heat stress events.
- Development of a digital portal to enable more effective coordination of the sector's response to wildlife emergency events.



**\$1
million**

Ensuring our
volunteers can
respond to bushfire
emergencies

4. General community education and awareness campaign to help promote the sector and reduce the number of animals requiring rescue

- Update the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife Backyard Buddies site to include more information about key species and strategies for reducing negative interactions with wildlife.
- Targeted marketing and communications campaign to promote the sector.

Enhanced capacity to respond to fire emergencies

The \$1 million already dedicated in response to the 2019-20 bushfires will be used to ensure our volunteers are prepared and have capacity to help and respond to bushfire emergencies. These funds will primarily be used to:

- Bolster the NSW Wildlife Heroes emergency grants program to ensure it meets the immediate needs of wildlife rehabilitation groups involved in bushfire response.
- Acquire large durable items necessary for the rescue, transport and rehabilitation of sick and injured animals including assets needed by the veterinary sector. This will include replacing equipment damaged by the recent fire event.
- Implement recommendation 53 of the Final Report into the NSW Bushfire Inquiry. NPWS is working with other fire agencies to deliver a new policy and operational framework for fire emergency responders. We will deliver a framework for coordination of wildlife care with emergency management structures, guidelines for incident management planning, bushfire awareness training for the wildlife care sector (including responding veterinarians) and guidance for firefighters handling injured wildlife.
- Develop and pilot a new tele-medicine service to increase veterinary access and support to wildlife rehabilitators at emergency fire grounds.

This funding is additional to the \$4.05 million committed to this strategy by the NSW Government via the [NSW Koala Strategy](#).



**Fire in Crowdy Bay
(Andrew Marshall/DPIE)**

Standards of care and training

Outcomes



- **Volunteers are skilled and capable to meet minimum standards of care in the sector**
- **Vets and vet nurses have the skills and technical resources to treat wildlife**
- **The sector has access to tools for ensuring standards are adhered to**

Volunteers provide a critical frontline role in the rescue and rehabilitation of sick and injured native animals. To successfully perform this role, volunteers need to have skills that meet accepted sector-wide standards of care. They also need to be guided by mentors and periodically monitored by species coordinators to ensure they continue to learn and comply with these standards. This will optimise the potential for animals to be safely rescued, successfully rehabilitated and returned to the wild or otherwise provided with a humane outcome. Veterinary practitioners will also benefit from additional training in wildlife care and access to technical resources.

‘There is considerable room for improvement with training standards. However, this is no fault of the organisation rather a lack of standardised training across the board by appropriately qualified trainers’.

Wildlife rehabilitator

Standard training for volunteers

An ambitious action under this strategy will be to introduce minimum standards for volunteer training. We will work with the sector to scope and develop a training framework that includes:

- essential learning outcomes
- establishment of shared learning resources
- assessment methods required to assess competency.

We will also explore opportunities for experienced wildlife rehabilitators to stay in touch with developments in wildlife ecology, veterinary medicine and treatment practices, and interact within other professional networks. To help facilitate this, NPWS via the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife will work with the sector to develop a program of priority workshops for wildlife rehabilitators in regional areas of New South Wales over the next three years, to augment their refresher training and help keep their skills up to date.

In addition, we will work with the NSW Rural Fire Service and key wildlife rehabilitation organisations to help implement Recommendation 19 of the 2020 Upper House inquiry and report on koala populations and habitat in New South Wales. This will lead to the development of new standards for access to fire grounds by wildlife rescuers and support wildlife rescue groups in completing fire awareness training.



Mentors and species coordinator support

Wildlife rehabilitation organisations that invest in a mentoring program are more likely to have satisfied volunteers and higher standards of care. Good mentors, as well as being capable wildlife rehabilitators, must also be excellent communicators, problem solvers and team players. We will require organisations to have a mentor program in place and provide resources to help train mentors in communication, teamwork and conflict resolution skills. Innovative ways to help optimise and share mentoring resources within the sector will be encouraged.

Wildlife care training for vets and vet nurses

The Government has allocated \$1.5 million over three years via the NSW Koala Strategy to Taronga Zoo in partnership with Sydney University and the Department to develop and implement, in collaboration with the sector, wildlife care professional development training to veterinarians and veterinary nurses. The training will be delivered across five modules including an introduction to the treatment and rehabilitation of wildlife and specific content on amphibians and reptiles, birds, mammals and a separate module on koalas. Topics will mostly cover the following areas:

- Regulation, resources and risks: This refers to Codes of Practice and covers risks associated with handling and care of wildlife including listing relevant zoonoses and links to resources on how to identify similar species or native/introduced and record keeping).
- Handling and immediate housing: Clinically relevant anatomy and physiology, handling, basic housing and feeding).
- Assessment, triage and emergency care: Clinical assessment and diagnostic aids, first aid, common injuries and diseases, chemical restraint and criteria for euthanasia.
- Diagnosis and treatment: Therapeutics, drug administration, pain management, antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs.

Face-to-face hands-on workshops in Sydney and regional areas are a key component of the planned training course. These will include clinical rounds with wildlife veterinarians, case studies, x-ray reading, necropsies and if possible, demonstration of handling and assessment with education animals.

 **\$1.5 million**

for vet and vet nurse training



An important outcome of this work will be enhanced technical resources for veterinarians and veterinary nurses. Providing standard resources will help alleviate time and skill constraints reported by veterinary practices and enhance opportunities for volunteers to access services.

Updated assessment and treatment protocols

Continuous improvement in animal care outcomes is reliant upon volunteers having access to assessment and treatment protocols that are current and represent best practice. We intend to work with the sector to review existing protocols and make them available to volunteers on a platform that can be shared by all wildlife rehabilitation providers. This will form a valuable resource for volunteer training.

We will also review the Codes of Practice to ensure they are current and prepare a new code for sick and injured sea turtles and sea snakes as more volunteers are coming into contact with these fascinating animals.

Promoting stronger compliance

All the initiatives identified above will help promote stronger compliance with standards of care in the sector; however, ongoing monitoring of volunteers' adherence to these standards can often be a challenge for species coordinators and the leadership teams of wildlife rehabilitation providers.

We will develop and make available to the sector standard templates for doing internal compliance audits against our codes of practice and future conditions of accreditation. Wildlife rehabilitation providers will need to implement periodic audits of their volunteers and maintain a record of compliance. We will supplement this work by implementing a random inspection campaign to help the sector better enforce standards of care. We will also develop resources that help improve how staff respond to wildlife rehabilitation enforcement matters.



Photo: Common Brushtail possums. (Stirling West)

Knowledge and information access

Outcomes



- **Data collected is more effectively utilised for wildlife management and conservation purposes**
- **Better understanding of the success of wildlife rehabilitation**

'Our records are vital to prove what impact we have on wildlife.'

Wildlife rehabilitator

Volunteers provide valuable information about the native animals they rescue. They tell us the name and type of species, where it was found, the probable cause of its injuries and its fate. At a landscape level, the data can inform government of potential emerging diseases and help land managers design and implement targeted conservation programs.

Over 1,000,000 native animals across 800 species, including threatened species, have been rescued by volunteers since the year 2000. Over the last four years, 104,000 animals have been rescued on average each year.

Streamlined reporting and improved access to data

Improving how volunteers capture data about the animals they rescue and rehabilitate will maximise the potential for this information to be better integrated into existing natural resource management programs. We will work with the sector to review existing reporting protocols and adopt revised standards for data collection and reporting.



Photo: Taronga Wildlife Hospital.
(P Fahy/Taronga Zoo)



 **104,000**

average number of animals rescued each year

This will help streamline the capture of data and improve the consistency and quality of information to be imported into the Atlas of Wildlife and SEED – the NSW Government’s new Sharing and Enabling Environmental Data Portal. We will also investigate new technological approaches for capturing and validating data collected by volunteers.

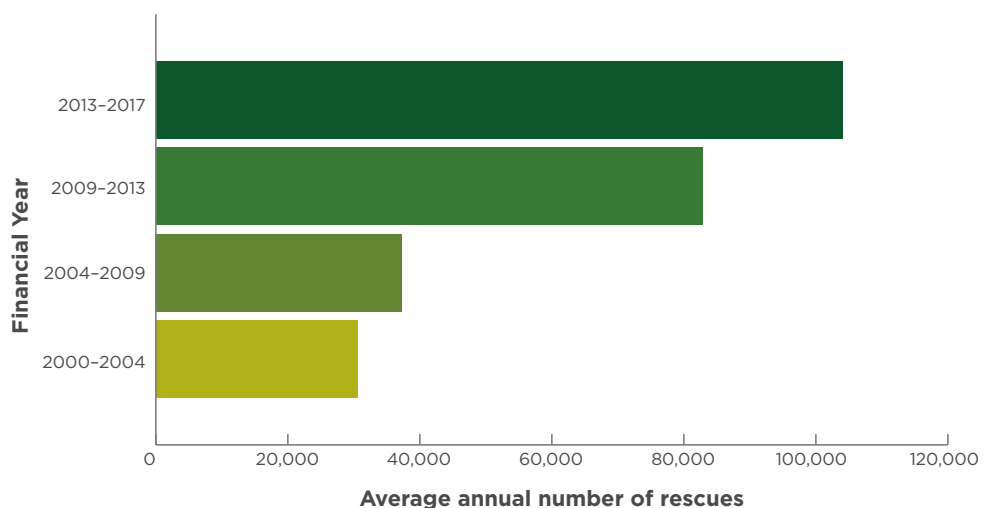
Once data collection has been streamlined, we will prepare an annual report and make it available to the sector and the community. This will help track trends in sick and injured wildlife and provide the sector with a resource to use for environmental education and grant application purposes. We will also build a data visualisation tool that will enable wildlife rehabilitation groups to develop sector-wide reports for their own purposes across multiple report years.

Connecting volunteers to other professional networks

We will help connect the sector with other scientific and veterinary networks to expand sharing of knowledge about wildlife ecology and improvements to best practice in wildlife treatment and care.

Post release monitoring

About 34% of native animals rescued are rehabilitated and released. We need to have a better understanding of the survival of these animals to inform improvements to rehabilitation practices and release site selection. The Government has announced funding through the NSW Koala Strategy for post release monitoring of rehabilitated koalas. We will explore opportunities with research institutions and wildlife rehabilitation groups to undertake post release monitoring of other species, in particular those affected by the recent bushfires.



Community awareness and recognition

Outcomes



- **Community access to rescue services is enhanced**
- **Community recognition and appreciation of volunteers and native wildlife is improved**

Wildlife rehabilitation volunteers want government and the community to know their work is challenging and something of value. Recognition and acknowledgement of the contribution of volunteers and veterinary practitioners is needed. The focus will be on increasing appreciation of the effort and skill of volunteers and the nature of their work.

The sector also makes an important contribution to raising awareness in the community about wildlife and conservation issues and volunteers regularly attend schools, scout groups, environmental events and other forums. The community will benefit from increased access to up to date information about how to positively interact with wildlife, particularly during wildlife emergency events.

‘We are not just animal huggers to be taken for granted and treated with disdain. We do make a difference to the animals, to conservation and help the community.’

Wildlife rehabilitator

Promoting awareness about volunteer participation in wildlife rehabilitation

Media will be developed that seek to improve community awareness and understanding about wildlife rehabilitation volunteers and their contribution to wildlife and the environment. We will do this by promoting the diverse range of wildlife rehabilitators’ stories and their varied interactions with wildlife. We will also enhance our website to better communicate the scale of work undertaken by volunteers and the factors that can result in animals requiring rescue.

Guiding community education about wildlife

We will develop resources that help wildlife rehabilitation groups educate and raise awareness in the community about managing negative interactions with urban wildlife species and promoting ecological sustainable behaviours that prevent injuries to animals and reduce the volume of animals requiring rescue. We will also review and update information on our website about how to help injured or distressed native animals affected by events such as drought, fire and flood.

Government support and regulation

Outcomes



- **Services provided by the sector are consistent, reliable and undertaken in accordance with standards**
- **More effective regulation and support for the sector**

The Department of Industry, Planning and Environment wants volunteers to know that it is a partner in the delivery of wildlife rescue and rehabilitation services in New South Wales. A focus for us going forward will be to implement a process of accreditation for the sector. Accreditation will give greater certainty to government and the community that services are being delivered in a consistent, reliable and credible manner that is in accordance with established standards.

The implementation of accreditation will necessitate changes to Department policy that underpins regulation of the sector. An important action will be to review existing policy and procedures to ensure they provide the flexibility and support to enable the sector to thrive and meet demand for services.

Accreditation of volunteer wildlife rescue and rehabilitation organisations

All volunteer-based organisations that operate and promote themselves as providers of a wildlife rescue and rehabilitation service will require accreditation in order to receive a licence under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*.

The intended benefits to the sector include greater community recognition of service; improved volunteer support and management; transferability of skills between organisations and stronger compliance with established codes of practice.

Accreditation will be administered by the Department and be assessed in accordance with the following six categories of volunteer support and service delivery:

- **Governance:** The structures, activities and operations of a wildlife rehabilitation provider are in accordance with the principles of legal compliance, probity, transparency and accountability.



- **Training and support:** There is a structured program of training and support in place that ensures fauna rehabilitators are competent to effectively perform their role.
- **Standards of animal care:** There is a system of quality assurance in place for the management of animals in care.
- **Service capacity:** There is an efficient phone rescue service and sufficient capacity to effectively respond to calls for assistance.
- **Record keeping:** There is a system in place that ensures data integrity in reporting, and organisations have a demonstrated history of compliance with Department reporting obligations.
- **Veterinary services:** There are policies and protocols in place that ensure interactions with veterinary practitioners are conducted in a consistent, positive and ethical manner.

To avoid adverse impacts on service delivery a transitional approach to accreditation will be implemented. Transitional accreditation will require existing wildlife rehabilitation providers to apply to the Department and demonstrate they meet the accreditation criteria (refer to the Accreditation support document). The criteria are based on those aspects of good practice currently being implemented in the sector.

Over the next three years, the Department will collaborate with the sector to refine the criteria and develop standards where they don't already exist.

Existing wildlife rehabilitation licences will be extended to 30 June 2021 to ensure continuity of service and give wildlife rehabilitation providers additional time to prepare for accreditation. After that time we will check with providers to ensure they have had sufficient time to prepare after the 2020 fire emergency. We will assist this process by undertaking an inventory of those policies, procedures and protocols currently used by the sector which are considered compliant with the transitional standards.

A more flexible policy framework

The Rehabilitation of Protected Native Animals 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, we intend to:

- Retain the current preference for services to be provided by groups but allow greater flexibility in where active wildlife rehabilitation members can reside. Currently, these members are required to live within the boundary of their group except in circumstances where a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been signed with the adjacent group where that member intends to reside. We are seeking to modify the policy to allow a small number of active volunteers to reside in the adjacent area without triggering the need for a MOU. Non-active volunteers such as financial members can continue to reside anywhere. We will discuss with the sector options for facilitating this outcome.
- Encourage new groups to seek accreditation in areas where support for specialist species is needed. Preference would be given to central style facilities. Our aim is to pursue this action once existing groups have had the opportunity to be accredited.
- Explore additional opportunities for augmenting home-based care with more central-based facilities.
- Reduce red tape and enable groups to transport animals interstate for treatment and rehabilitation without the need for additional approvals. The conditions attached to accreditation will ensure groups who are granted this opportunity can account for and report on animals moved interstate. Wildlife rehabilitation providers will still need to satisfy the legislative requirements of other jurisdictions.



Photo: Taronga
Wildlife Hospital
(Larry Vogelnest)



We will continue to give strategic support to the sector to help implement this plan over the next three years. We intend to:

- assist the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife to implement \$1.47 million funding plan for the sector
- implement \$4.05 million of wildlife rehabilitation actions identified in the NSW Koala Strategy
- implement \$1 million in bushfire emergency relief funding for the sector
- dedicate two new staff toward implementation of priority actions in this plan
- continue to support volunteers who respond to wildlife emergencies
- continue to contribute funding toward the Sector's insurance requirements
- advocate for greater understanding within other NSW Government departments of the important work undertaken by the wildlife rehabilitation sector
- continue to provide in-kind support for the use of NPWS venues for meetings or training purposes where it is possible to do so
- help wildlife rehabilitation organisations leverage compliance by undertaking random audits and investigating alleged breaches
- maintain and update data, produce an annual report, and update resources on our website
- review and promulgate relevant policies in accordance with the new directions set through this strategy.



©Wayne Reynolds

**Striped dolphin rescue
(Wayne Reynolds)**

Implementation, reporting on and evaluating the strategy



NPWS in collaboration with the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife will coordinate implementation of this strategy. NPWS will report progress on actions relevant to the NSW Koala Strategy to the Koala Board and NSW Koala Strategy Interagency Steering Committee. Actions funded through the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife and NPWS emergency relief funding plan will have monitoring and reporting requirements and be subject to independent evaluation by the NSW Environmental Trust.

Workshops will be held with volunteers to help develop and implement projects in each focus area. Annual reports will be published and an update on progress will be given to key stakeholders each year. An action implementation plan will be prepared once the final strategy is completed.

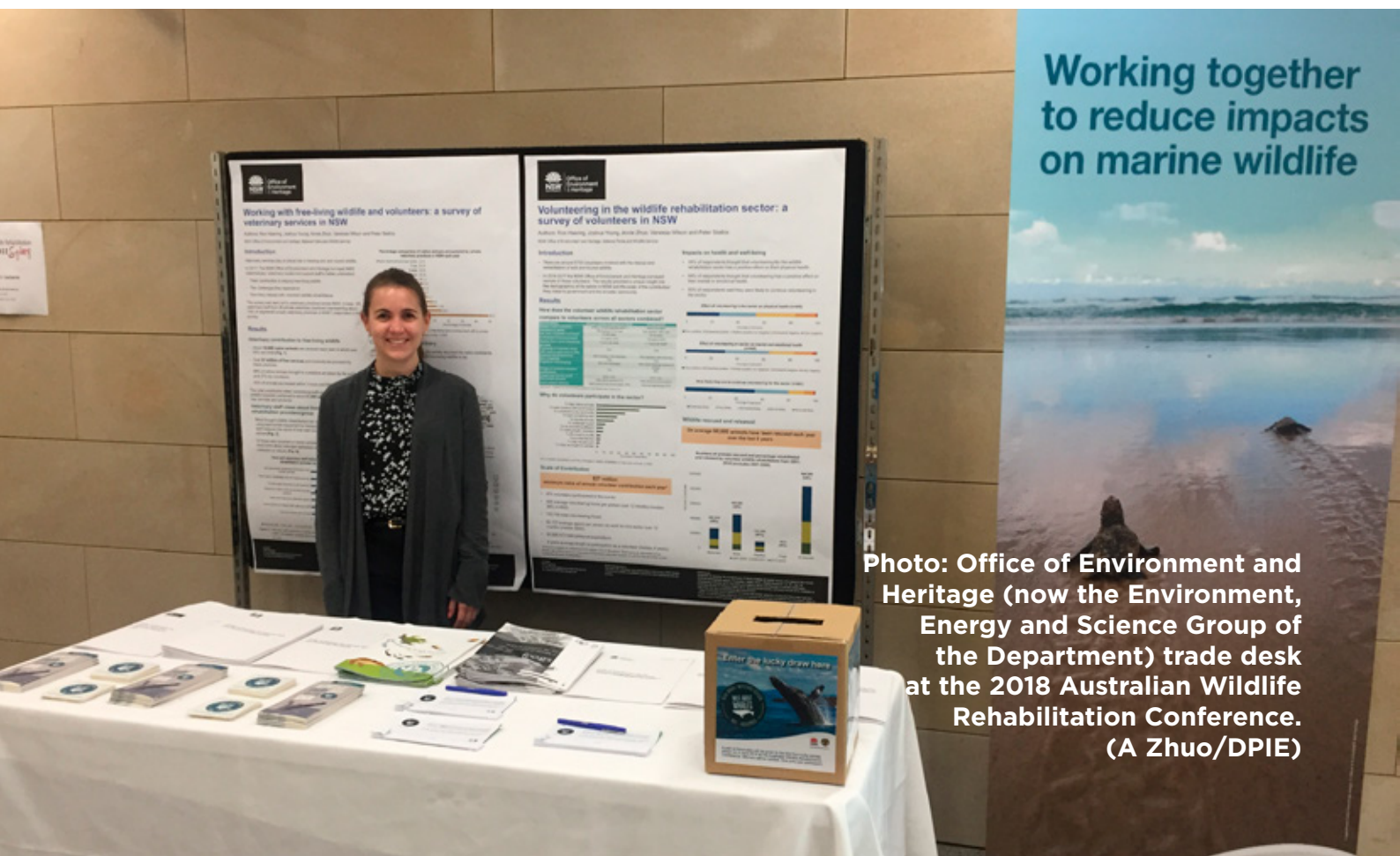


Photo: Office of Environment and Heritage (now the Environment, Energy and Science Group of the Department) trade desk at the 2018 Australian Wildlife Rehabilitation Conference. (A Zhuo/DPIE)

Acknowledgements



The Department would like to thank all the people and organisations that contributed to the evidence base underpinning this strategy. Approximately 970 volunteer wildlife rehabilitators and 150 veterinarians, veterinary nurses and support staff from around 70 practices responded to our surveys.

A special thanks to all the wildlife rehabilitation service providers who shared their time, resources and knowledge about being a volunteer and what is needed to support them.

Our thanks go to:

- NSW Wildlife Council
- WIRES
- Australian Veterinary Association
- Taronga Conservation Society
- Veterinary Practitioners Board of NSW
- Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia
- NSW Environmental Trust and the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife.

For further information contact the NPWS Biodiversity and Wildlife Unit on npws.bwt@environment.nsw.gov.au attention Ron Haering.

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Cover photo: Volunteer with blue-tongue lizard (WIRES); **Page 3:** Southern boobook owl (Philip Machin/Wildcare Queanbeyan); **Page 9:** Grey-headed flying fox (Hannah Ryan/DPIE), Water dragon (John Spencer/DPIE), Australian pelican (John Turbill/DPIE); **Page 13:** Sulphur crested cockatoo (Rosie Nicolai); **Page 14:** River red gum, Monkeygar creek, Macquarie Marshes (Nicola Brookhouse/DPIE); **Page 15:** Eastern water dragon (Hannah Ryan/DPIE); **Page 17:** Squirrel glider (Jeff Betteridge/DPIE); **Page 18:** Gang-Gang (Shona Lorigan/DPIE); **Page 20:** Eastern blue-tongue lizard/skink (John Spencer/DPIE); **Page 23:** Australian fur seal (Shona Lorigan/DPIE); **Page 24:** Tiliqua rugosa shingleback lizard (John Spencer/DPIE); **Page 25:** Burnt out trees in Crowdy Bay (Andrew Marshall/DPIE); **Page 26:** Injured koala in Crowdy Bay (Andrew Marshall/DPIE); **Page 27:** Eastern long neck turtle (Hannah Ryan/DPIE);

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ISBN 978-1-925974-91-1

EES 2019/0472; September 2020