

Wildlife rescue and release policy review

Discussion paper



Government
of South Australia

Department for
Environment and Water



Acknowledgement of Country

The Department for Environment and Water acknowledges Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Nations of the lands and waters we live and work upon. We acknowledge and respect the deep spiritual connection and relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to their Country. The department works in partnership with the First Peoples of South Australia and supports their Nations to take a leading role in caring for their Country.

Introduction

The Department for Environment and Water (DEW) has committed to reviewing the current rescue and release policy for macropods (kangaroos, wallabies), brushtail possums and wombats, and is seeking your input on a potential policy change.

Your feedback is important, so please have your say.

Complete the online survey via our YourSAy webpage:
<https://yoursay.sa.gov.au/wildlife-rescue-release-policy-review>

Current policy

The current policy restricts the release of macropods (kangaroos and wallabies), wombats and male brushtail possums. This position was taken at the time due to the expected poor survival rates and environmental impacts caused by these abundant native species. As a result, once an animal comes into care, they are no longer considered to be free-living wildlife and must remain in captivity.

DEW’s current policy on rescue and rehabilitation is guided by several environmental factors and suitability for release criteria which take into consideration animal welfare and conservation implications. These include (but are not limited to):

Environmental factors	Suitability of animals
Animals of unknown origin	Imprinting on humans
Release site availability and suitability	Permanent injuries or chronic disease
Landholder permission for release	Acceptance and recognition of natural food
Conflict with humans	Length of time in captivity
Conservation status of the species	Likelihood of long-term survival post release
Over-population and habitat degradation	

Why change?

The current policy has contributed to some wildlife carers reaching the limit of their caring capacity. There have been recent improvements in rehabilitation and reconditioning practices and better understanding of welfare outcomes for animals post-release, which provides the basis for review of this policy. As part of this review, DEW is considering allowing the release of these species.

This consultation aims to engage the wildlife rescue and rehabilitation sector and other interested parties in a review of this policy. DEW is seeking to understand the range of perspectives on a potential policy change, key considerations for a change, and feedback on appropriate parameters to support release of these species (macropods, wombats, and male brushtail possums).

Other considerations

Wildlife rescue and rehabilitation activities involving protected species are regulated by the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* and National Parks and Wildlife (Wildlife) Regulations 2019, administered by the Department for Environment and Water. Other relevant legislation includes the *Animal Welfare Act 1985* and *Veterinary Services Act 2023*.

The South Australian wildlife rescue and rehabilitation sector provides a valuable volunteer service on behalf of the community, responding to and caring for sick, injured, or orphaned wildlife across the state.

Wildlife carers invest significant time and resources into rescuing and rehabilitating wildlife with the welfare of individual animals being at the forefront of decision making. It is recognised that wildlife rescue and rehabilitation is a mentally, emotionally and physically challenging job, and that not every rescue has a happy outcome.



Interstate comparison

South Australia is the only Australian jurisdiction that allows the broad-scale retention of animals unfit for release, as well as restrictions on the release of certain species. Most jurisdictions require animals to be euthanised if they can't be suitably rehabilitated and released.

The Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction without specific criteria surrounding euthanasia.

Aligning with other states may reduce issues around sourcing or providing ongoing care for rescued animals and enable better animal welfare outcomes.

DEW has reviewed the requirements for release of rehabilitated wildlife from each Australian state and territory. The review found specific criteria surrounding the suitability of an animal for release, site selection and euthanasia. This criteria is summarised below and provides a reference point for South Australia in considering any change in policy.

Animal suitability for release criteria collated across state and territory jurisdictions

General criteria

- The physical health of the animal (including fitness, freedom from injury, disease and parasites, correct weight for age) is obtained.
- The animal can recognise, find, and consume naturally available food (foraging behaviour).
- The animal can recognise and avoid predators (including pets).
- The animal is not humanised or imprinted.
- The animal is being released at a suitable time of year.
- No animal is released under circumstances which may cause additional stress, such as during extreme weather or wrong time of day (e.g. nocturnal animals during daylight).
- The animal can recognise and interact normally with other members of the same species (social species only).
- The animal can navigate effectively through its natural environment.



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Site selection release criteria collated across state and territory jurisdictions

General criteria

- Animal is to be released into a suitable habitat and location, as close as possible to where it was collected.
- Animal should be released as soon as it is deemed ready and the environmental conditions are suitable.
- **Suitable habitat** – provides conditions or examples for consideration.
 - Contains appropriate habitat and adequate food and water resources.
 - Is occupied by members of the same species.
 - Does not place the animal at risk of injury or disease.
 - Has infrastructure for post-release support for macropods if required.
- Timing of release must be considered (species specific).
- Animal should not be transported across a physical boundary that it would not normally cross, or further than it would normally move.

Euthanasia criteria collated across state and territory jurisdiction

General criteria

- There is no suitable environment for release.
- Animal suffering from unreasonable and/or incurable pain, distress, trauma, sickness or injury.
- Animal is likely to require extensive surgery to survive.
- Animal is likely to require extended periods in captivity to be rehabilitated.
- Animal is unlikely to survive in the wild.
- Animal is unlikely to reintegrate into the wild on release.
- Animal's ability to sense its environment (i.e. see, hear, smell, taste or feel) is permanently impaired due to a missing or injured organ (e.g. eye, ear or nose).
- Animal's ability to forage successfully is permanently impaired.
- Animal's ability to consume food unaided is permanently impaired due to an injured jaw or missing or worn teeth.
- The ability to move freely or normally permanently impairs the animal's ability to survive in the wild.
- Animal has an incurable disease that may pose a threat to wild animals.

What happens next?

Following consultation, the department will review all the feedback provided. A summary will be provided back to participants.

Feedback received from the consultation will inform any future changes to the rescue and release policy.





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