

WOMBAT PROTECTION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA BULLETIN 17  
FEBRUARY 2008

Welcome to Bulletin 17

In December we were contacted by a member of the public concerned about wombats being shot at Kandos. Readers may remember it is not unusual for the Society to be asked or told about such matters. Often the biggest problem is the event has happened in the past, or has been told by someone to someone (is heresay) but we always do what we can to follow up. When told of wombats being shot at Yowrie N.S.W. , we contacted the licensing officer at N.P.W.S. and confirmed two permits had been given in the area. One was given in a situation where we believed we could offer the landholder an alternative and he was sent a letter called a "new landholder letter" which explains that if the property owner needs help to manage wombats on their property we will assist. In the other case we weren't given the address so couldn't do anything other than report that two legal permits had been issued. We try to be available to landholders who do ask for help and to resolve their issues and explain wombat behaviour to them. We wrote and spoke to the person involved at Kandos. Thanks to all those members who responded to the Kandos report and also to another concerning wombats that may be affected by a development.

Sometimes the simple act of dispelling myths about wombats can make a big difference. One farm visit led us to understand the farmer's concerns much better. Shown two burrows spaced around 500 metres on the far bank of the river, we initially couldn't understand the farmer's problem. After a bit of a chat, we realised the poor fellow believed that burrows were connected by underground tunnels and suddenly, seen through his eyes, we could understand what he was frightened about.!!! Similarly, another farmer was under the impression that wombats had "litters of pups" a number of times each year. The Dairy farm "Moama" near Bemboka is a good example where change in farming practises lead to resolutions to perceived problems. Initially involved with helping removing willows from the riparian (river/creek) zone, the local Catchment Management Authority has helped see this area fenced and an additional wildlife corridor constructed on the land. Wombat burrows seen in the now regrown riparian zone are holding well despite the river coming up and over them. Concerns about burrows causing erosion are now resolved. As more examples of farming practises where harmony between wildlife and farm activities become known, more change will be possible. It is often by talking to those who profess their dislike of wombats, that the most can be learnt and the best changes implemented. It is wonderful though to

find people who are looking for positive solutions and there seems to be more of them around these days . Sapphire Coast Flora Nursery is a good example where the owners sought help to solve what had been a major problem for them of wombats pushing under fences and letting rabbits into their fenced area. They put in some magnificent wombat gates which solved the problem.



Wombat Gates at Sapphire Coast Flora Nursery

These gates are made to let "prehistoric" wombats through and wombat gates certainly don't need to be as elaborate but we were impressed that the owners went to such lengths.



Less elaborate gate used on "Never A Doubt"

This month it was great to meet brothers, Pat and Tony from Toothdale who made the trek out to talk through their concerns about wombats. They live on rugged, decomposed granite hills which run down into the local catchment. Their area is reknown for

older style farming practises of clearing gullies and shooting out native animals, particularly wombats. Their concern arose from neighbours commenting on a number of burrows and suggesting they should get rid of the wombats to stop erosion. Already on the path to replanting their gullies, they were happy to find that they would need to take no further action as replanting near burrows works well and as their gullies were regenerated their erosion issues would stop. "Cowsnest", a nearby farm has replanted gullies around wombat burrows successfully and the wombats have happily left the replantings alone and now it is with some difficulty that burrows can be seen.



Replanting around burrow at Cowsnest

We were able to suggest the brothers get involved with the Catchment Management Authority and Landcare to help them in their endeavours and also link them into the Carbon trading schemes that pay farmers who are replanting. They left feeling they had suitable ammunition to address any of their neighbour's future comments.

The Catchment Management Authority also contacted wanting advice for a horse stud where the owners were concerned that horses were receiving sprains from collapsing burrows. In this case, electric fencing to let wombats in and keep horses away was the solution and as the farm already used electric fencing, an easy and available solution as well. At a recent Wombat day at Berridale a suggestion from Bill and Lesley Waterhouse is to use old pallets to mark burrows and stop stock wandering on top of them.

Shortly after sending out an email to members about wombats affected by a housing development and others being shot, members supplied contacts to help resolve both situations. The ability to respond and put people into contact with one another is one of the

most important links in the chain of protection. This works on the broader public issues, like landholder's concerns down to the more niche area of those who rear wombats needing help or advice or contact with a vet or a carer who has treated certain problems. We feel this area of the Society is working well and we get good feedback when we link a member / member of the public who has a problem to contacts who can help resolve it.

There is a huge group of people out there who really care about our wombats, but who can have little to do with them due to where they live or their work. The Society as a Public Company is duty bound to represent these people and their concerns as well as those of you who are fortunate enough to be more intimately involved with the wonderful world of wombatdom. One woman upon hearing a talk about road kill mitigation was so relieved to find that there were groups working on this issue she made herself known to us. The one thing she had found abhorrent when she moved to a wombat region was the number of dead bodies left after road kills. It had really been affecting her and to find that there were people who checked pouches and tried to educate drivers had a positive psychological impact on her. The Society produces a pamphlet "Wombat, big brains, no roadsense...so use yours, slow down dusk to dawn".

It was a delight to have contact with a dad in Colorado whose daughter and her best friend are "mad about wombats" despite never having any contact with them. By now they will have received their society T-Shirt and card and another link in the chain of caring for wombats has been made. We were also asked whether we would accept donations from Germany this month. Does a wombat like to dig?



Peaches in Pot Plant from Shirley Lack N.S.W.

Some areas of wombat care need a lot of money to resolve problems and this is where the Society will concentrate its attention in the coming year. We still don't know whether the mite that causes mange is a sub species or whether it has differentiated and around \$100,000.00 is needed to answer this question and begin investigating whether a vaccine could assist wombats. One hypothesis is that wombat areas where manged wombats are left alive to purposely infest others are also those areas where burrows are most numerous. Longitudinal studies need to be done and published to support change practises.

There are a number of carers who have rescued and saved wombats but now fear there are no safe release sites whether because of mange, road kill, over development or local culling practises. There needs to be a system where those wombats could be housed in appropriate conditions until safe release sites are established. The Society previously discussed developing "wombat hospitals" within 50kms of one another throughout the wombat's territory. These need an interlocking set of major wilderness areas where pre release sites can be established and wombats in those areas can be supported. The Society was pleased to hear from N.A.R.G. a relative newcomer to the rehabilitation arena, that they have secured the right to a lease over a large parcel of land suitable as a release site.

There was a positive public response to Monaro Press's promotion of the "Mange Can Be Stopped Campaign" and to the Newcastle Herald's publication of an opinion piece .This is reproduced below for your interest.

Wombats , "Property of the Crown" , a far cry fom being "Protected".  
Published Newcastle Herald February 2008;

It makes me wonder and perhaps it will you too, what the word "Protection" means when you consider how the wombat, a supposedly "protected species" throughout its limited range in Australia is "Protected". While many of us have been roused to action seeing pictures of whales being harpooned, or have donated, (as has the Australian Government) to animal rescue programs outside Australia, most of us don't have a clue about the suffering of wombats, our claimed "iconic" animal; happening, often literally, in our own backyards. We all tend to believe that these animals are protected by law, and if hurt , injured, or endangered, National Parks and Wildlife Service or some other Government body steps in to help them. Sadly, this is untrue.

In N.S.W. it is easier to get a permit from National Parks and Wildlife Service ( now part of the Department of Environment and

Climate Change) to kill wombats (and more are issued) than it is to get a license to rear and rehabilitate one. Thousands are left to die when trucks and cars run them down on the roads, or dog attacks or shooting of females leave a motherless joey. Of those thousands of joeys, fewer than a hundred get rescued from the pouches of their dead mothers to be raised and released back into the "wild" by wildlife rehabilitation groups. That's if there is a "wild" into which they can be safely released. Laws across States vary with South Australia not permitting hand reared animals to be returned to the wild and N.S.W. insisting they are.

*A wombat should spend two years with its mother, learning its territory, feeling the ground and the seasonal changes, learning where to go for water, where a bolt hole or burrow is, finding scratching spots, learning that pathways other wombats use and leave marked by scats, tell what food the other wombat has eaten, whether it is well or sick, male or female and whether it is in season, or has a joey. The human who replaces the mother wombat has to try and teach the orphan all these skills and be prepared to say goodbye after two years of total devotion. That's a big ask and these dedicated people deserve all the help they can get. Their task would be lot easier if wombats were truly and appropriately protected. Of those released, few will find a safe haven where they can live out their days peacefully. If a suitable habitat for release ( large, forested, with water, away from roads and highways and farmers and others who shoot/gas/poison or trap wombats) is available and the wombat manages to miss being killed by feral and hunter's dogs if released in a State Forest and avoids being killed by logging trucks therein, or if released in a National Park, avoids leaving the National Park so that farmers don't shoot the wombat for "agricultural reasons", then mange, an insidious and deadly mite infestation will see the youngster dead within months unless treated.*

Thousands of wombats die each year, slowly and painfully from mange, meanwhile inevitably passing the mites to their joeys. When they finally succumb to a long drawnout death, characterised by skin fissuring and scabbing, infections and flyblow, blindness and emaciation and crawl into a burrow and die, for the next two to three weeks the mites have to live, they infest any other wombat that sticks their nose down the burrow. Mange is easily treated, particularly in its early stages and we have eradicated this problem from ourselves and our domestic animals and could easily do so for our wombats if we choose to. Human activity is responsible for the suffering of our wombats and human activity is needed to ameliorate this suffering.

Our care, or lack of it, of this wonderful iconic animal seriously diminishes us as Australians and as human beings. Were we to allow domestic animals to develop and suffer from mange the way wombats do, we would be charged with animal cruelty and severely fined, if not jailed. It seems that native animals as "property of the crown" have a form of protection that simply fails to protect.

Other states are just as "unprotective" as N.S.W.

*Over 150 parishes in Victoria allow wombats to be shot without even needing a permit. Reports of wombats being sold in Pet shops in Victoria continue. A Tasmanian government response to a query about mange was a flippant whatever's happening on the mainland, don't worry, we've got plenty of wombats. South Australia has "monitored" the progression of mange and while "monitoring" seen it take hold in the three major populations of Southern Hairy Nosed wombat it "protects". Western Australia has (unverified recently) a few representatives of the Southern Hairy Nosed species on its border but otherwise it and the Northern Territory have no wombats and Queensland has the only living representatives of the Northern Hairy Nosed wombat, once established throughout the state but now living in a single forest, now "protected" by a fenced area in Epping National Park. These 115 individuals are the only wombats in Australia not dying from mange. Extinction has got them first. Wombats in Tasmania and on Flinders Island all have mange and foxes, the usually blamed vector, are not responsible as Tasmania only had foxes released there recently and Flinders remains fox free.*

*A number of native animal rescue groups in N.S.W. spent last year fighting one another over territory because National Parks and Wildlife Service as the delegated Government department that issues licenses- both to rescue and rehabilitation groups and to those who wish to shoot wombats, "prefer" that there be only one rescue group in "each area". Meanwhile, they issued hundreds of permits to kill wombats to private landowners without any checks being done, alternatives to killing wombats offered, or any inspection to see whether the killing was necessary or done humanely. While the rehabilitation groups had their government "preference" induced turf war, mange continued to spread throughout all populations of wombats unabated because these groups cannot keep up with their basic rescue and rehabilitation tasks, let alone take on a major health crisis like mange. They all rely on volunteers who contribute without receiving any tax benefit by paying for their petrol to undertake rescues and contributing heavily to the feed costs and often totally to the medicine bill for injured animals. (Vets usually donate their time free). National*

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*Parks and Wildlife Service is supporting the development of a "wildlife rehabilitation council", but as it is only represented by volunteer groups it has licensed, it means those actively involved in working to eradicate mange continue their dedicated work unsupported.*

Only a tiny handful of primarily, independently operating carers try desperately to stop the disaster and to gain support from those who should be taking action to no avail.

Let's hope 2008 gets some priorities straight and that protection of native animals begins to be just that."(end of article).

It is important for all of us to realise that "we" are the "they" that makes Government Policy . This will only change when and if enough of "us" make clear our views and wishes. Democracies, almost by definition, work slowly, but don't discount the importance of your view and your say. Write to your local pollie, each time they change, whether in power or in opposition ,and tell them what you feel and think. At the end of the day these folk are our representatives and they need the opportunity to be empowered by knowledge to represent properly.Government Departments and their policies don't change by osmosis they change by having an itch that needs scratching. Be a mite. Cause an itch.

The Society will again write to all State Premiers next month requesting an update on what each is doing to protect wombats and what each is doing to deal with Mange. We will let you know in each Bulletin who replies and when they do. If you contact a pollie about wombat issues, send us a copy of your letter and we'll inspire others by publishing it. The "you speak for me" principle often helps someone else have the courage to take action.

The Society has received \$1,000.00 from "Voiceless, the fund for animals" for further distribution of the Mange Symposium information which will help information about mange be given to all rehabilitation groups throughout the country.

Until next time may you and all the wombats remain healthy, happy and mange free.We hope to see as many of you as possible at the A.G.M. March 1<sup>st</sup> at Quaama or hear from you beforehand so any view you would like represented may be.Until then may your burrow stay dry, may your back be scratched and may you know the priviledge of loving something that you set free.

Joey's Pages



Hello everyone and thank you all for your great responses to last month's challenge. It was to give us a slogan to the picture sent to us by Bob and Jan Cleaver from South Australia showing Anusha (remember the naming competition) and her friends. Well none of you picked that the two kangaroos in the picture are unusual because one is an Western Grey Kangaroo and the other a Eastern Grey,... ( with Anusha, a Southern Hairy Nosed Wombat in the middle) but hey, when Bob sent us the picture as a Happy New Year one we missed it too!!! The other two are Daisy and Poa, Bare Nosed Wombats from N.S.W. doing well; what wombats do well.

So here are some of the best;



Do you two mind if I share? (Romy (9) via-John and Una Merrick)  
Why haven't I got an apple? (Bob Cleaver)

Is that your mum?

Don't look now but there's a funny creature coming between us



"Oy!!! Move!!!" (Bob Cleaver)

A little more to the right please (Romy (9)- John and Una Merick)  
I said bite YOUR bum, not mine!

This month we talked to P.J. Nicolson, "the wombat boy" (see last months' bulletin) and his wife Lucinda, amongst a few other P.J. Nicholsons called. It is surprising how many responded to a message to call back if this was the P.J. Nicholson who crawled into wombat burrows at school. Many a perplexed and funny conversation was had! THREE P.J. Nicholsons had been involved with wombats when they were younger.

The "young wombat person of the year award" announced previously as going to Jarred Wynan and his brother Jake is now able to be called the P.J. Nicholson Award ( see "Wombat Boy" Bulletin 16 ). The award will be annual and given to an associate member who demonstrates "care, concern and devotion to wombats, their welfare or the pursuit of knowledge about them" in line with the Society's aims and objectives. Jake and Jarred recently showed some of the board around their property and introduced "Ken", star of the boy's D.V.D. sold on site. Ken is a free living and naturally reared wombat, not a released orphan the boys befriended. On cue, Ken came ambling out the night and rolled and played and enjoyed having his back scratched. Ken is a beautiful big male who obviously enjoys the company. Two wombats that the boys had treated for mange were also seen ( again, on cue first one was seen and then the other we were looking for) and Jake was able to retreat them while we were there.



Ken enjoys a scratch and two wombats with mange (one is in a burrow under the log) get treated.



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