

DEH - STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

NATIVE SPECIES - RESCUE AND RELEASE

1. INTRODUCTION

These operating procedures concern the rescue, care and rehabilitation of sick, injured or orphaned protected native animals and the release or retention in captivity of those animals.

The administrating agency is the Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH).

2. OBJECTIVES

DEH will:

- Ensure a consistent State wide application relating to rescued native animals.
- Ensure that the provisions of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* (hereinafter referred to as “the Act”) and the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1985* relating to a rescued animal are communicated to and understood by DEH Staff.

3. PROCEDURES

3.1 RESCUE

A “rescue” is defined as the act of assisting a native animal perceived to require immediate help.

Rescues apply to the following situations:-

- Sick animals (eg. loss of sight, unable to run/climb, unable to feed).
- Animals suffering obvious injuries including animals injured by vehicle or window strikes.
- Orphaned dependent young animals.
- Captive escapees that have no apparent chance of feeding themselves.
- Animals impacted by natural disasters eg wildfire, oil or chemical spills, pollutants, poisons, etc.
- Humanised animals (either escaped or released).
- Animals in imminent danger eg located on a busy roadway.

All animals should be properly assessed prior to any rescue attempt.

A person finding a non endemic, healthy animal eg Queensland Carpet Python found in metropolitan Adelaide, should contact DEH for advice.

Animals should **not** be rescued in the following situations:-

- Healthy animals (eg koala in tree).
- Healthy juvenile animals eg “L-Plate” birds or hatchling reptiles.
- Nectar feeders which get “drunk” from eating nectar at certain times of the year.
- If the rescue is dangerous and puts human life at risk eg koala on a busy highway, injured venomous snake.

3.2 PRINCIPLES

In most cases, the rescue of a native animal has little direct conservation value. This may not be the case for an endangered, vulnerable or rare animal.

DEH - STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

NATIVE SPECIES - RESCUE AND RELEASE

Participation of the public in rearing rescued animals may indirectly contribute to greater community knowledge of native species. In addition, where appropriate the display of a rescued native animal unable to be returned to the wild has an important role in public education.

There is no conservation value in releasing a common animal back to the wild, particularly if it is behaviourally, physically or otherwise impaired.

The welfare of an individual animal and the preservation of an individual animal's life are intrinsically important.

3.3 RESPONSIBILITIES

In general DEH does not become involved in rescuing native animals. DEH does not fund animal rescue organisations or individual carers who voluntarily undertake this task.

DEH officers may receive requests from the public regarding seriously injured kangaroos or possums on roadsides. These requests are referred to the appropriate animal rescue group or the RSPCA, who may be able to have the animal humanely euthanased.

There are a number of volunteer organisations and individuals in South Australia who care for rescued animals. Their responsibilities are to: -

- Arrange an early assessment of a rescued animal;
- Provide appropriate care for the animal; and
- Adequately prepare an animal for survival in the wild if the animal is to be released.

DEH provides a referral service by acting as a receiving point for public inquiries regarding the collection and care of injured or orphaned wildlife and directs callers to the nearest appropriate rescue organisation.

3.4 HOLDING

Holding is defined as placing a rescued animal into care, either on a short term or long term basis.

A person intending to care for a rescued animal should only do so if the carer has adequate time, appropriate facilities, appropriate skills and sufficient knowledge of species concerned (including compatibility both with conspecifics and other species). A carer must be able to ensure that the necessary hygiene, safety and welfare standards can be met. A carer must ensure that appropriate treatment for an animal's injuries, disease or illness is sought and can be carried out.

If a person does not have the skills or knowledge to care for a rescued animal, that person can care for the animal under the supervision of an experienced carer (or mentor).

An experienced and competent person should properly assess all animals prior to holding.

Where a person is incapable of providing for the needs of an animal they should transfer the rescued animal to another carer forthwith.

A person should not hold a rescued animal if:-

DEH - STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

NATIVE SPECIES - RESCUE AND RELEASE

- The person is inexperienced and unsupervised.
- The person has inadequate facilities.
- The person cannot afford to provide the animal with food, treatment, housing etc.
- The person has insufficient time to care for the animal.
- The animal is difficult to keep without specialist skills (eg. echidnas).
- The animal is a marine mammal (RSPCA excepted).
- Koalas are to be consigned to Cleland Wildlife Park DEH forthwith.
- The animal was in imminent danger of being run over eg reptiles on roads. If possible and safe to do so, these animals may be removed from the danger site and relocated to a nearby location forthwith. In general, it is not necessary to take the animal into captivity.

An animal that is intended for eventual or immediate release should not be placed on public display.

3.5 RESCUE PERMITS

An individual rescuing a protected animal requires a rescue permit issued under the provision of Section 53(1)(d) of the Act.

The Act defines a protected animal as: -

- any mammal, bird or reptile indigenous to Australia; or
- any migratory mammal, bird or reptile that periodically or occasionally migrates to, and lives in, Australia; or
- any animal of a species referred to in schedule 7, 8 or 9 of the Act; or
- any animal of a species declared by regulation to be a species of protected animals.

Introduced non-native species (eg starling, European blackbird, fox, rabbit, domestic pigeon, domestic cat and domestic dog) or an unprotected native animal referred to in schedule 10 of the Act (or any animals declared by regulation to be unprotected) does not require a rescue permit issued under the provisions of the Act.

This includes Zebra Finch (*Poephila guttata*), Budgerygah (*Melopsittacus undulatus*), Red Wattlebird (*Anthochaera carunculata*), Grey-backed Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis halmaturina*), Galah (*Cacatua roseicapilla*), Little Corella (*Cacatua sanguinea*), Australian Raven (*Corvus coronoides*), Little Crow (*Corvus bennetti*), Australian Crow (*Corvus orru ceciliae*), Little Raven (*Corvus mellori*) and Wild Dog (Dingo) (*Canis familiaris*).

Rescue permits may be issued to an individual but not to a rescue group or organisation. Applicants for a rescue permit must reside in South Australia.

If the rescued animal is not to be returned to the wild the carer should apply for a permit as soon as possible after rescuing the animal.

A number of rescues involve providing an animal with short term respite and then releasing the animal back to the wild. Due to the rapid turnaround of these rescues, it is unreasonable to require carers to apply for a rescue permit in these instances. Consequently DEH will not undertake any legal action against a person who rescues an animal from the wild, returns the animal to the wild as soon as possible (but no more than 4 weeks after the animal being rescued) and does not obtain a rescue permit.

DEH - STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

NATIVE SPECIES - RESCUE AND RELEASE

If a person rescues any Black Cockatoos, monotremes (echidnas, platypus) or koalas they are to immediately contact the duty officer DEH for advice.

In all situations it is essential that full details of possession be recorded by the carer to substantiate the source and progress of the animal.

Details of a rescued animal are to be recorded in the permit holder's Protected Animals Record Book.

Rescue permits are not always issued. A person will be advised in writing if their application is refused. The permit may be subject to special conditions (eg releasing the animal when it can fend for itself).

If an individual keeps more than one native animal [listed as basic: refer to schedule 6 of the *National Parks and Wildlife (Wildlife) Regulations 2001*] or keeps an animal of a specialist species, that person must obtain a permit under section 58 of the Act. Two options are available:-

- **A permit to Keep Rescued Animals** (hereinafter referred to as "KRA") that entitles the holder to keep any animals taken under a section 53(1)(d) rescue permit. Those persons wishing to keep specialist animals will be required to be endorsed for those species. Applicants will be assessed to ensure they have the necessary skills, experience and enclosures to keep the specialist animals. There will be no fee applying to KRA permits. Persons keeping an animal under a KRA will not be able to sell or otherwise dispose of the animal. The KRA will not apply to the progeny of rescued animals. If a person keeping animals under a KRA subsequently breeds from those animals the permit holder will be required to obtain a Keep and Sell permit and pay a permit fee.
- **A basic or specialist Keep and Sell permit.** If a person keeps more than one native animal [listed as basic] or keeps an animal of a specialist species, that person will be required to obtain a Keep and Sell permit. Keep and Sell permit holders will be required to pay an annual permit fee.

A person must not sell, give, exchange or otherwise dispose of a rescued animal. However, a transfer may be allowed in special circumstances. The permit holder is required to seek approval in writing, prior to transfer. The progeny of rescued animals may be sold as long as the carer has the appropriate Keep and Sell permit.

If an animal is rescued in another State (eg an Eastern grey kangaroo joey rescued by a truck driver) and imported into South Australia the carer must apply for an import permit. The animal must not have been acquired in contravention of other State's legislation.

Permit holders moving interstate must apply for an export permit. Before moving they are advised to check with the relevant State wildlife agency to ascertain the requirements for keeping the species concerned.

3.6 THE ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION PROCESS

Each application for a rescue permit needs to be assessed by a National Parks and Wildlife warden. The following will be taken into consideration in assessing the application:-

DEH - STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

NATIVE SPECIES - RESCUE AND RELEASE

Acquisition by novices. At times well-meaning members of the public keep a rescued animal in breach of the Act. Such individuals may lack the necessary skills and experience to care for the animal. As a result the animal may be in a state of neglect or distress. The welfare of the animal is the main concern of DEH and individuals should be encouraged to surrender the animal to an experienced carer or to care for the animal under the guidance of a person experienced in the keeping of that species.

Illegal Acquisition of an animal. Some individuals use the rescue permit system to acquire an animal for illegal purposes. The officer assessing the rescue application must pay particular attention to species that are sought after in the trade, such as the Major Mitchell's Cockatoo, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, wombats, pythons and some lizards. The carer may be required to provide a tissue/blood sample from the animal for DNA analysis and/or allow a threatened species to be implanted with a microchip.

Appropriate Care and assessment. The animal's welfare is of paramount concern and prolonged suffering must be prevented. To this end, a rapid and accurate assessment of an individual animal is important. The applicant must have appropriate qualifications, experience and facilities to care for a particular species. Applicants without relevant experience must have access to an experienced carer, who can supply the necessary guidance and supervision.

Rehabilitation. Carers must possess the ability to assess the animal's potential for recovery and release when taking the animal into care.

3.7 RELEASE

Release is defined as reintroducing rescued animals back into the wild.

The release of a rescued animal is acceptable if:-

- it is a self-sustainable animal and the release conducted is within 48 hours of rescue (within its home range and is not a biosecurity risk)
- Beyond 48 hours, a release can be conducted only if it meets release criteria (refer to part 3.8)
- the release is conducted in accordance with a Threatened Species Recovery Plan

A carer is to consider the following factors prior to release:- time of year, weather conditions, territory, predators, adequate food supply, hibernation, habitat availability, competition for resources and socialisation. A carer should use the precautionary principle - if there is any doubt don't release.

3.8 RELEASE CRITERIA

An animal being released must be self-sustainable, physically fit, weaned and able to recognise natural food. It must be released as close as possible to the point of capture provided that it is within its natural range.

An animal being released must not be imprinted, incapacitated, a biosecurity risk, actively showing disease signs, non endemic to the area or unlikely to survive.

A release is **not** to be undertaken if the rescued animal is a handreared, humanised animal of any species. There are situations where humanised animals may survive if released under a stringent conditions (eg magpies & possums), however the release of these animals can only be undertaken if a management plan is prepared and is approved by the Director, National Parks and Wildlife.

DEH - STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

NATIVE SPECIES - RESCUE AND RELEASE

Animals with permanent disabilities and exotic animals (eg turtle doves, Barbary doves, sparrows) are not to be released (the latter is an offence under the *Animal and Plant Control (Agricultural Protection and Other Purposes Act)*).

3.9 PERMIT TO RELEASE

The Act provides restrictions on the release of a native animal from captivity. Section 55 of the Act states “A person must not release a protected animal or an animal of a species listed in schedule 10 (ie. an unprotected animal such as a galah, zebra finch, budgerygah, little Corella) from captivity unless that person is authorised to do so by a permit granted by the Minister”, or released in line with an approved management plan.

Permission to release a rescued animal onto private land is required from the landholder.

The release of an animal into a National Park, Conservation Park, Game Reserve, Recreation Park, Regional Reserve or Wilderness Protection Area is only permitted under an approved recovery program.

The release of an animal on other Crown land is only permitted with the approval of the relevant authority.

3.10 EUTHANASIA

Euthanasia is the quick and humane killing of a rescued animal.

Animals are to be euthanased where there is an unacceptable degree of disability or suffering, where the animal is dying (eg mangy possums) or diseased, infectious animals.

A person killing an animal should consider their own safety, public safety, efficacy, available humane techniques, sensitivities of bystanders, and aesthetics.

In cases where the rescued animal is listed as a threatened species, the carer should contact a veterinarian and DEH before euthanasing the animal. Obviously, if the animal is in extreme distress and there is no other alternative, euthanasia may have to be performed even in these cases.

If the animal cannot be euthanased quickly in a humane manner it should be taken to a local veterinary surgeon.

A rescued animal should not be euthanased if there is a humane practical alternative.

3.11 PERMANENT CAPTIVITY

Permanent captivity is the holding of rescued animals where there is no intention to release that animal and includes:

- captive escapees
- anything that is unreleasable (eg permanent disability)
- anything of unknown origin
- hand reared imprinted animals

An animal should not be kept as a permanent captive if it will not settle in captivity

Rescued animals should only be placed on public display if the animal does not suffer stress and there is an educational benefit in doing so. Groups or individuals are encouraged to prepare a code of practice for the display of rescued animals.

DEH - STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

NATIVE SPECIES - RESCUE AND RELEASE

4. REVIEW OF POLICY:

The policy shall be subject to review on an ongoing basis by DEH.

5. LEGISLATION

National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972.

National Parks and Wildlife (Wildlife) Regulations 2001.

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1985.

The Animal and Plant Control (Agricultural Protection and Other Purposes) Act 1986.

6. APPENDICES AND REFERENCES

Draft “*Guidelines for the Rescue and Rehabilitation of Native Animals*”. Dated 22 December 1998 prepared by Dr Deb Kelly, Manager, Resource Protection, Gary Fitzpatrick, Operations Manager, Cleland, Bob Chance, IT Support Kensington, Robin Storr, Biodiversity Partnerships, Peter Alexander, Manager, Biodiversity Conservation Program and Frank Dal Piva, Manager, Compliance.

Paton, J.B., Bird, P.L., Dal Piva, F., Inns, R.W., Kelly, D.K. and Storr R.F., 1998; *The Common Brushtail Possum in South Australia*, Fauna Management Coordinating Committee, Department for Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs, Adelaide.

NPWSA. Draft *Koala Policy, Rescue, Transport, Holding and Transfer*. Draft dated 25 March 2002

This policy was endorsed by the CFCC at its meeting on 11 August 2003

This policy was endorsed by the WAC at its meeting on 1 October 2003

This policy was adopted by the Director, Science and Conservation, DEH

Signed by

Dated: