Exhibited Animals – Wombat

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Australian Ministers responsible for Primary Industries
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Introduction

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

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

**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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards</th>
<th>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.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
2 Security

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

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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S3.10 The <em>operator</em> must ensure <em>enclosures</em> that provide housing for <em>wombats</em> at night time meet all <em>enclosure</em> standards.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# 4 Dietary and water requirements

**Objective**

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

**Food**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S4.1</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guidelines</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 Health and wellbeing

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

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

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

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

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

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

Objective
Animal welfare, safety and security are maintained during transport.

Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S11.1</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S11.2</td>
<td>The operator sending a wombat must ensure each adult wombat is transported individually. Wombats carrying pre-emerged pouch young are exempt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

12 Animal identification and records

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.