

Submission  
No 191

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date Received:** 21 July 2023

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Partially  
Confidential

I am a Sydney-based small animal veterinarian with over 25 years of experience.

For most of my working life, I have been focused primarily on treating pets - who in the majority of cases have loving owners who will try their best to give them the treatment required. Vets need payment in order to cover expensive hospital overheads (equipment, staff, and medications) so these patients are often understandably prioritized.

Given that many of our native wildlife species are now endangered or threatened (we are facing an extinction crisis and climate change and extreme weather events will only accelerate losses), I have become more aware and increasingly concerned about the welfare and survival of these iconic Australian animals - who often don't have owners to advocate or pay for their care.

Veterinarians (and vet nurses) fill this role as best as they can and in most cases cover all the costs involved (give freely of their time and expertise, pay for the treatment/surgery/medication/ bandaging etc). We see this as our duty of care and we do it out of love for the animals involved - it is however extra time added on to an already busy day (some vets do not get time for lunch breaks or toilet breaks) and does cost money.

We rely heavily on the dedication, care, and expertise of wildlife carers to partner with us in treating and rehabilitating wildlife that is unwell or been injured through loss of habitat (land or tree clearing for development), motor vehicle trauma, or dog/ cat attacks.

The shortage of veterinarians places our wildlife in an even more serious predicament.

- Often wildlife is seen when the vet has a free moment or at the end of the day when they are exhausted.

- Stress worsens clinical outcomes

- injured wildlife often require euthanasia which takes a huge toll on veterinarian mental health when this is a common occurrence.

- Vets may be limited by costs of treatment/ what they can offer (eg may not have the time available to dedicate for surgery, or limited funds to order in specific medications)

- Vets may have limited experience with certain species

- Once stabilized, wildlife is often best cared for with an experienced carer in a quiet environment - carers may be unavailable or have limited mobility/ access to transport

- Numbers of injured wildlife escalate when habitat is removed/ land clearing is carried out for development (eg apartment buildings near urban forests or riparian corridors) especially if fauna management plans are inadequate or if culling occurs (eg shooting kangaroos on a golf course) near busy roads in semi-rural areas.

- people causing this to happen should have some responsibility in covering the veterinary expenses that result - eg large developers should pay to have a veterinarian as part-time staff or be required to pay a retainer to veterinary practices that they nominate on their fauna management plans. This would ensure that veterinarians can properly allocate time and resources for these animals and would result in better outcomes.

- more government funding (eg part of our road taxes etc) needs to be allocated for the treatment and protection of our wildlife - at present we are just relying on the kindheartedness of vets, carers, and the public who make donations. We need a coordinated plan to stop the imminent loss of some of our most vulnerable species.

- more vets would be available to treat wildlife if there were paid positions (many wildlife hospitals operate purely on a volunteer basis and with donations from the public).

- emergency and disaster management of wildlife needs to be considered and planned for - we need to protect vulnerable populations (we lost 3B animals in the 2019/2020 fires)

- Government policy needs to protect wildlife better from injury and harm in the first place, (fence at the top of the cliff) as vets (acting as ambulances at the bottom of the cliff) can only do so much. Please help us shoulder the burden. Our wildlife is everyone's responsibility.

- Pass changes to the Companion Animals Act in NSW to allow councils to have a greater capacity to restrict movements of cats to being kept indoors/ within their owner's property. Cats kill huge numbers of wildlife. Indoors is safer for cats and better for their health.