

## Wildlife Health Australia

Media release

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### Universities help with wildlife health

Boosting Australia's capture of wildlife health data is the aim of a new, one-year pilot project involving seven universities.

Announcing the project today, Wildlife Health Australia CEO Dr Rupert Woods said, "Understanding the health status of Australia's wildlife is an important step towards protecting them, and the huge benefits they provide to the environment, agriculture, tourism, and people's health and wellbeing."

Dr Woods said the seven Australian universities will input data into the electronic Wildlife Health Information System (eWHIS) which is managed by Wildlife Health Australia. He explained universities undertake hundreds of wildlife disease investigations annually, generated as part of their usual operations. He said the number of records going into eWHIS could increase by around 50 per cent or more as a result of the project.

Dr Woods said information drawn from the database helps Australia to deal with key threatening processes such as beak and feather disease in birds and chytrid fungus in frogs.

"It also provides important information to our policy and decision makers on managing potential risks of wildlife disease, such as diseases jumping from wildlife to people or domestic animals.



Figure 1: WHA Project Officer Sam Gilchrist with koala

"The database assists in maintaining access to overseas markets for our agricultural products by helping to provide evidence of Australia's freedom from particular diseases. It also provides useful information on human health issues such as Australian bat lyssavirus," he said.

Data is currently contributed to eWHIS by government agencies and departments along with zoo wildlife hospitals, private veterinarians and national programs for detecting Australian bat lyssavirus and avian influenza in wild birds.

Wildlife Health Australia project officer Dr Sam Gilchrist said the contribution of universities is likely to bring in a wider dataset in terms of different wildlife species, and the geographic areas where they are found.

He said the pilot program would improve linkages between the universities and other government and non-government surveillance partners and is expected to deliver faster identification of issues and a valuable national perspective on new research opportunities.

The universities involved in the pilot project are Charles Sturt University, James Cook University, Murdoch University, the University of Adelaide, the University of Melbourne, the University of Queensland and the University of Sydney.

Dr Gilchrist said the program could be rolled out to include other universities if the pilot project proved a success.



Figure 2: Dr Donna Spowart with a wallaby patient, the University of Queensland

## About

Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) is the peak body for wildlife health in Australia. WHA was established as the Australian Wildlife Health Network (AWHN) in 2002 as a national government initiative, and its work continues following incorporation as an independent company in 2013. Major funding for WHA is provided by the Australian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

[www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au](http://www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au)

## Images

Wildlife Health Australia's Dr Sam Gilchrist, with a koala.

Dr Donna Spowart of the University of Queensland, with a wallaby patient. The University of Queensland is one of seven universities involved in a project to boost Australia's capture of wildlife health data.

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