

Wombat Protection Society of Australia Submission to Parliamentary Enquiry into Faunal Extinction Crisis

The Wombat Protection Society of Australia is pleased to be able to contribute to this enquiry.

We would like to address a number of the terms of reference to this enquiry.

Our first concern is the inadequacy of existing (ineffectual) assessment processes for identifying threatened fauna and argue for the increased prioritization of conservation actions. Transformative change requires the implementation and enforcement of protective measures, along with management, monitoring and penalties for non-compliance. We believe Australia is losing fauna because monitoring systems are 'too little, too late'. It seems that only when a species is on the brink of extinction that any adequate monitoring of the health and welfare of that species is undertaken.

Our next concern is that Wombats, with the exception of the critically endangered Northern Hairy Nosed species are not adequately protected in any State and no coordination or conservation strategies exist between States.

Wombat populations are threatened by land clearing, permitted shooting, illegal killing, increasing road kill, lack of coordinated wildlife corridors, changes in climate and associated alarming weather events, hunting, and mange, an infestation caused by a mite.

There are three species and a sub species of wombat in Australia. The Northern Hairy Nosed wombat is known to be critically endangered and thus is the only species adequately monitored or for which some appropriate action to care for and maintain the species exists. The Southern Hairy Nosed wombat, residing primarily in South Australia has minimum protection and the Bare Nosed Wombat in N.S.W. Victoria and Tasmania receives minimum protection dependent on the State and area in which they reside. It is incorrect to consider these animals protected or their numbers monitored.

Mange, caused by *Sarcoptes Scabiei*, a mite, decimates populations of wombats. It is not only a population scale animal welfare issue but it causes localised extinctions of wombat populations. Many of these localised extinctions are permanent as evidenced by locations Australia wide where once were wombats but where none have been seen in decades. A recently publicised extinction has occurred in Narawntapu National Park in Tasmania. Our Society warned the Tasmanian government of Mange many years ago and was assured by the Tasmanian Government that 'their' wombats were safe.

WPSA signals the need to convince the Coalition Government to strive harder in protecting our irreplaceable diversity, while giving more importance to animal (wombat) welfare in Federal policy making. It makes little sense to allow State Governments alone to monitor and control the welfare of any native species, given our native animals are still crown property. For the Commonwealth to continue to delegate that responsibility leads to poor outcomes for any threatened species and explains why Australia is leading the world in species extinction rates. (Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform and Ecosystems Services report- UN) warning of one million species).

In all states such as in Tasmania, Victoria and N.S.W. Permits to Kill wombats are provided to farmers by state authorities such as Environment and Heritage workers who have limited updated data, limited or no training in assessing population level wombat numbers and limited skilled expertise in advising property owners how to maintain healthy populations. In wombat ecology, for example, when the dominant population is shot out from an area, recruitment from adjacent areas occurs, leading to many new burrows being dug, the rationale given for permitting shooting on agricultural land in the first place.

In Victoria the wombat has virtually no protection and recently Australians and wombat lovers world wide were outraged to hear of hunting parties being promoted in Victoria. Lack of State species protection leads to such outcomes and diminishes us as a nation, and detracts from our ability to attract tourists, the majority of whom are not interested in killing our native fauna and nor should they be permitted to, under any circumstance.

Sarcoptes Scabiei threatens populations in each state other than Queensland where wombats exist and is a major animal welfare issue. State governments have shown themselves incapable of meeting even the most basic animal welfare standards, leaving any attempt to assist wombats to the volunteer sector. Wombats are a difficult animal to treat for this infestation due to their nocturnal and burrowing behaviours, however a number of treatment programs have been developed and have shown mange is both treatable and preventable.

Roadkill of wombats causes huge resource use, not only in the harm to people and the health system, but to vehicles and the insurance system and in the Wildlife voluntary sector. In the voluntary wildlife sector joeys left orphaned when females are hit need to be raised and further resources go into the volunteer effort to remove carcasses from the road to prevent further injuries to motorists and other animals feeding off carcasses. Many areas are known hotspots for road kill, yet no State Government invests in any form of appropriate road kill mitigation. It is pointless to have Wildlife corridors traversed by major highways without roadkill mitigation programs.

There is a potential for National monitoring systems for wombat numbers, health, and roadkill. Ad hoc systems do exist but are inadequately funded and not used collectively within or across States. One such system WomSat developed by the University of Western Sydney has the capacity to become a model monitoring system which would also allow Citizen Scientists to be involved if properly funded.

Finally, we are extremely dismayed that in the few areas where States purport to have protection laws, people flagrantly abuse these but are not held to account. There are virtually no prosecutions in any state for people deliberately harming wombats, whether by shooting, poisoning, burying burrows or intentional road kill. There is no point in having laws that are not enacted nor policed

WPSA Recommendations:

- Sarcoptic Mange in bare nosed wombats should be prioritised as a welfare issue and Commonwealth funded treatment programs implemented.
- Existing systems for monitoring numbers of and health of wombats Australia wide, such as WomSat should be Commonwealth funded and used as the most appropriate data collection system allowing researchers and citizen scientists together to monitor the numbers of and health of what is a national treasure and responsibility.
- No State should have the authority (be able) to allow any native animals to be culled or hunted.
- In cases where any native animal needs removal from any area this should be done via a Commonwealth Licence provided to the State using best practice guidelines and offering any fauna care group the opportunity to develop and provide humane alternatives.
- Provide the legal protection for all Australia's fauna and flora through federally enacted law and police the abuse of those laws ensuring penalties for non compliance are implemented and advertised as a further protection by warning others who abuse laws due to ineffectual or non existent consequences.