

**Submission  
No 118**

**INQUIRY INTO VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE  
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Name:** Ms Chantal Whitten

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## Inquiry into the veterinary shortage in NSW

Submission: Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital  
419 Hinterland Way, Knockrow NSW, 2479.

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Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital (BBWH) is the only all-species wildlife hospital operating between Sydney and the NSW-QLD border. BBWH's professional veterinary team operates seven days a week from a fully equipped, veterinary hospital licensed by the Veterinary Practitioners Board of NSW. All our infrastructure, staffing, equipment, operations, and costs of doing business have been achieved by raising over \$6 million in cash, in-kind and volunteering contributions entirely from donors and sponsorship. Our service is provided to licensed wildlife rescue organisations and members of the public free of charge. There has been no contribution by the NSW government to our work.

Recently the NSW State Government, with the Department of Planning and Environment, declined funding of \$6 million over four years (commencing 1 July 2023) for Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital (BBWH) to provide veterinary treatment, recovery, and rehabilitation services to injured, sick and orphaned wildlife in New South Wales (NSW), and to educate the community about the importance of these services to the protection of wildlife and biodiversity across the state. The reason given was that our grant did not represent 'value for money'.

This has been a huge disappointment to us, and we are unsure if we will be able to continue operating into the near future. Despite this, our aim is to continue to operate at our current, if not expanded capacity, to meet demand. We have been sustained by overwhelming support received via national media coverage, social media commentary, emails, and a public petition which at the time of writing had over 7500 signatures in four days.

As an industry we are already suffering burnout and financial stress on an individual basis. This recent news makes me doubt my value as an experienced wildlife veterinarian and to be honest, I wonder why I would choose to work in an industry that does not provide funding and wages that support the level of experience that we have. We are the ones trying to make a difference and save our wildlife that the Crown is legally responsible for, yet the NSW government's advice that funding our work does not represent 'value for money'. \$6 million dollars was reduced to zero, with advice that there is no middle ground. This implies our work is worthless and is demoralising.

The industry and government needs to provide more support for the vets and vet nurses that live in rural areas. I know I can earn more money in small animal practice, but I became a vet to help wildlife and should not suffer for this. I will never return to general practice because of the hours, the abuse, and the burnout.

Our nurses are also struggling with low wages. They need to be valued. I think there needs to be a mandatory veterinary nurse registration process. They need to have a CPD record as vets do so employers are responsible for ensuring continued growth in a profession that is constantly changing.

Our hospital is struggling to find experienced wildlife vets to work weekends and casual shifts because the wages are not high enough to meet the cost of living. This is putting extra pressure on the current staff and leaving a gap in care, at times when the wildlife care groups and rehabilitators need us the most.

We are also helping to educate and train the next generation of veterinarians. We have final year vet students from all Australian Universities with us weekly. There is no compensation for this. Most of what they learn from us is not provided in any veterinary degree curriculum. There are limited opportunities for wildlife training within Australia and therefore we should be supported.

Please consider this submission as part of a wider feeling amongst veterinarians that the expectations put upon us to treat, diagnose and provide great animal welfare outcomes for all species are not being supported.

Regards

Chantal Whitten