

Submission
No 10

**INQUIRY INTO 2025 INQUIRY INTO THE OPERATION
OF THE APPROVED CHARITABLE ORGANISATIONS
UNDER THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS
ACT 1979**

Name: Ms Coral Johnson

Date Received: 17 October 2025

Partially
Confidential

Wildlife Rescue Australia



Submission to RSPCA NSW Inquiry

INTRODUCTION

This submission relates to a fine of \$2,000 imposed by a NSW RSPCA Inspector Coral Johnson for alleged cruelty to a possum. on

BACKGROUND

Coral Johnson is an 81-year-old pensioner with over 50 years experience caring for native animals. She was a founding member of both the Clarence Valley and Woolgoolga branches of WIRES and became an Honorary Life Member of that organisation.

In 2011, Coral became a founding member of Wildlife Rescue Australia, a non-profit, voluntary organisation dedicated to the rescue of injured, orphaned and distressed wildlife. In November 2023, Coral (and her sister) were granted Life Membership of WRA.

WRA operates an Australia-wide Call Centre staffed by home-based volunteers. Since commencing operations, WRA has responded to over 100,000 calls from members of the public, other native animal groups, vet clinics, police etc. Of these, over 95% were answered within 25 seconds.

The WRA Call Centre is capable of handling over 1,000,000 incoming calls per annum. As many as 100 phone coordinators may be on duty at the same time, in case of emergencies.

The registered charity is not licensed by any State authority. WRA's efforts are therefore confined to organising the rescue of animals in accordance with the Biodiversity Conservation Act of NSW and similar Acts in other States (the Act).

Statement by Coral Johnson

POSSUM

On Sunday, 9th March 2025 I received a request from Wildlife Rescue Australia, an organisation of which I am a member, to collect a possum from an address in Emerald Beach.

Despite the fact that Cyclone Alfred was causing heavy rain, I attended the rescue.

The adult female possum had sought refuge at the front door step of a house. The occupants had placed it in a box.

The possum was drenched, cold and not moving. I put it in a rescue basket and then drove to the home of Ivan Ta Kowski in Woolgoolga as I thought he was the WIRES possum co-ordinator. I rang Ivan from my car [it was still raining] but had to leave him a message on his phone.

I brought the possum home and established that it was still alive, though lying prone. [Possums will normally curl up].

I dried it with a towel and put it in a regulation carry basket with more towels and the basket on a heat pad.

I decided to just leave it to recover. It was very thin with no obvious injuries, and in my opinion looked as though it was at the end of its life. I wanted it to be warm, dry and comfortable. As it was a Sunday, there were no vets available to take it to.

In response to my phone message Ivan messaged me the next day, Monday 10th March, to say that he was no longer the possum co-ordinator and asked me to take it to a vet, though he didn't specify when. He also said that he was unable to take the possum. I sent Ivan a photo of the possum and told him that if it improved [ie hadn't died] I would take it to the vet.

On Monday the possum had improved to the point where it was curled up in a ball - its natural position - and was eating and drinking.

In view of the improved condition of the possum I did not think it needed immediate veterinary attention and in view of the terrible cyclonic weather, had put off taking it to the vet.

On Tuesday, 11th March I had my car out of the garage and in the driveway ready to take the possum to the vet. An officer from RSPCA, came to my door and said I had been reported for cruelty to a possum.

I showed her the possum in its basket. It was eating a piece of fruit.

The officer stated several times that the possum was "catatonic", despite the fact that it was eating a piece of fruit.

The officer stated that she intended taking the possum and would take it to a vet. I offered to take it down to her vehicle as she did not have a basket with her. At her vehicle she transferred the possum to one of her own baskets.

The possum was obviously very old and looking its age, but it had improved dramatically. I was pleased with its progress. At no time was I contemplating keeping the possum in my care. It was always my intention to pass it on to WIRES.

*I was a wildlife carer for over 50 years, long before WIRES and other related groups came into existence, and loved the work. When WIRES was established I joined Needless to say I
have a lot of experience in the care of injured and orphaned wildlife.*

I was a founding member of Woolgoolga WIRES and was made a Life Member of Woolgoolga branch of WIRES.

Coral Johnson

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On what basis did WIRES report the possum to the RSPCA, sight unseen, as have been treated cruelly?

Given that catatonia is defined as “a state of immobility and stupor”, on what basis did judge
the possum (seen to be eating) to be catatonic?

Is the RSPCA/WIRES of the opinion that any animal not taken immediately to a vet is being treated cruelly?

Why were the charges by the RSPCA against Coral withdrawn by the Chief Inspector, Scott Meyers? Why were these reason(s) not given to Coral Johnson?