



## **CHAIR REPORT – AUDREY KOOSMEN**

I would like to welcome our new member Reps present today to the NWC Lisa Hood, Australian Seabird Rescue and Peter Rodd, Wildlife In Need of Care. It is nice to see new faces and I thank Cathy Gilmore and Lorraine Yudaeff for their time on NWC. Two new members who can't be here today are Helen Semmens, Rep from RRANA in Broken Hill and Raymond Morrow, alternate delegate for Wildlife in Need of Care WINC. You are both welcome to the NWC group.

It has been another busy year and somewhat confusing as we do not know where we are going in the rehab sector and we hope we will hear more from DPIE as to what is happening in the sector at our meeting today. We have reported on the closure of the Office of Environment and Heritage and it being subsumed into the larger super Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, now referred to as DPIE.

All these changes have led to a fractured twelve months, with the scheduled Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 (BCA) Wildlife Rehabilitation Reform process delayed considerably from the proposed time frame for announcements. It was expected the strategy and accreditation announcements would come soon after the Australian Wildlife Rehabilitation Conference in July 2018, but the materials were not released until March 2019 for a 6 week consultation period. In this delayed process rehabilitation licenses expiring 30 June 2019 were extended by another 12 months. The upside is that NWC groups will have more time to ensure systems are in place that will satisfy the accreditation requirements in the 42 point accreditation checklist. We hope that DPIE will identify group governance documents that will meet their accreditation scrutiny; NWC has asked groups that are willing to share materials with other NWC groups to save much duplication of effort and reinventing the wheel. The added workload of the Reform process to groups has caused much angst among volunteers tasked with meeting new and unclear standards of governance. It is a time-consuming process for incorporated associations to change governance procedures. In the main these need special approvals at Special General Meetings convened for the purpose and for which appropriate notice has been given to all members.

Stakeholder Meetings during the year have concentrated on Animal Keeping matters and the animal welfare organisations have joined with both the NWC and WIRES in expressing their concerns that relaxation of controls on species able to be kept could lead to unintentional bad animal welfare outcomes. The need for public education programs has been highlighted throughout the consultation process. I must say it has been heartening that NWC and WIRES have been able to network effectively, supporting each other's views on many of the issues raised. We hope that current moves will result in WIRES rejoining NWC so the Peak Body can

truly represent all licensed rehabilitators and groups in NSW. It has been mutually agreed that rehabilitation groups do not want to be left with the cost and responsibility of housing and caring for animals that have been seized for numerous reasons.

The Wildlife as Pets subject reared its somewhat confrontational head during the year and both NWC and WIRES mounted campaigns against any proposals to relax the protections currently afforded to native wildlife species.

In February we were hit by the bombshell that permanent care animals currently retained under OEH approval by rehab groups for member training and community education purposes may be subject to approvals from Department of Primary Industries DPI/Animal Ethics Committees, and not by OEH as published in the Rehabilitation of Protected Fauna Policy July 2010. This matter was explored with DPI at the May NWC meeting and a NWC Sub Committee is currently looking at processes and a way forward to formalise procedures under the Animal Research and the Exhibited Animals Protection Acts.

Through NWC's participation in the Flying-fox Consultative Committee the subject of Camp Heat Stress response has arisen. There is the belief that the Guidelines published for South East Queensland are not appropriate for NSW conditions and Kerryn Parry-Jones has been tasked with further work. There is a meeting of numerous Federal and State Government Agencies, local government, animal welfare and rehabilitation interests scheduled for October to address heat stress response in flying-fox camps. Jacquie Maisey and Meredith Ryan have contributed to the FFCC during the year and Kerryn Parry-Jones is a member in her own recognisance.

Kerryn has invited groups to participate in a flying-fox study to ascertain the degrees of conflict between Black and Grey-headed flying foxes.

Other research projects that NWC groups have contributed to or participated in include:

- genetic sampling of koalas
- study looking for antibiotic resistance found in wildlife faecal samples (scoop a poop)
- Q Fever testing
- provision of macropod roadkill statistics
- mental health of wildlife rehabilitators
- cost of wildlife rehabilitation
- National Flying-fox Camp Monitoring Project
- Forests survey
- EDNA Citizens Science

Statistical Officers and representatives from various groups met at the behest of DPIE to discuss ways to revise the current report template for rehabilitation animals rescued and taken into rehabilitation. Results from that meeting on 20 May have not been published.

The \$10000 budget for Rehabilitator enclosure & equipment grants process continues in 2019.

A Marine Reptile Code of Practice development workshop was convened by DPIE and held in Port Macquarie on 4 and 5 June including representatives from the NWC coastal groups that are licensed to rescue marine reptiles and marine turtles. Shona Lorigan, DPIE Project Officer, facilitated the workshop and following further individual consultations with participants the resulting Draft Code of Practice is at Draft 3 stage. Again the networking opportunities were much appreciated by all participants.

All groups that are licensed for Koalas have been offered funding from the Koala Strategy budget. This funding is for equipment from a prescribed list that will help koala rescue and care. We hope that all groups took up the funding offer.

Telephone rescue lines for many of the NWC groups were severely curtailed or interrupted due to Telstra withdrawing a vital divert capability due to "incompatibility with NBN". This resulted in patchy service being offered by affected groups and much concern. The NWC Secretary was able to help resolve the stalemate by convincing Telstra the importance of the features they had withdrawn without proper notice. After considerable communication inter-group, most were made aware of the problem and how to overcome it. The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman was of invaluable assistance. Many groups have now transported to less expensive communications technology that offers what they need.

Our Media Officer, Sonja Elwood, has kept members on Facebook up to date with matters of interest to the wildlife rehabilitation cohort. Rod and Meredith have updated the Webpage with stories pertinent to our sector.

The Management Team has worked hard in what has been a fractured year, waiting for decisions on the pathway forward under the Biodiversity Conservation Act wildlife rehabilitation strategy, and I thank VC Jacquie Maisey, Treasurer Shirley Lack, Secretary Meredith Ryan, and Sonja Elwood, Suzy Nethercott-Watson, and Linda Stoev for their commitment to NWC.

I would like to thank the NWC member representatives and alternates for their participation through the year, whether by attendance at meetings or involvement in email debates on various topics, or in taking on specific tasks. Our colleagues at OEH, now DPIE, have had their own difficulties with staff recruitment, and negotiating their way forward with departmental changes, state elections, and planning for the premises move to Parramatta. We must remember that wildlife rehabilitation makes up just one small part of the Wildlife Team's overall responsibilities. We have valued DPIE's attendance at our quarterly meetings to update NWC on the process forward and while we would like to speed it up to add certainty to our forward planning we thank all NWC members for their patience through this drawn out reform process.

We trust that the future will see a unified Peak body for wildlife rehabilitators and that is what DPIE and NWC are working towards through the reform strategy under the BCA.

*Audrey Koosmen – 14 August 2019*