

Wombat Protection Society

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Why Wombats Need Protection

Lack of Research

The Wombat Protection Society of Australia was initiated following meetings between people involved with wombats from different aspects.

One group was involved in raising and releasing orphaned wombats, another in River Management and included riparian zone farmers and Landcare workers and a third group that focuses on developing native animal sanctuaries / habitat protection and conservation areas on private and public land.

It became clear through these groups that not enough is known about wombats and a great deal of myth exists. Some people thought they bred like or were related to rodents (they are related to Koalas) and others thought their burrows extended miles underground (they don't) and would cause huge erosion problems (it is actually the cows not the wombats that cause the erosion). Others thought they had litters of "pups" (they have one Joey approximately every three years) or ate things they didn't (they eat native Australian grasses).

At the same time, there are few behavioral studies undertaken to help people understand why wombats do what they do. They will go under a fence in one spot and back through the fence the other way less than a metre from the first spot (they follow scent trails but can learn to use wombat gates).

Many farmers and others who resort to unnecessary cruelty do so because they aren't assisted manage problem issues like burrow digging near infrastructure. Research into wombat behavior is unfunded. There are no incentives or subsidies for people to set aside appropriate habitat for wombats Lack of research and education causes these incredibly beautiful, harmless nocturnal marsupials to be misunderstood and not appreciated for their important role in the Australian ecology.

Lack of Legislative Protection/Enforcement

In Australia native animals are "the property of the Crown". This means that no-one owns wombats; they can't be kept as pets and to do anything with them you have to be licensed by government departments.

Government Departments do little to protect or help wombats. Most research and all welfare (rescuing injured wombats, raising the joeys of mothers killed in collisions with vehicles, removing wombats from unsuitable places) is undertaken by voluntary organizations.

While penalties exist if someone is found to hurt or kill a wombat, the same government departments charged with wombat care issue permits to farmers to cull wombats. Sadly, there is often no check whether this is necessary, whether it is done humanely or any insistence that alternative options be employed before issuing such permits.

On the other hand although penalties exist for the illegal killing of wombats, such killing occurs every night where on a farms they are shot, buried alive and gassed and on the highways of Australia vehicles indiscriminately drive directly at wombats without penalty. Live joeys left in their dead mother's pouches die slowly and a lack of public education means few Australians understand how to rescue a joey still living after its mother falls victim to road kill.

The failure by all governments to adequately research and protect wombats from such fates in the areas where they remain combined with government sanctioned logging practices in forests (which see their burrows ripped up and logging trucks on the road at night when wombats come out to eat), lead to multiple wombat deaths. All these practices and failures continue today.

Human Impact and Disease

Human impact on the wombat population is now at a critical level. Wombats suffer from a disease called mange that was introduced to Australia and to wombats by human activity. Mites that cause mange lead to deep skin fissures that become flyblown and septic. This leads to a long, slow and painful death for wombats. In addition they are also being affected by a fungal lung disease for which there is currently no cure. Diseases and viruses brought in by farming activity now affect wombats. Incidents of coccidia, clostridium perfringens and tetanus amongst others ,are evident in wombats. Some people believe that the distribution of mange is so widespread that only isolated populations and those tended in sanctuaries will, in the long term survive.

It is only recently that Veterinarians have begun to receive training in dealing with native animal health. Behavioral studies on wombats are few and limited in their scope. As a result wombats are misunderstood and those attempting to rear and rehabilitate injured and orphaned wombats have difficulty getting them appropriate medical attention and in helping others understand the best ways of living with wombats.

Habitat destruction is having a major impact on wombat numbers as well. Water sources and grazing areas being fenced into farms and out of public lands limits the suitable range for wombats to a small strip of land. Although Australia is a big country there are few areas where wombats can live undisturbed. They are restricted to a small section of the east coast of Australia. Unless they are fully protected their limited distribution will reduce further. This is already evident in the northern Hairy Nose Wombat whose numbers are so low that the species is severely threatened and without human intervention will become extinct.

The Wombat Protection Society's Formation

The Wombat Protection Society of Australia has formed as a non-profit organization to raise money to fund projects that provide wombats with immediate protection from harm, enhance the quality of life of individuals or groups of wombats and to fund projects which develop or maintain suitable habitat/ sanctuaries for wombats.

The society will also fund and support research projects which meet these criteria. One aim of the society is to develop an interactive web site which will bring together people involved in wombat conservation and protection, maintain a data base of up to date research and information about wombats and serve as a conduit for further research.

Children Are The Future

The Wombat Protection Society recognizes that educating and teaching children is the only way of maintaining the long term health and welfare of wombats.

In providing education and activities to children through the web site, the organization plans to teach children about wombats and develop a children's membership that can nominate and vote for projects that the society will fund with funds raised by the children.

It will work with the creativity and enthusiasm of this children's membership to develop the children's website and funding projects. A major component of the society's long term fundraising strategy is the involvement of children in the membership. The goal is to have a global membership of children to ensure the long term viability of the society as well as ensuring that the future of wombats is in educated hands.

Legacies Our Present

The Wombat Protection Society intends to raise money from sources different to those already being employed to raise funds for wildlife.

It will actively seek legacies and bequests as well as suitable sponsorships.

In addition it is intended that the society will develop new ways for the children's membership to assist in raising funds. It is intended that the society support the work of existing groups rather than duplicating services or competing for funds.

We particularly want to focus fundraising overseas due to the very limited market in Australia, however we expect that bequests and sponsorships are most likely to come from within the country.

Where We Are Now?

The society has been launched and is in the process of being registered as a public company limited by guarantee.

It will be governed by a Constitution and the Australian Securities and Investment Commission's "Replaceable Rules". This means that in the initial phases three directors and a secretary and one member have been nominated to meet the requirements to register as a company and begin operation.

A steering committee of directors meets monthly.

Directors have accepted nominations for company registration.

A member has loaned immediate set up money to allow the guarantee to be met and registration to proceed.

Where to Next?

Once the company is registered an Australian Business Number will be issued and the Society can begin "trading."

The Society will then need to meet criteria to be registered as an Australian Charity and therefore be able to provide tax deductibility to donors. To achieve this, the Society lists its members and "sits" on the Australian Conservation Registry for a period of time and shows, through its constitution that it meets the standards for registration as a charity.

What You Can Do

You can show your support by contacting the society's secretary Amanda Cox at info@wombatprotection.org.au.

A dedicated website www.wombatprotectionsociety.com.au will be available after company registration is completed.

You can give permission to include your name and contact details for the Register of environmental organizations.

You can spread the word about the society and elect to be sent email updates that you can share with interested parties who don't have computer access.

You can help by volunteering particular skills you have. The Society will send out a list of skills needed in our next bulletin.

You can contribute pictures, information and references to resources that can help those involved in the care and protection of wombats.

You can assist by helping to develop the children's involvement by suggesting web based activities, games and fundraising ideas suitable for children.

You can put anyone you know who might be interested in sponsoring or bequeathing a legacy to the Society in contact with the Society.