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**Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines**

# **Exhibited Animals – Wombat**

**Public consultation document  
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Australian Ministers responsible for Primary Industries

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# Introduction

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## Purpose

The principal purpose of this document is to describe standards and guidelines that ensure the welfare and security of *wombats* used for *exhibition purposes*.

This document promotes measures and conditions that, if implemented, would see exhibited *wombats* kept to the same standard throughout Australia.

The document considers a broad range of operational issues facing *facilities* that keep *wombats* for *exhibition purposes*. Failure to address these issues could result in adverse animal welfare and security outcomes.

## Scope

These standards and guidelines apply to those people and industries responsible for the care and management of:

- *wombats* kept for *exhibition purposes* at *facilities*, i.e. for display, conservation, education and entertainment;
- *wombats* during their temporary removal from a *facility*; and
- *wombats* during their transport to or from a *facility*.

These standards do not apply to:

- wild *animals* (i.e. free-living and not confined to a *facility* by an *enclosure*, a leash or by management practices);
- the keeping of *animals* solely for the purposes of feeding to other *animals* at the *facility*;
- feeding of wild *animals*;
- *animals* kept for *animal* competitions, horse racing and sporting events, wildlife farming and domestic *animal* farming;
- wildlife rehabilitation of *animals* that are not displayed to the public at the *facility*
- *animals* at pet shops; or
- circuses and mobile exhibitors.

These standards and guidelines should be considered in conjunction with other requirements for *animals* kept for *exhibition purposes*, and related Commonwealth, state and territory legislation for:

- animal welfare;
- exhibiting *animals*;
- pest control; and
- nature conservation.

Where legislation requires a higher standard than these standards, the higher standard will apply.

## Interpretation

- **Objective** – the intended outcome(s) of a section of the standards and guidelines.
- **Standards** – the acceptable *animal* welfare and security requirements designated in this document. They are requirements that must be met under law with respect to *animals* kept for *exhibition purposes*.

The standards are intended to be clear, essential and verifiable statements. However, not all issues are able to be well defined by scientific research or are able to be quantified. Standards use the word “must”. Non-compliance with one or more standards will constitute an offence under law.

They are presented in a box and are numbered consecutively with the prefix ‘S’.

- **Notes** – provide background and guidance on interpreting the standards and guidelines.
- **Guidelines** - complement the standards by providing advice and/or recommendations to achieve desirable *animal* welfare and security outcomes. Non-compliance with guidelines does not constitute an offence under law.

They are numbered consecutively with the prefix 'G'.

## Document organisation

These *taxon standards* contain standards and guidelines that apply to the keeping of a specific *animal* group for *exhibition purposes at facilities*. They are additional to the standards and guidelines in the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines. Exhibited Animals – General* which apply to all *animals* kept for *exhibition purposes at facilities*.

- ***Taxon standards must always be read in conjunction with the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines. Exhibited Animals – General.***

The *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines. Exhibited Animals – General* contain the following sections:

- Introduction;
- Definitions;
- Responsibilities;
- Security;
- Enclosures;
- Dietary and water requirements;
- Health and wellbeing;
- Reproductive management;
- Euthanasia;
- Quarantine;
- Capture and restraint;
- Training;
- Interactive programs;
- Transportation; and
- Animal identification and records.

The same section headings are used in these *taxon standards*. An additional *taxon Preface* section follows this Introduction. Where a section of these *taxon standards* does not include any standards or guidelines that are additional to those in the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines. Exhibited Animals – General*, the section includes the following statement: 'This section has been deliberately left blank'.

Definitions are given in the Definitions section of this document. These definitions are additional to those in *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines. Exhibited Animals – General* that also apply to these *taxon standards* unless otherwise stated.

Defined words in this document are italicised.

## Taxon preface

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### Wombats

*Wombats* are large, herbivorous, burrowing marsupials in the Family Vombatidae. There are three species, all endemic to Australia:

- Common *wombat* (*Vombatus ursinus*);
- Northern hairy-nosed *wombat* (*Lasiorhinus krefftii*);
- Southern hairy-nosed *wombat* (*Lasiorhinus latifrons*).

The northern hairy-nosed *wombat* is critically endangered with fewer than 150 individuals believed to remain in Epping Forest National Park in central Queensland.

Although similar in build, the hairy-nosed *wombats* and common *wombats* are very different in their preferred habitats and social habits.

Common *wombats* have a preference for dry sclerophyll forest of temperate climate which is a fairly moist habitat. The hairy-nosed *wombats* are adapted to a drier climate and live in semi-arid tussock grassed plains or sparse woodlands.

*Wombats* are among the world's largest burrowing animals and are dependent on their burrow environment for behavioural thermoregulation. Activity above ground is closely related to ambient air temperature and is often restricted to the hours of darkness. While common *wombats* are considered to be solitary, the hairy-nosed *wombats* may be loosely communal and share burrow systems.

*Wombats* are grazing animals and eat a wide range of grasses, sedges and rushes. They have the lowest dietary maintenance requirements for energy and protein of any herbivorous marsupial. Both the incisor and molar teeth are rootless and grow throughout the animal's life, an adaptation to the fibrous character of the natural diet.

Successful captive management is contingent upon an understanding of *wombat* behaviour and ecology, creation of an appropriate environment allowing for withdrawal and behavioural thermoregulation, provision of an appropriately low nutrient/high fibre diet, and recognition of socio-biological considerations that include the solitary or more gregarious habits of the different species.

## Definitions

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**Independent wombat:** A *wombat* at a stage of development where it is not dependent on parental care for its survival.

**Inhang:** a continuous feature on an *enclosure* perimeter barrier, orientated towards the interior, whose angle and width provide a physical impediment to *animal* escape or as a barrier to visitor/*animal* interaction.

**Wombats:** all members of the Family Vombatidae including the common and the hairy-nosed *wombats*.

All Definitions cover the singular, plural and all variations of the word.

# 1 Responsibilities

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## Objective

*Operators and staff* understand their responsibilities and collectively manage the *facility* to ensure the health and welfare of *animals*, and *animal* safety and security.

## General

### Standards

S1.1 All standards in the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines. Exhibited Animals – General* relating to *dangerous animals* apply to adult *wombats* that demonstrate aggressive behaviour towards humans.

## 2 Security

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### Objective

*Animals* are held securely to ensure their welfare and prevent pest establishment. Access by unauthorised persons and escape of *animals* is prevented.

This section has been deliberately left blank.

### 3 Enclosures

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#### Objective

*Enclosures* are designed, constructed and maintained to ensure the welfare, safety and security of *animals*.

#### General

##### Standards

- S3.1 The *operator* must ensure a *wombat enclosure* barrier:
- i. prevents the *wombat* from digging or pushing under the barrier; and
  - ii. is sufficiently robust and suitable in both design and materials to prevent the *wombat* from escaping through the barrier; and
  - iii. that has a climbable barrier, has a top rail at a height of at least 900 mm which prevents *wombats* from gaining traction; or
  - iv. has a non-climbable barrier a minimum of 1000 mm high; or
  - v. is approved by the relevant government authority as providing equal or better containment.
- S3.2 *Wombats* at all times must have access to areas within the *enclosure* that are below 30 degrees C.

##### Guidelines

- G3.1 A range of materials and construction methods for *enclosure* barriers can be applied to satisfy the requirements of S3.1, including:
- i. extending the barrier one metre into the ground or using a barrier on the *enclosure* floor such as heavy gauge wire mesh;
  - ii. using a variety of materials either singly or in combination, such as concrete, sheet metal, glass, cable, steel rods, timber and steel posts; and
  - iii. using *inhangs* and/or gussets as appropriate.
- G3.2 A *wombat enclosure* housing a *dangerous animal* should include an adjoining holding area to ensure appropriate maintenance of the exhibit is not hindered by *keeper* safety concerns associated with entering an *enclosure* containing a *dangerous animal*.

## Substrate and Drainage

### Standards

- S3.3 The *operator* must ensure that each adult *wombat* has access to *substrate* to a minimum depth of 500 mm over an area not less than four square metres.
- S3.4 The *operator* must ensure that for each additional adult *wombat* the area of *substrate* with a minimum depth of 500 mm is increased by two square metres.
- S3.5 The *operator* must ensure that *substrate* deeper than 500 mm must be of a type that does not pose a risk of collapse and burial of the *wombat*.

### Guidelines

- G3.3 Where *enclosures* include the use of concrete as a *substrate*, close observation of *wombat* behaviour is required to ensure injury does not occur through attempts to dig.

## Enclosure Furniture

### Standards

- S3.6 The *operator* must ensure *wombats* are provided with shaded retreats at all times and digging opportunities within the *enclosure*.
- S3.7 The *operator* must ensure *enclosure furniture* is positioned in a manner that will not allow a digging *wombat* to cause the *enclosure furniture* to shift in any way that may cause injury to any *animal*.

### Guidelines

- G3.4 A suitable shaded retreat for a *wombat* includes:
- i. a natural or artificial burrow;
  - ii. a hollow log; and
  - iii. a hide box.
- G3.5 Provision of complex *enclosure furniture* and its frequent rearrangement and/or renewal may reduce the incidence of *stereotypic behaviours*.

## Spatial Requirements

### Standards

- S3.8 The *operator* must ensure that a *wombat enclosure* for up to two adult specimens has a minimum floor area of 45 square metres.
- S3.9 The *operator* must ensure that for each additional adult *wombat* the floor area is increased by a minimum of ten square metres.

### Guidelines

- G3.6 *Common wombats* are naturally solitary and should be closely monitored upon introduction to a conspecific.
- G3.7 *Wombats* housed in mixed-species *enclosures* should be closely monitored for inter-species aggression.

- G3.8 Ordinarily mature male *common wombats* should not be housed together due to their propensity to be aggressive towards each other.

### **Short-term Enclosures**

#### **Standards**

- S3.10 The *operator* must ensure *enclosures* that provide housing for *wombats* at night time meet all *enclosure* standards.

## 4 Dietary and water requirements

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### Objective

*Animals* are provided food and water of an appropriate quality and quantity to maximise their health and wellbeing.

### Food

#### Standards

- S4.1 The *operator* must ensure that *wombat* diets are:
- i. low in energy and protein; and
  - ii. high in fibre.

#### Guidelines

- G4.1 *Wombats* should be offered freshly cut grass on a daily basis.
- G4.2 Foods which contain high dietary levels of Vitamin D, calcium and phosphorus (dog kibble, rat cubs etc.) increase the possibility of *wombats* developing tissue calcification (sometimes referred to as calcinosis circumscripta) and obesity.

## 5 Health and wellbeing

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### Objective

The health and wellbeing of *animals* is maximised, and *disease* and *disease* transmission is prevented.

### General

#### Standards

- S5.1 The *operator* must ensure *wombats* are provided with chewable branches, bark or untreated timber.
- S5.2 The *operator*, unless otherwise advised by a *veterinarian*, must ensure that *wombats* are provided with the opportunity to:
- i. behaviourally *thermoregulate*;
  - ii. withdraw from other *wombats*; and
  - iii. withdraw from viewing the public.

#### Guidelines

- G5.1 Where a *wombat* burrow/den incorporates a glass viewing panel for public viewing alternative resting and thermoregulation opportunities should be provided.

### Enrichment

#### Standards

- S5.3 The *operator* must ensure *wombats* are provided with digging opportunities

#### Guidelines

- G5.2 *Enrichment* for *wombats* may be achieved by providing:
- i. burrowing opportunities;
  - ii. social groupings;
  - iii. dietary variations;
  - iv. buried food caches;
  - v. freshly dug clumps of grass;
  - vi. repositioning and/or replacement of *furniture*;
  - vii. various scents within the *enclosure*;
  - viii. behavioural conditioning; and
  - ix. *interactive programs*.

### Quarantine

#### Standards

- S5.4 The *operator* must ensure newly acquired *wombats* undergo a minimum 30 day period of quarantine, unless advised otherwise by a *veterinarian*.

#### Guidelines

- G5.3 *Quarantine* checks should include *veterinary* inspection for sarcoptic mites.

## 6 Reproductive management

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### Objective

*Animal* breeding is managed to maintain the genetic integrity, sustainability and/or diversity of the species and to prevent the production of unplanned surplus *animals*.

This section has been deliberately left blank.

## 7 Euthanasia

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### Objective

If an *animal* is to be killed, it is done humanely.

### Guidelines

G7.1 An acceptable method of *euthanasia* for *wombats* is barbiturate overdose.

## 8 Capture and restraint

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### Objective

*Animals* are captured and *restrained* in a manner that ensures *animal* safety and minimises negative impacts on the *animal*.

### Guidelines

- G8.1 Acceptable methods of *wombat* capture and *restraint* include:
- i. manual *restraint*
  - ii. capture bags and nets; and
  - iii. hand injection, pole syringe or dart administration of an appropriate sedative or anaesthetic agent by or under the direction of a *veterinarian*.
- G8.2 Manual *restraint* usually involves approaching the *wombat* from behind and quickly lifting it off the ground by encircling the arms around the *animal's* body immediately behind its forelegs.

## 9 Training

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### **Objective**

*Animal training* is humane and beneficial to the *animal's* health, safety, behavioural and management needs.

This section has been deliberately left blank.

## 10 Interactive programs

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### Objective

*Animal* welfare, safety and security are maintained during *interactive programs* so that people have a positive experience and have an enhanced appreciation of *animals*.

This section has been deliberately left blank.

# 11 Transportation

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## Objective

Animal welfare, safety and security are maintained during transport.

### Standards

- S11.1 The *operator* sending a *wombat* must ensure the *wombat* is transported in a solid, secure container measuring at least 10% longer than the length of the *animal* and with sufficient width that enables the *wombat* to lie comfortably on its side.
- S11.2 The *operator* sending a *wombat* must ensure each adult *wombat* is *transported* individually. *Wombats* carrying pre-emerged pouch young are exempt.

### Guidelines

- G11.1 Containers used to *transport wombats* for more than two (2) hours should have leak-proof drop trays fitted at the base.
- G11.2 *Wombats* should be maintained within a range of 5° C to 25° C during *transport*.
- G11.3 Young at foot should never be *transported* in the same box as their mother.

**Note** Additional *transport* requirements apply to *wombats* being *transported* internationally: (2008) Conditions for the Overseas Transfer of *wombats* (Effective from March 2008). Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, Canberra. < <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/trade-use/publications/export-conditions/pubs/wombat-export-conditions.pdf> >

## 12 Animal identification and records

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### Objective

*Animals* are identified by standardised means and have a detailed written history.

### Animal Identification

#### Guidelines

- G12.1 A passive integrated transponder (PIT) is the recommended form of *individual permanent identification* for *wombats*.
- G12.2 The standard location for PIT insertion in *wombats* is in the dorsal midline (or slightly to the left) between the scapulae, or behind the left ear.

**Note:** *Wombats* usually become *independent animals* at approximately 12 to 15 months of age.

### Records

#### Guidelines

- G12.3 Records kept for *wombats* used in demonstrations and *interactive programs* should include:
- i. *handling* rotation schedule;
  - ii. feeding; and
  - iii. behavioural issues.