INQUIRY INTO VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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I have been a wildlife rehabilitator for 14 years in suburban Sydney and over that time I have rescued and/or cared for nearly 5000 native animals. I could not do this without the many vets who have received rescued animals from members of the public and treated them without charging a consultation fee. I particularly appreciate the vets that rehabilitators take animals to because of their specialist expertise, for example in assessing and treatings birds, and I am aware that we overload these vets because of their expertise and willingness to assist.

I am aware that there are many vets who, while willing to treat wildlife, have not had specialist training, and that there is no incentive for them to develop these skills apart from compassion. Because I also train wildlife rehabilitators across New South Wales, I'm also aware of the shortage of vets in rural and regional areas, which means that some wildlife rehabilitators travel long distances to seek treatment for injured animals. This is an animal welfare and also a human welfare issue - for example, when a severely injured animal needs to be euthanased and there is no vet available, the wildlife rehabilitator needs to find a way to do this humanely themselves, which can be traumatic.

My suggestions, in relation to supporting vets treating wildlife:

1. That there should be some financial compensation for vets treating wildlife, funded by government or by public donations

2. That vets and vet nurses should receive more training on treating wildlife during their training.

3. That a support network (similar to the televet system trialled during COVID) be established so that both non-specialist vets and wildlife rehabilitators can get free access to expert advice

4. That specialist vet clinics for treating wildlife be established, especially in regional areas (and I note with great disappointment that a government grant to Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital was terminated recently).