

**Submission
No 101**

INQUIRY INTO VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Possumwood Wildlife Recovery & Research Inc Hospital

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Inquiry into the veterinary workforce shortage in New South Wales

Submission by Possumwood Wildlife Recovery and Research Inc

1. Purpose

This submission addresses the availability of veterinarians to help injured and sick Australian native wildlife.

2. Background

Possumwood Wildlife is a NSW Veterinary Board licenced wildlife hospital and a charity registered with the ACNC with DGR status. It received its hospital licence in December 2020. We believe we were the first general wildlife hospital granted a veterinary Board licence in NSW following the catastrophic fires of 2019-20.

The principals of Possumwood Wildlife have been rescuing and rehabilitating injured and sick wildlife for more than 23 years and have helped more than 6000 animals over that time. During the Black Summer Bush Fires, Possumwood Wildlife was a key triage centre for southeast NSW. A total of 30 animals with burns were treated at that time. Many wild animals were rescued during the fires by the Possumwood principals, and many were brought to the Centre from other triage centres established in the southeast that were unable to cope with the challenge of so many burns cases. All but two of the 30 animals brought to Possumwood survived the treatment and recovery at Possumwood Wildlife. This was a voluntary service provided by Possumwood Wildlife for which there was no government financial assistance.

Under the aegis of Vets for Compassion, a total of five veterinarians and supporting vet nurses were part of the Possumwood Wildlife contribution to assisting in the treatment and recovery of wildlife with significant burns.

3. Observations from the past 23 years

Our experience with the veterinary profession over the past 23 years, in rural and semi-rural areas, and particularly during the fires, demonstrated the following relevant to the call for the present Inquiry:

- In general, veterinarians appear to know very little about how to effectively treat the needs of wild animals and usually apply the same principles which they would apply to privately owned domestic animals. Many are just not interested in helping wildlife. If they do offer to help, their fees are often prohibitive for the wildlife carer who

may be caring for a number of animals, usually at their own considerable expense. Medication and services such as radiography and ultrasound often have a substantial markup.

- Despite the lack of experience and knowledge of veterinarians about how to treat the medical needs of the sick and injured wild animal, many vets are not prepared to listen to the considerable experience of the wildlife carer and often exclude the experienced carer from any involvement in the treatment regimen. The veterinarian is mostly only interested in the animal they see before them in the surgery, whereas history and post-surgery recovery are also important to achieving a successful outcome.

4. The Possumwood Wildlife Veterinary Hospital Experience

The Possumwood Wildlife veterinary hospital was created by its owners specifically to target the medical needs of the injured and sick wild animal. As a general hospital it helps all species and sizes. It has received no government support either for its setup or ongoing operation.

- The veterinary team give their time for free. All personnel involved in running the hospital clinics are volunteers.
- The veterinary team builds a close relationship with the patient's carer/rescuer to learn as much as possible about the history underlying the illness or injury to the wild animal. The experience and knowledge of the wildlife carer is valued by the veterinarian.
- Mentoring other vets is an important feature of the hospital practice. Visiting vets come from Sydney, Brisbane, and Melbourne. We aim to encourage session veterinarians from non-metropolitan areas as well.
- Encouraging young people as 'Future Vets' as a learning experience is important. The veterinary superintendent at the hospital has been running 'Future Vets Kids Camps' in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne and soon we aim to extend this Program to non-metropolitan centres and add a focus on wild animal treatment.