

“From Small Beginnings”
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Every organisation starts with a small group of people, who have similar needs and aspirations, getting together to form a formal group that can meet those needs and fulfill those aspirations. I want to tell you about that journey.

In 1989 NQWC started out just like most other wildlife care organisations. Help was obtained from the EPA to contact people that had had permits to care for wildlife with the aim of forming a wildlife care organisation.

People who turn up at the initial meetings are usually people who are committed wildlife carers and their experiences and knowledge may be very extensive across a wide range of species or may be very narrow and just restricted to a single family of animals.

Regardless of back-round there is usually a great amount of good will and enthusiasm to work as a group and help each other. If you're lucky the group will contain people with other skills such as secretarial, accountancy, publicity, organizational and especially fund raising skills.

Back in these early days there were quite a number of National Parks and Wildlife Service Rangers and the head ranger was very supportive of the group but pictured the group as a group of volunteers that would be directed by him to support the NPWS. This probably held back development of the group for about a year until the executive and members made it quite clear in their rules in their incorporation document that they were quite independent and did not need to be subservient to NPWS.

Incorporation occurred in 28th November 1990 with the following

Aims of NQWC

- a. To care for sick, injured and orphaned native fauna for rehabilitation and release
- b. To provide mutual assistance, support and information about the care of sick, injured and orphaned native fauna.
- c. To encourage education concerning native fauna in the community
- d. To provide access to release sites approved by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.
- e. To provide access to veterinary resources at minimal cost.
- f. To provide a Trust Fund (with Tax deductibility) this was added a few years later.

The group had all the usual
An executive comprising

- President,
- Secretary
- Treasurer

Additional people were appointed to the following positions
Publicity officer and Training Officer

Later on they added a Vice President, Minute Secretary, and Resource Officer

They met at various private houses for many years. One of the early decisions was to establish Coordinators for various species. So they established a Coordinator for the following Macropods, Possums and small Marsupial Mammals, Birds, Bats, and Turtles.

These coordinators would mentor new carers and allocate new animals coming into care to appropriately trained carers.

This concept has proved it's worth over the years and the group now have 3 Macropod coordinators, 1 Possum and small mammal coordinator 3 Bird coordinators, and 1 Bat Coordinator, a Reptile coordinator and Turtles are handled by 1 carer

The Philosophy of the group has always been

1. It is important that every animal coming into care be assessed with the view that if it can never be released into the wild it should be euthanased. I know this is a bold statement and I will admit there are a few exceptions for Captive Breeding Programs and others but generally this holds true. We have all seen those wonderful wildlife carers that fill their cages with non release animals that they care for, for the rest of their life!!!!!! We have always been dead against people filling their facilities with cripples

We believe that resources and our time should be spent on animals with a high expectation of rehabilitation and release

2. Wildlife caring and rehabilitation is a hobby and a way of life for many people but carers have to work within their family budget to afford the day to day costs of this vocation. Just because you do 10 times more than the next person "Please do not expect someone to pay for the cost of food and facilities".

Our group buys aviaries and cages and loans them out to the carers but retains ownership of the resource. The group has an extensive collection of resources including about 40 macropod panels 3m x 1.8m, 10 aviaries, 4 Humidi-cribs safety vests and they even have a poultry incubator and candle light for bird and reptile eggs.

3. The group will supply foods and medicines at as cheap a cost as possible .

This is well below the cost of anyone buying it casually from a vet or pet store.

With regard to finances it is far easier to get grants for money to be spent on material resources that will still be around in 5-10 years time. In our experience grant providers are reluctant to give money to be spent on food that ultimately literally turns to faeces with nothing to show in material terms. They like to see something that shows where their money has gone.

We have tried subsidizing food and after about 3 years we gave it away. Our method was simple– we believed that a hobby usually costs about \$30/week (e.g. play basket ball, skate, fishing, play bridge etc.) or about \$120.00 per month. If the carer produced receipts for food for a month of greater than \$120.00 then we would give them 50% of the difference as a subsidy. The system worked but only about 8 people availed themselves of it and it generally cost the group about \$1000 in a year. It was difficult for the coordinator to keep track and to administer the program and so it was dropped some years ago.

It has been my experience that **when ever a group has a surplus of money in its account members will start to demand that the group subsidises the cost of caring, usually cheap or free food.** You would all be aware that someone stageing macropods may have 10 or 12 large grey kangaroos drinking 50 ml Wombaroo twice daily that it adds up to over a litre a day so \$80.00 a week does not go far without discussing the costs of teats, bottles, medicines etc. Our group had this happen, and they were mostly macropod carers. They formed a new group and flourished for while but their dreams of cheap food were not realized. They are now defunct. One other carer who was organizing donations for a big funday fund raiser had a personality clash with two other carers and got her knickers in a knot and broke away and founded her own care group with cheap food that was subsidised with a grant from a mining company \$2000 a year for 3 years. She left the area and the group is now defunct. **None of these groups offered formalized trainings for beginners.**

4. Education is vitally necessary for all carers to improve their skills and knowledge and to enlighten the public about wildlife in general. Education can be achieved by having someone that can go to schools and talk to primary school children, talk to clubs and other community groups.

To this end much of our money raised through fundraising and grants went on educational material in the early years. The early committee set about developing a Training module that covered all the common species the group regularly encountered. Right from the very early days they held Basic Level 1 training every 3 months for new carers. Experienced carers prepared the notes and presented the lectures and these early talks lasted 4hours from 1-5pm on a weekend. Now days a basic Level 1 training starts at 10.30 am and goes till 5pm. At least 3 other more advanced Level 2 trainings for Macropods, Possums and Birds occur during the year with more detailed knowledge and hands on training being imparted to those that had done a level 1 training previously. All new carers are mentored by their coordinator for their first few animals until they are confident. Though the group has

trained over 1000 new members since inception we still maintain a membership number of only 130 +

Successful grants were obtained from The Environfund to develop the Level 1 training module and a Sheraton Breakwater Casino Community Benefit Fund grant paid for the first printing.

In our early days we regularly imported speakers, often for a weekend, and they included

People like Helen George, Des Cooper, and more recently we had a weekend with Chris Lloyd from WIRES in Sydney. Of course we had a lot of support from Dr. Rick Speare a great Veterinary Surgeon and Doctor who did a vast amount of work on wildlife in the seventies and eighties and was a major contributor to the early PGF wildlife courses.

5. 24/7 Phone. Very early on they put in place a mobile phone number for the public to contact regarding wildlife problems. Besides listing in the yellow pages and on various web sites, signs were placed on the north, south and western highways leading into Townsville. We now take up to 400 calls a month. All veterinary clinics and the fire station, police and ambulance receive a regular update on group's services and contacts.

As you can imagine manning this phone 24/7 is an onerous task and the group has been lucky to have a small number of carers that do most of the work.

6. Pathology. Very early on in the groups history (1993) they forged an agreement with the Pathology Dept at the School of Veterinary & Biomedical Sciences, James Cook University. It was thought that supporting members by finding out what caused the death of an animal that they had devoted many hundreds of hours to rehabilitating would help them cope with that loss and would increase the knowledge and experience of the group as a whole. To this end at least \$1000 has been allocated each year and an analysis of the data was presented at last year's conference and has changed some standard protocols in caring.

7. Records are important and everyone and every group does it differently. The important thing is that there are records kept that one can show the groups activity and they give street credibility to the group's existence and give statistical data when arguing cases with bureaucrats in government departments. Let's face it, only the wildlife care groups know what is going on with our wildlife because they are at the coal face and that is why State bodies for carers are so essential to deal with state governments who really have no concept of wildlife care financial reality.

8. Euthanasia is a problem for every group in Australia. We all recognize the wonderful support given by vets in providing free euthanasia for wild life but it is incredibly hard to access this service free after hours. There was legislation in Qld allowing non veterinarians, employed in Council dog pounds and similar situations, to be allowed to euthanase animals. They were classified as "Proscribed Entities" NQWC lobbied the Qld Dept of Primary Industries to have our group listed as a Proscribed Entity under the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001*. Our application triggered a complete review by the DPI and Queensland Health of the current situation and after about 24 months we were the first wildlife group to be listed as a

“Proscribed Entity”.. Each individual has to be trained in both theory and practical aspects of euthanasia before the vet will submit their names to the Health Department for permission to hold and use the drugs required. The vet is responsible for issuing the drugs and signing off their record of use book and has to authorize all euthanasias but can do so retrospectively if it is in the middle of the night. Our macropod coordinators who hold a euthanasia license are also able to hold Valium for use in macropods.

9. Set long term goals even if they seem more a dream than a reality. About 8 years ago we set about trying to find a building or land where we could have a Wildlife Education and Assessment Centre. We wrote to both our city councils. One council had no concept of our needs and was totally unhelpful despite a meeting to explain our requirements

The Townsville City Council was very helpful and we met and even looked at a suitable site in the Botanical Gardens that had a small building and animal cages as for ducks, poultry etc but it was not central enough being right close to the CBD when our population was expanding 15 to 25km inland and we thought that no one would bother to drive that far to drop off wildlife. It would also be a drive to man the centre. So we decided to keep looking.

In 2005 we heard of a Scout Hut (building) where the unit had been closed for the last 2 years and would probably be offered for sale if we applied.

We did apply and had a look inside and we could see the potential to make something of it. The building was on a 10 year peppercorn lease that was due to expire 30 June 2006 and the Scouts did not want to renew as they were paying rates on an unused building

We had the benefit of having the Deputy Mayor as a great supporter of NQWC and to this end we approached the council for a new 10 year lease and \$20,000 to refurbish the building. We had 2 weeks to buy the building before 30th June 2006 and if we could prove that we owned it the Council would give us \$20,000 in kind (left over in that year's budget) and a project manager to oversee how it was spent. This we achieved.

Late 2006 were spent gutting the building with working bees and drawing up plans to better utilize the space it offered. We negotiated a contract with “Life Be In It” work for the dole program that provided 8-10 labourers to work with a trained builder to carry out the refurbishment and upgrade of the building. This meant that we could submit invoices for materials to the Council to pay and these materials were then used by the “Life Be In It” crew to do the work. This ran from February 07 to July 07.

We had previously had success with a 3 year grant from BHP Billiton QNI to provide \$5,000 a year for 3 years which was largely used to pay for educational material, resources in the form of aviaries and fencing panels for macropods. We had produced 20,000 flyers that were distributed to vets, chemists, pet shops and Service Stations on the highway. This money was also allocated to producing the “First 24 Hours” a glove box book for emergency treatment for injured wildlife written by our members.

We already had a successful grant from the Breakwater Island Casino Community Benefit Fund Trust for just under \$5000 to buy a Lap Top Computer and a Data Projector

With this in mind we applied to BHP Billiton Yabulu Refinery for a further grant of \$30,000 to help with the refurbishment to cover things such as air-conditioning, plumbing and to help establish the veterinary part of the centre. They agreed to fund us with \$10,000 a year for 3 years

The first \$10,000 was used in 2007 to air-condition the building except for the animal areas that needed to be kept warm.

The second \$10,000 this year has paid for the carpet on the floor of the lecture room that takes up about 1/3 of the building It will also be used to purchase some veterinary equipment to set up the operating theatre and treatment room.

Some other successful grants that we received this year were

- Breakwater Island Casino Community Benefit Fund Trust for \$5000 towards the cost of placing quality vinyl flooring to the rest of the facility. The operating room and treatment room have full floor to wall coving while the rest has vinyl skirting.
- Gambling Community Benefit Fund provided \$6976.20 to purchase a Veterinary Treatment Table and a hydraulic Veterinary Operating Table.
- The Townsville City Council provided a grant of \$1700 to provide a floor waste and drainage and water to the treatment room.
- The Townsville City Council donated 100 native trees for the "Fodder Farm" and 2 Loads of mulch for same as a donation in kind.
- BHP Billiton Century mines (near Mount Isa) donated \$2,000 towards ongoing running costs.

Throughout the last few years we have had numerous donations of amounts of \$200 and to \$300 from a number of western mining companies. Mining companies all have environmental officers and they often send injured and orphaned wildlife in from the far western areas to us in Townsville to look after and return. We have had a number of Antilopine Wallaroos come in and be reared only to be flown back to the western areas for release. Townsville is a major residential area for many hundreds of miners that "Fly in and fly Out" every week.

Throughout the development of the centre we have been blessed with having a stable group with some hard working members who have responded to the call every time we have called a working bee to do something.

Nothing is ever achieved unless someone has had a vision or dream and has kept it alive and engendered other people to believe it can be achieved

The development of the Wildlife Assessment and Education Centre has taken 2 years since we originally bought the building and only in May have we started opening the centre on Sundays. The day is covered by 3 shifts of 3 hrs with a 20 minute overlap.

We are trying to roster one experienced carer with a less experienced carer. This has been working well and as we get more carers trained to deal with all contingencies especially on "How to handle the 15+ phone enquiries each day", we will be really making a difference. We have circulated all the vets (19 practices) to say we are open and send all animals direct to us on a Sunday. As more are trained we will open on Saturdays as well.

During the week we revert to referring injured animals direct to vets for assessment and we collect from them. It will be a long slow haul before we are able to open 7 days but we hope to get there some day.

Let me say in closing that many people have worked for many years, including my wife Eleanor Pollock who has been on the executive since its inception in 1989, (with about 10 years as treasurer and the last 9 as a vice president) to get where we are today and although I have been a member and a supporter and the groups unofficial vet for all of the groups life I have only been privileged to be their president these last 5 years. Little did these people know in the early days that the group would be as successful as it has and they are all proud to put their hand up and say "Yes I was there and I helped make this dream come true?"

**GREAT THINGS CAN BE ACHIEVED BY A SMALL GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO
HAVE VISION AND COMMITMENT**

Jim Pollock
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