

Wombat Protection Society

Bulletin Number 3 – December 2006

Welcome to Bulletin Number Three.

It has been a busy month for the Wombat Protection Society.

We have registered sufficient members to apply for charity status and have all our required A.C.N.s and A.B.N.s, Tax File Numbers, G.S.T. registration and have opened the trust fund bank account.

Members have been giving great input into the website, what they see as issues the society should be addressing and younger members and interested parties have begun telling us what they'd like to see on site and as activities.

Alexandra Seddon, an artist and environmentalist involved in the Pambula wetlands sanctuary and Potoroo Palace in NSW has supplied artwork for what will become the society's logo.

One of the big issues for people involved in caring for and rehabilitating wombats is wombat mange. This parasitic skin infection was introduced to Australia by the fox which remains a vector of the mite. Wombats, more than any other native animal, are seriously affected by this mite and it leads to eventual death. There seems to be two stages, a superficial skin irritation which eventually leads to stage two where huge maggot ridden skin fissures cause infection and death. Most research into mange is limited and anecdotal and virtually no research has occurred into preventative methods within the wild population.

The Wombat Protection Society of Australia is pleased to announce that as a result of member concerns, the Board of Directors approved the following at their meeting on December 10th 2006.

Moved J.Smith Seconded J. Bruce "That the Wombat Protection Society become a 'Clearing House' for information about mange in the next three months, that in the following six, it undertakes member assisted research to document the spread and extent of mange Australia wide, and that the society have as a goal the eradication of mange in the wild population within 5 years." ...All in Favour.

A number of factors influenced this decision. Membership concern about mange was the initiation point and the either unanswered or flippant responses from government departments has made it clear that those vested with the legal responsibility for caring for wombats are not doing their job.

There is a concern expressed by different members in different states that mange will wipe out the Common Wombat within 5-10 years, yet there is no such concern in government arenas.

Mange causes a slow, insidious and painful death that were a domestic animal allowed to suffer, its owners would be charged through animal cruelty legislation, yet apparently, because wombats are wild they are afforded no such protection.

The society believes that if you have the privilege to live in countries where animal habitat is limited, or a specific species resides, then you are duty bound to care for and protect that species for the rest of humanity, not just for the residents of that country.

We are duty bound to teach other Australians about the limited distribution of wombats and to engage the broader society in assisting care for and protect these animals. To knowingly allow a disease as insidious as mange to not only wreak havoc on population numbers but to cause slow death from putrifying maggot ridden wounds is simply, inhumane.

As people fortunate enough to have connected with wombats in some way and to have developed awareness of their issues it is incumbent on us to set the goals high to ensure their health, their habitat and their longer term survival.

Too late our heroic actions to attempt to claw back from the brink of extinction the Northern Hairy-Nosed Wombat. There are less than 120 of these animals left .To be responsible for the extinction of any species is a disgrace, and in a country as affluent and educated as Australia it is a national disgrace. To live on a continent that in the shortest period of time known to humankind has had stewardship over the greatest number of animal extinctions, is a sobering and totally unacceptable record of care. The society believes this must change and that our children's children must be able to see wombats in the wild.

Wombats seem to be a good barometer for the health of the land. Their habitat is limited and becoming smaller. As the continent has dried they have moved toward the small sections of eastern Australia they now inhabit and as forests and land clearing have taken more habitat they have moved into the riparian zones where they come into conflict with antiquated agricultural practices. Such practices allow stock and grazing in riparian- river and creek zones. There wombats are accused of causing erosion because as cows and agriculture bikes move through their tracks and burrows stream banks are claimed to collapse. Left as habitat, wombats would be understood as a soil engineers, helping the river and stream courses.

Farmers are given permits to kill wombats because of these environmentally disastrous practices and such culling only makes matters worse as younger wombats take over territories and dig more, not fewer holes. Water quality and quantity has become a major issue for Australia and as Australian agricultural practices progress, the management of the Riparian zone to exclude stock should mean more protection for wombat habitat. With streams and rivers receiving appropriate flows, wombat burrows should get cleaned out by the occasional flood and this may also assist wombat health by lessening the prevalence of mange.

So, along with the goal of eradicating mange from the wild population these other measures to care for and protect wombats have been set as goals or objectives for the society.

1. To ensure that no more wombat habitat is destroyed.
2. To fully protect wombats in all remaining habitats.
3. To promote and protect riparian zone habitat as wildlife corridors and

Wombat habitat.

4. To work to change regulations so that no wombat anywhere can be culled for “agricultural” purposes.
5. To promote wombats and Australia’s unique stewardship and responsibility to these animals.
6. To make sure that Australians know how to rescue a wombat and how to help an injured animal.
7. To provide sanctuaries for wombats in all wombat inhabited areas within 50kms of each other.

In the next bulletins we will discuss each of these objectives in greater detail. We look forward to hearing from members and others involved with wombats about these objectives. It has been good to hear from members in general but especially pleasing to have begun to get input from younger people about how they would like to be involved.