

# THE STATE OF QUEENSLAND

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Chairperson  
Queensland Wildlife Rehabilitation Council*

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I would like to thank the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Conference committee for the opportunity to talk to you all today about a very important innovation which is set to give the rehabilitation industry in Queensland a government recognised overarching body which will provide great benefits to the rehabilitators of Queensland.

In 2001 public meetings, which were instigated by the Queensland State Government, were held throughout Queensland to discuss a range of issues relating to wildlife management. Then early in 2002 teleconferences were held between Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) staff and interested rehabilitators across the state. By October 2002 the "Wildlife Management Review Discussion Paper" was published by the Queensland State Government and sent to all participants of the public forums.

It was from seeds sown by rehabilitators during those forums that QWRC grew.

From this paper it is noted that in section 2 the following recommendations were made regarding wildlife rehabilitation issues:

- It was recommended that rehabilitators should be accredited or belong to an accredited rehabilitation group. Although this may be the preference of rehabilitators across Queensland, the State Government feels this is not totally possible due to the vastness of the state, and the government's desire for all persons to retain their right to individuality. The State government has chosen to address this situation by not issuing any new individual permits unless the applicant can prove that they have experience in wildlife rehabilitation. Individual permits are now only issued for a period of six (6) months. This is set out in the Nature Conservation Regulation as revised in 2004. There was a desire to progress the establishment of a state-wide association to co-ordinate members. It is from this seed that QWRC has grown. I will tell you more about this point later.
- It was recommended that the "Code of Practice" be rewritten to better address animal welfare issues. Since the recommendations of 2002 the rewriting of this code is almost complete.
- Recommendation 4 suggested that a wildlife representative be appointed to the Minister's Recreational and Commercial Animal Management Advisory Committee (RACAMAC). It must be noted that the appointment of such a representative to RACAMAC will be at the Ministers request but it is anticipated that this request will come through QWRC.
- It was also recommended that rescue permits be renamed rehabilitation permits to better address the fact that rehabilitation was the greater part of the task undertaken by all wildlife carers. This has been done.
- Rehabilitators also suggested the abolition of returns from wildlife rehabilitator to QPWS. I am sure you are all aware, and pleased, this happened very quickly.

- A further recommendation ensured that there is an obligation on any person who rescues a sick, injured or orphaned marine mammals and turtles to immediately inform a departmental conservation officer. This has been addressed.
- It was suggested wildlife exhibitors, zoos, sanctuaries etc, involved in rescue and rehabilitation of wildlife for release, be exempt from having to obtain a rehabilitation permit as well as their permit to exhibit. This too, has been done.

I am sure you will agree with me that the Government is to be commended that all of these issues have been addressed.

Do you recall I said I would tell you more about the establishment of the state wide body.

Well before I do we must note here that although it was the rehabilitators who wanted this body, it was the State government that instigated its existence and has facilitated its progress to date.

So here is what happened.

In December 2002 the first meeting between QPWS staff, an RSPCA representative and a representative from WPSQ was held to discuss the terms of reference, framework and guidelines for such a group, together with the possibility of an accreditation process for wildlife carers. At this meeting it was decided that the overarching body should include representatives from the four to six (4-6) largest existing rehabilitation groups, with up to 3 independent carers, together with representatives from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (WPSQ), QPWS and maybe Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F).

Early in 2003 this committee asked all incorporated rehabilitation groups across Queensland to nominate a representative to be considered for a place on the steering committee to progress the formation of this state-wide body.

From the nominations received selections of members for the steering committee were made based on their geographic location; the size of their group (thus representing the largest possible number of rehabilitators); and the skills and expertise of the nominees. Those not chosen for the steering committee were to make up a reference group to whom the committee could turn for assistance.

On the 12th May 2003 approximately 20 persons, including rehabilitator representatives and representatives from Environment protection Agency (EPA), QPWS, DPI&F, RSPCA and WPSQ, met in the QPWS building in Brisbane to discuss and brainstorm the formation of the state wide body.

This and all future meetings of the steering committee were very ably chaired by Mr Adrian Caneris from Biodiversity Assessment and Management.

At the inaugural meeting of the steering committee such issues as: a mission statement; who the interested stakeholders might be; setting standards; dispute resolution; and insurance were discussed. The steering committee would meet in Brisbane on a monthly basis to continue to progress the formation of the now named Queensland Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (QWRC) along the guidelines established at the first meeting.

The next step – the work of the steering committee.

Over the following months the numbers of persons able to regularly attend the monthly meetings changed and eventually the reference committee was blended with the original steering committee. I do want to make the point that all the rehabilitators on both the steering committee and the new council have paid their own way to attend all subsequent QWRC meetings, whilst thanks must go to QPWS for providing the venue and paying the costs associated with teleconferencing for those not able to attend in person.

The committee decided that the best way to handle representation of all rehabilitators across such a large state was to divide the state into regions. By closely aligning those regions with the boundaries used by QPWS it was felt that we could maximise coordination between the QPWS and rehabilitators. QWRC has therefore divided the state into (3) three regions comprising (11) eleven districts. Each of these districts is serviced by a QPWS office. Within each district we have utilised the existing shire boundaries to enable easy dissection of the district.

The northern region has three districts covering a total of 27 shires while the central region has three districts covering a total of 32 shires. The southern region has 5 districts covering a total of 66 shires.

By May 2004 the steering committee felt that to stay as a steering committee was not going to advance the eventual development of the QWRC, particularly considering the possibility of formal elections being at least two years away. It was therefore decided to elect office bearers from among the current representatives for the official positions on the QWRC until the first state-wide elections could take place - hopefully during 2006 or by 2007 at the latest.

The executive of the QWRC currently stands as:

Chairperson – (Myself) Annie Saunders from Rockhampton (Central Region – District 5)  
Vice Chairperson – Gail Gipp from Gold Coast (Southern Region – District 11)  
Treasurer – Vicky Dawson, an Individual rehabber from Brisbane (Southern Region – District 11)  
Secretary – Julie Firkins - the representative for WPSQ and;  
Minute taker – Deb Hotchkis the QPWS representative.

This executive took up their positions in August 2004.

One of the first decisions made by the QWRC Steering Committee was that QWRC should progress to being an incorporated body. This meant that we needed a set of rules or constitution. We had the option of using the model rules suggested by the Office of Fair Trading, but that would have meant a large number of changes, so it was decided that it would be easier to start from scratch and write our own. Many long hours were spent writing and re writing the constitution, a task that was finally completed in October 2004.

Each rehabilitator on the steering committee parted with some more hard earned cash and the document was submitted to the Office of Fair Trading for approval and registration. I am very pleased to say that there were only a couple of very minor alterations necessary before approval was given in early November 2004.

QWRC Inc was born!

Much discussion and thought went into the search for our mission statement.

Finally it was decided that it should be:

**“To direct, guide, and improve standards and outcomes of wildlife rehabilitation and release throughout Queensland.”**

We feel this states just what we see the role of QWRC to be and we can illustrate this as follows:

It is the aim of QWRC to unite all wildlife rehabilitators across Queensland.

QWRC will provide the means by which those actively involved in wildlife rehabilitation will have a representative statewide body.

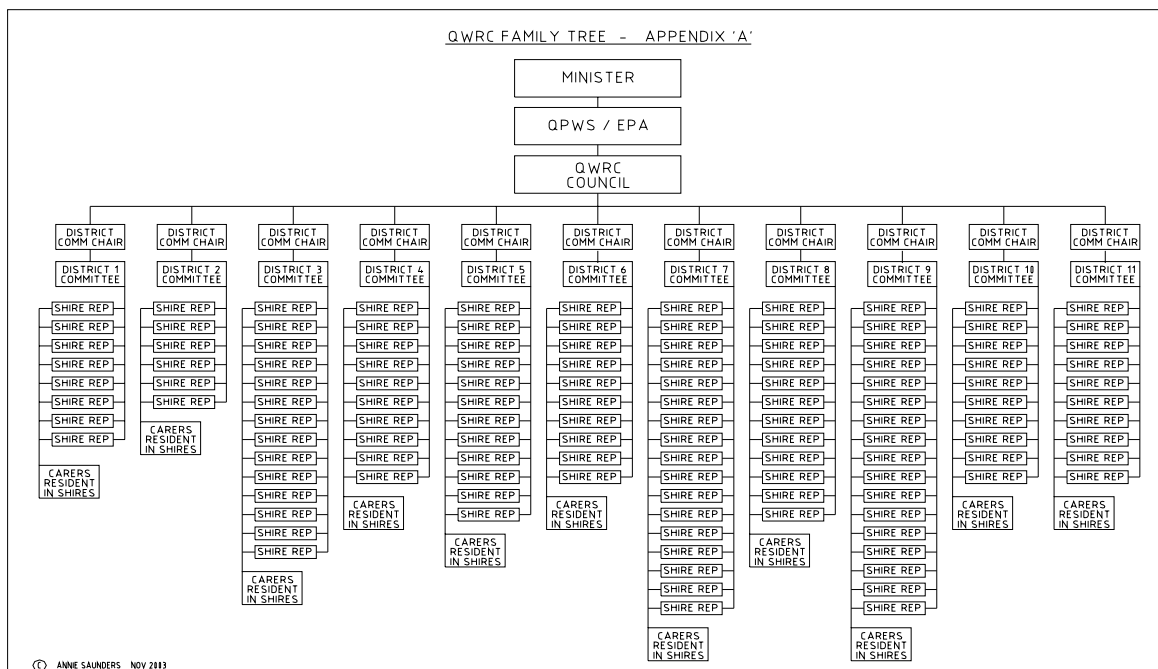
Our united voice will provide a means of influencing policy and legislation decisions.

The intention of QWRC is to provide direction and guidance to the wildlife Rehabilitation industry in Queensland to improve the standards and outcomes of wildlife care.

QWRC aims to have one rehabilitator representative elected from every shire in each of the 11 districts within Queensland.

This person will be the representative for all wildlife rehabilitators who reside in that shire. It is to that representative that rehabilitators can turn for assistance and advise on rehabilitation issues. I am not saying that the representative will necessarily handle it on their own but will be the avenue by which matters are put before QWRC. If there is an issue a rehabilitator or group is not sure how to handle QWRC may be able to suggest the best path to a solution. All shire representatives in each district will comprise the district committee. From their number they will elect a chairperson who will be their representative on QWRC.

This slide will illustrate what I have just said.



Each representative will hold the position for a minimum period of two years. The elections for these positions will be staggered across the state to ensure that QWRC always has both new and seasoned representatives members.

QWRC will **not** hold a rehabilitation permit. We are **not** a rehabilitation group.

QWRC will **not** have the power to issue or rescind permits. This is still the task of Ecoaccess/QPWS. The task of determining who is committing an offence under any legislation still lies with the QPWS, the DPI &F and RSPCA.

So what will QWRC do, you ask?

I describe QWRC as being a bit like the Master Builders Assoc or Nursing Mothers Assoc. We are the collective voice of all Rehabilitators. It is through QWRC that the hopes and dreams of all rehabilitators have a chance of coming true. Our focus is on assisting rehabilitators to provide the best possible care thus ensuring excellent welfare for all native animals both during care and after release. It is our aim to compliment and advance conservation benefits and outcomes for all native wildlife.

QWRC will offer independent advice to QPWS and DPI&F on all matters relating to native animal care and conservation.

We hope to be able to nominate a representative to sit on any Ministerial advisory committee dealing with wildlife matters.

We will work to further the aims and objectives of the "Code of Practice for rehabilitation and care of sick, injured and orphaned native wildlife". We are currently working on a set of guidelines and standards for training to enable the easy recognition of quality training programmes. This should therefore encourage improved standards of care throughout the industry. QWRC will promote and maintain the philosophy of wildlife care for the purposes of rehabilitation and release, conservation, education and research.

We aim to collect, assemble and disseminate accurate information on all aspects of wildlife care and rehabilitation thus enabling rehabilitators to work towards better release and conservation outcomes.

It is our intention to use the QWRC structure to provide assistance, where possible, to all rehabilitators in issue or dispute resolution.

We have achieved a lot in the past 12 months.

- As I said earlier we have written our constitution and had it approved.
- Our business name has been registered and we have an ABN.
- We have written and are signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the State Government through QPWS which will stay in force for the next 2 years.
- A grant application to the QPWS was successful which will allow us to continue at least in the short term.
- Another successful grant application, this time to the Gambling Benefits Fund, has provided us funds with which to purchase computer equipment and software which will assist in the running of the council.

- We have accepted the generous offer of office space in Burleigh Heads for the head quarters of QWRC. Inside the centre there is a lovely paperbark forest display with a boardwalk and running creek. The building is conveniently located with both north and south bound buses stopping right outside the door. Currently half the building houses a QPWS information centre which is open from 9am – 4pm daily, 7 days a week and is manned by volunteers. Until we can afford paid staff the volunteers are happy to accept training to man our section for us. This places us one step closer to our aim of having a maned office and resource centre available to all members.
- RACQ has generously donated funds to allow QWRC to take over the printing and distribution of the "RnR" newsletter from the QPWS.
- We are still having discussions with insurance companies to enable us to provide Public Liability Insurance to all financial members of QWRC.
- We have had input into the rewriting of the "Code of Practice for the care of orphaned, sick or injured protected animals by wildlife care volunteers".
- We currently have a subcommittee made up of 2 highly experienced wildlife rehabilitator/Vet Nurses and a wildlife rehabilitator/Vet working to establish the minimum standards required so that QWRC can endorse training programs that reach the high standard that is necessary for us all to give all wildlife the very best chance it can have for successful rehabilitation. There is another sub committee that is writing guidelines for the care of Flying Foxes outside their natural habitat in times of mass disasters.

All that is left now, is for all Queensland rehabilitators to support the group that they had asked for and we have worked so hard to establish.

The following list outlines the benefits of affiliation with QWRC;

1. Each member will get representation on the peak representative body governing wildlife rehabilitators across Queensland.
2. They will benefit from a collective voice on all issues relating to wildlife rehabilitation enabling liaison with Government departments on the standards of care for wildlife rehabilitation.
3. There will be credible access to all relevant Government departments on wildlife welfare and rehabilitation issues.
4. Membership will give representation on a body that aims to monitor and assist the quality and viability of all wildlife care groups across the state.
5. Membership offers a means of providing proactive advice to Government departments and all stakeholders on wildlife rehabilitation strategies and programs and conservation issues.
6. An avenue is opened to all members by which they can research problems pertaining to a particular wildlife species.
7. Affiliation will at last give easy access to the network of carers across the state.
8. We will facilitate a means by which to collect, assemble and disseminate accurate information on all aspects of wildlife care, rehabilitation and release to all rehabilitators. This will be made easily accessible to any one requiring information regarding wildlife welfare issues.
9. Assistance will be given in the resolution of conflicts concerning wildlife care.
10. Access will be available to QWRC endorsed training courses in wildlife rehabilitation.
11. We aim to provide easy access to professional advice, information and data on wildlife.
12. Assistance in improving public awareness and understanding of wildlife welfare and conservation issues through education.
13. Financial members will have access to a quarterly newsletter "RnR" published by the council.
14. Finally and importantly our aim is to provide affordable public liability insurance to all financial members of QWRC.

Now it is over to you, all the rehabilitators across Queensland.

It was at your request that QWRC came into being and it is only through your support that we can do our job of representing you the wildlife rehabilitators of Queensland.

I look forward to the day when there will be an organization like QWRC in each State in Australia.

I have a vision that in the not too distant future we will see a national body giving a united voice to all wildlife rehabilitators across this great and diverse land of ours!

I would like to take this opportunity to again offer sincere thanks to Adrian Canaris for all the time and effort he poured into those early months of deliberations setting up QWRC.

To Deb Hotchkis from QPWS I offer a very special thankyou. Deb has been tireless in her efforts working for the establishment of the QWRC right from the beginning.

Thanks also must go to Leslie Shirreffs, director of QPWS, for her support and encouragement together with all the staff at QPWS who have been assisting us all the way.

To all the members of the QWRC I give my sincere thanks for without their efforts and support there would not be a QWRC today.

And finally to all our new and prospective members I say welcome. Thankyou for your trust and support. We look forward to a long and happy future representing you, the wildlife rehabilitators of Queensland.

We should all take to heart the words of the 19th century English Scientist, Thomas H. Huxley who said,

**"The rung of a ladder was never meant to rest upon, but only to hold man's foot long enough to enable him to put the other somewhat higher".**

We at QWRC will always strive to have our sights on the next rung of the ladder and with your support, QWRC will go on climbing forever higher.

Thank you.

