

# Annual Report 2023-2024



## Acknowledgements

Wildlife Health Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We respectfully acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' continuing connection to land, sea, wildlife and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to their Elders past and present.

## Join Us

Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) aims to link, inform and support people and organisations who work with or have an interest in wildlife health across Australia and the Indo-Pacific through technical advice, facilitation, communications and professional support. By joining our community, you join a network of stakeholders with an interest in wildlife health.

Follow the link to subscribe: [www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au](http://www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au)

WHA would like to thank its members, supporters and employees for their dedication and commitment to the ongoing development of Australia's wildlife health system.



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# Our Purpose

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Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) is the independent coordinating body for wildlife health in Australia. It provides leadership through strong partnerships for national action on wildlife health to protect and enhance the natural environment, biodiversity, economy and animal and human health.

WHA's activities include managing the national wildlife disease surveillance program, facilitating investigations into disease incidents and emerging wildlife health issues, and providing input into national and sub-national strategies for wildlife health and exotic disease emergency preparedness, surveillance, management and response.

WHA work is enabled through coordination and collaboration with a diverse range of stakeholders to deliver wildlife health surveillance, through partnerships with over 45 government and non-government agencies including environment, health and biosecurity agencies, zoo-based hospitals, sentinel veterinary clinics, and university clinics and pathology departments.

The health of Australia's wildlife, animals in agriculture and human population are all inextricably linked. Many diseases that can affect humans and livestock often emerge in wildlife, and they are increasing. Effective surveillance of wildlife health is therefore vital to human health, agriculture, the environment and biodiversity in Australia.

Wildlife can also act as indicators of environmental health where other factors are at play, such as toxins or chemical contamination. In monitoring wildlife health, WHA also indirectly monitors the health of ecosystems, domestic animals, people and communities.

The presence or absence of disease in animals can also impact Australia's trade-status with overseas partners. To avoid potentially devastating trade shocks, we need to understand the potential for disease transmission across species and how to prevent exposure of domestic animals to the risks.

We also need proven, ongoing, streamlined processes for surveillance and emergency preparedness in wildlife. This makes it vital to align incentives to connect wildlife surveillance and intelligence with decision-making and action nationally.

The challenges of sustaining healthy wildlife in Australia will become greater with changing land use, climate change and as societal practices bring wildlife, livestock and people into closer contact. Now, more than ever, there is the need for coordinated national action on wildlife health.

Beyond our borders, our World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) Collaborating Centre for wildlife health risk management contributes to a network of centres that provide scientific expertise and support to WOAH and its members, promoting international collaboration and WOAH's wildlife health framework.





# Healthy wildlife, healthy Australia

## Our Mission

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Lead national action on wildlife health to protect and enhance the natural environment, biodiversity, economy and animal and human health through strong partnerships.

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# Chair Introduction

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If last year was a year of growth and change for our organisation, this year has been about strengthening, broadening and consolidation for WHA.

In 2023–24, WHA’s activities in the One Health Program and through establishing an international collaborating centre have been crucial to found a network of wildlife health professionals and member countries across the region to assist in better integrating One Health into decision-making and managing the drivers of emerging health risks (see page 32).



As part of our organisation’s growth and evolution, we also transitioned our governance framework this year. Historically, WHA has been registered as an Incorporated Association under the Associations Incorporated Act 2009 in NSW.

As a next step in its development for the nation, the organisation transitioned to a ‘public company limited by guarantee’ with a skills-based board. This complex transition in our legal and governance arrangements was spearheaded by Business Manager, Karen Magee, and I’d like to recognise her leadership and meticulous management of these fundamental organisational changes.

In 2023–24, and through responding to a growing number of emerging disease events affecting wildlife, WHA has also progressed substantially in bringing a true One Health-type approach to the wildlife, human and environmental problems of today.

This has included building relationships with Indigenous agencies including medical, environmental health, land councils, protected area councils etc., and promoting Indigenous perspectives at national and international policy, planning and operational forums (see page 18).

This year I’d like to thank Chief Executive Officer, Rupert Woods, and the team for embracing a period of change, rapid growth, and increasing regional and international presence, whilst sustaining the vitally important national networks, collaborations, and information-sharing that underpins the strength and value of our organisation.

In December 2023, the incumbent Chair Peter Bridgewater departed our organisation and I took on the acting Chair role while an international recruitment process could take place. Under Peter’s leadership and guidance during 2022-23, and support of Board members, WHA has become well positioned to undergo the evolution required for the organisation to meet both present and future challenges. Peter’s considerable experience and expertise was a distinct asset to us and the Board during his time.

Finally, I would also like to recognise the significant contribution of all our members and network in driving our vision forward, and thank all Australian governments who provide the core funding support that will help us realise an exciting new vision for wildlife health in Australia.

Cameron Bell  
Acting Chair



# The Board



The WHA Board (Pictured left to right): Andrew Pearce, Cameron Bell, Sharon Kolek, Michelle Campbell-Ward, James Newman, Julien Grosmaire, Leanne Wicker, Rodney Vile, Rupert Woods (CEO), Michelle Rodan. Not Pictured: Nicola Craddock

<b>Cameron Bell</b>	Acting Chair, Funding Member, Agriculture Victoria
<b>Andrew Pearce</b>	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Representative
<b>Michelle Rodan</b>	Animal Health Committee Representative
<b>Sharon Kolek</b>	Funding Member, Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer
<b>Michelle Campbell-Ward</b>	Individual Member Representative
<b>Nicola Craddock</b>	Organisational Member Representative
<b>Julien Grosmaire</b>	Organisational Member Representative
<b>Leanne Wicker</b>	Organisational Member Representative
<b>James Newman</b>	Invited Member
<b>Rodney Vile</b>	Invited Member

# CEO Introduction

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It's been an extremely busy year responding to emerging wildlife disease issues and incidents that have gone on to pose a multitude of One Health challenges.

Disease events have included the emergence of Japanese Encephalitis cases, for the first time being detected in southern Australian states including Victoria and New South Wales. During these and other disease events, we've been able to support consideration of wildlife in the responses of the Australian federal government, and states and territories.



Similarly, the detection of High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI) (H7 strains) in poultry farms in Victoria, NSW and the ACT in 2024 required WHA to assist response agencies in better understanding the role wild birds and was a critical factor in mounting an effective response.

Extensive efforts have also been underway to equip a range of Australians – from wildlife managers to farmers and government agencies - to be prepared for the possible incursion of the more deadly H5N1 strain of HPAI that has ravaged wildlife and farm animals around the world. In doing this, our organisation has continued to coordinate the National Avian Influenza Wild Bird Surveillance Program, sharing data and insights across multiple government, academic and scientific agencies and networks. We also prepared and updated bespoke technical and lay resources including advisories for veterinarians and animal health professionals, fact sheets, Risk Mitigation Toolboxes, global technical updates, various guidelines and maintaining the electronic Wildlife Health Information System database (eWHIS). H5N1 will be a significant challenge for Australia if and when it arrives. We must do everything we can to support those individuals, agencies and organisations who will be involved in the response.

As well as post border, our work has started to address emerging One Health issues pre-border in the Asia-Pacific through the establishment of our International Collaborating Centre, regional and global wildlife information sharing, collaboration, joint research and disease response operations.

An expansion of our work in capacity building has also allowed us to start to identify gaps in the lack of First Nations input into One Health management and to encourage better coordination of their inputs into national and local policies, as well as that of wildlife first responders and feral animal experts.

In November 2023 WHA launched our first **Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)**. Through this, we have been proud to announce the formal start of our journey towards reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We aim to learn from and engage with First Nations peoples who have cared for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island landscapes through millennia of active custodianship and conservation, and have a deep and abiding knowledge of caring for country.



I would like to take the opportunity to thank our Board member Cameron Bell who stepped in as acting Chair after Peter's departure in December 2023, and who has so ably overseen a very busy, demanding and challenging period for the organisation, always with calm leadership and incisive insights.

Thank you also to our Board including new members who all bring their professionalism and insights to our organisation, and of course our funders and supporter without whom none of this would be possible.

Lastly, thanks to our great team, which has grown by a factor of three in the past few years and massively expanded our capacity, scope and services provided nationally and now regionally and globally. Everyone constantly contributes well over what is expected of them: thank you for all that you do. Rock stars one and all!

Rupert Woods

Chief Executive Officer

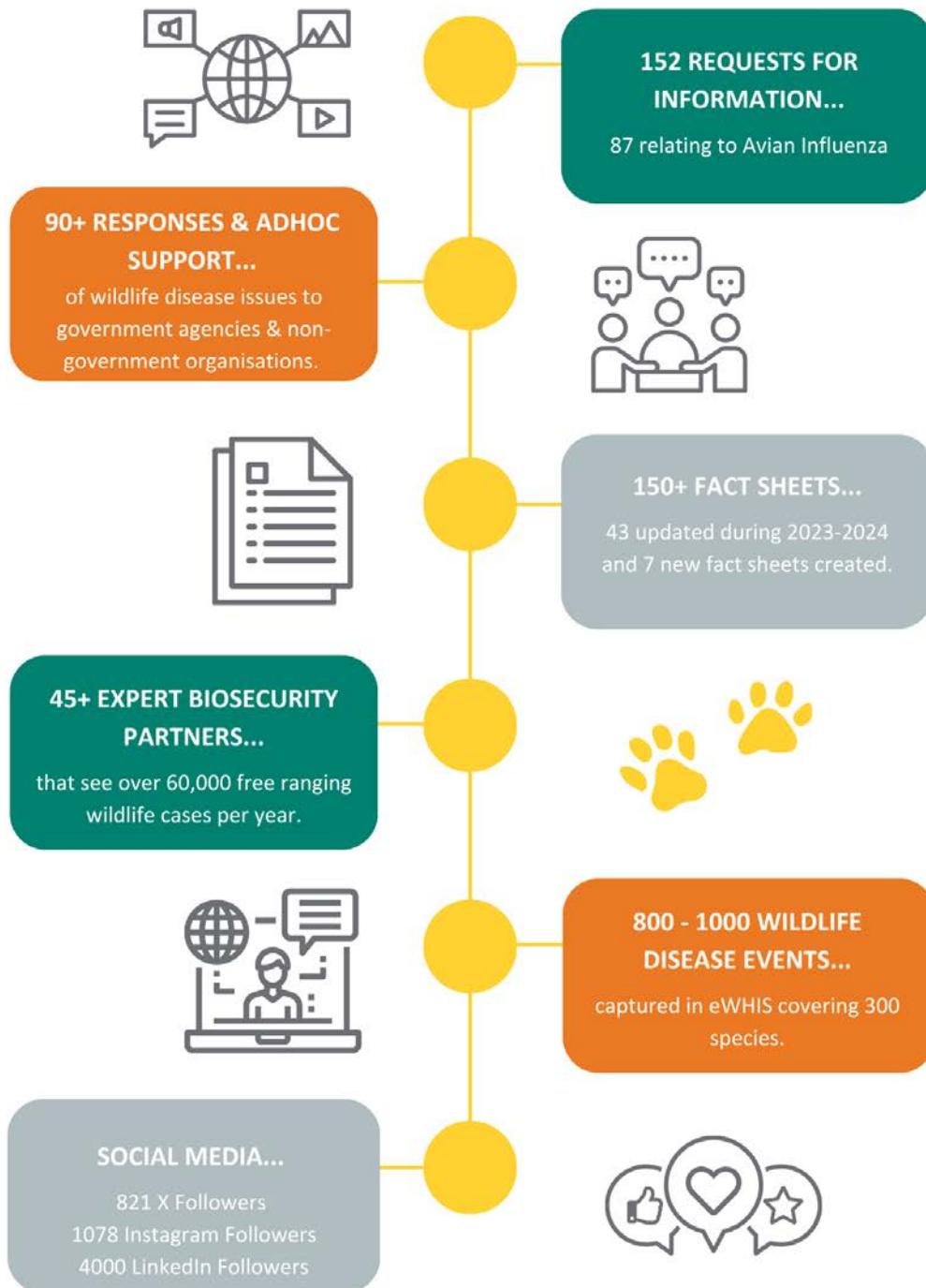
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*“We must do everything we can to prepare for the arrival of HPAI H5 (clade 2.3.4.4b); now, more than ever, there is a need for coordinated national action on wildlife health.”*

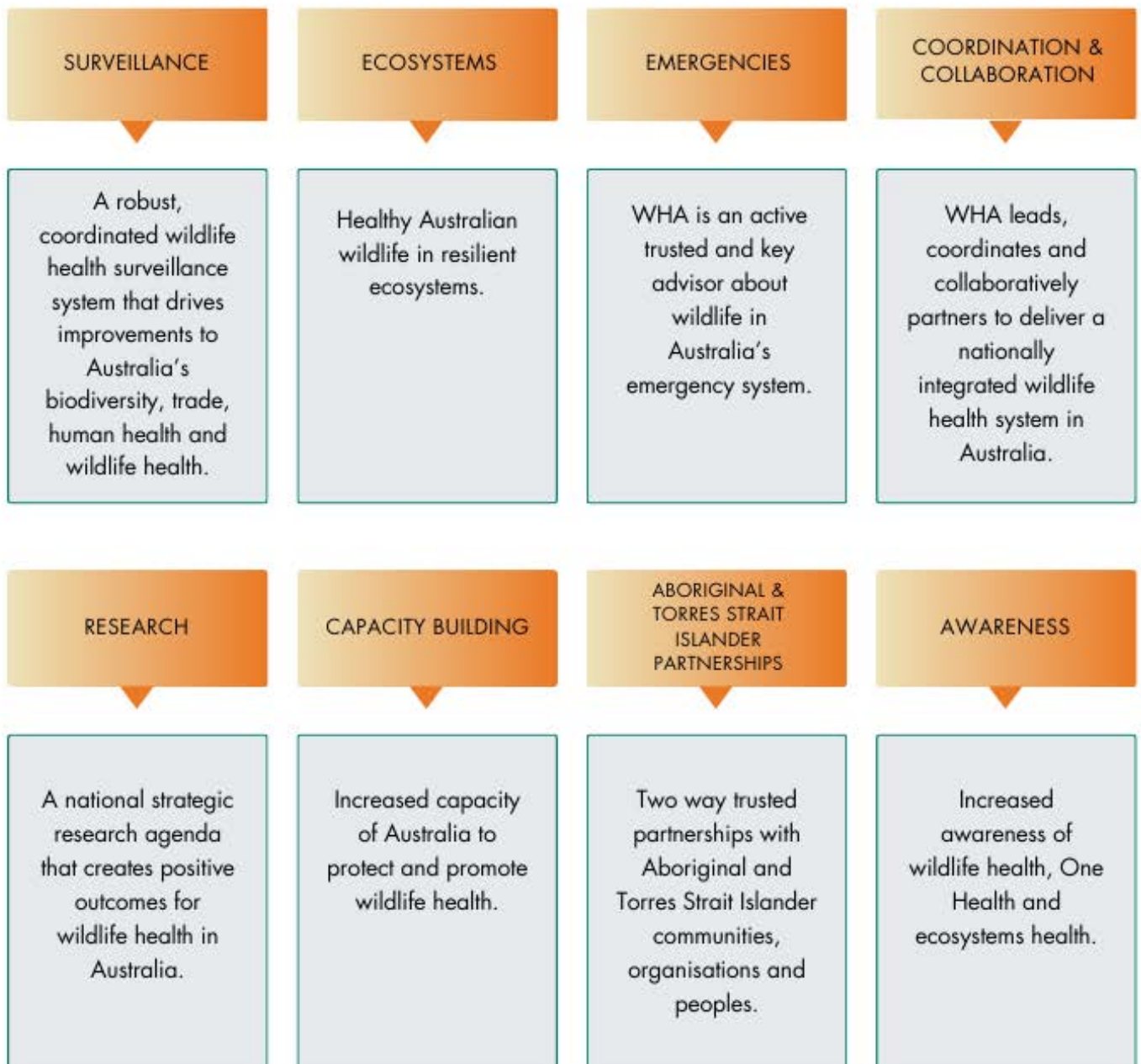
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# WHA 2023-24 Snapshots



# Strategic Vision 2023-2024



# SURVEILLANCE

*A robust, coordinated wildlife health surveillance system that drives improvements to Australia's biodiversity, trade, human health, animal health and wildlife health.*

## Objectives & Deliverables:

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An expanded national wildlife health coordination system for wildlife disease surveillance and reporting.

Rapid, effective and efficient capture, management and sharing of wildlife health information, integrated with relevant data sources.

An expanded national information system for wildlife health, with an increased focus on:

- wildlife health and disease issues impacting upon human health
- information on antimicrobial resistance in Australian native wildlife
- disease impact on conservation, biodiversity and ecosystems for wildlife
- use of wildlife as bio-sentinels for environmental pollutants, pesticides and heavy metals
- wildlife as indicators of ecosystems health.

## Progress:

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The foundation of Australia's wildlife health surveillance system is supported by core funding, with enhanced activities possible through the new WHA 'One Health' program. The sentinel surveillance program has continued to expand over the last few years as new opportunities for sentinel clinic participants are identified. These clinics help to fill identified gaps (geographic or species) in the surveillance network. WHA now has **45** surveillance government and non-government partners across our programs. WHA is working with a consultant to scope the future expansion of the sentinel surveillance program to include broader engagement with veterinarians in private practice.

Information collected from the surveillance programs is analysed and reported on a regular basis e.g. wildlife health reports in *Animal Health Surveillance Quarterly* and quarterly Wildlife Health and Intelligence Reports to Animal Health Committee (AHC), along with more specific reports such as *ABLV Bat Stats*. A project is underway to develop a data visualisation and reporting tool for the eWHIS database, which will increase WHA's ability to utilise and report on data collected through the national surveillance system.

Input into national animal health surveillance activities this year included contribution to the response to HPAI H7 outbreaks in Victoria, ACT and NSW.

# ECOSYSTEMS

*Healthy Australian wildlife in resilient ecosystems.*

## Objectives & Deliverables:

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Wildlife health management is integrated within national One Health and conservation strategies, including planning, governance and multi-sectoral information sharing.

Expert advice on the impact on Australian wildlife health of climate change, habitat loss and other significant environmental threats.

A national picture of Australia's wildlife health through linking and harmonising health information systems.

Expert wildlife health guidance is integrated within threatened species planning and recovery.

Coordinated national response to priority wildlife health issues, including iconic species such as koalas, orange-bellied parrots, and frogs.

## Progress:

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This year WHA participated in the National Koala Recovery Team activities through the Strategy and Coordination Group and the Community Advisory Committee and attended a workshop hosted by CSIRO to implement the incorporation of koala health metrics into the National Koala Monitoring Plan. WHA provided scientific and technical advice (via the Australian Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water; DCCEEW) on Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals resolutions in *wildlife health and migratory species* and *avian influenza* presented as part of the Convention of Parties (CMS COP14). Biosecurity and surveillance input was also provided to the National Recovery Team for the critically endangered southern bent-wing bat.

In addition, submissions were made to DCCEEW on the *Draft updated Threat Abatement Plan for Predation by Feral Cats, Updating Australia's Strategy for Nature 2019–2030* and to the NSW government on the *NSW Koala Strategy*. WHA presented for the first time at the NT Natural Resource Management (NRM) conference and Australasian Ornithological Conference raising awareness of the threat of HPAI and WHA tools available to assist in preparedness and management.

# EMERGENCIES

*WHA is an active trusted and key advisor about wildlife in Australia's emergency system.*

## Objectives & Deliverables:

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Agreed national standards for triage, care and rehabilitation of wildlife affected by emergency events.

Communicated protocols and guidance on best-practice in wildlife welfare during emergencies.

A national wildlife bushfires and emergency preparedness focus group to improve communication, coordination and progression of issues of mutual concern between government and non-government stakeholders.

Veterinarians, first responders and wildlife carers can effectively contribute to all-hazard emergencies affecting wildlife.

## Progress:

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A 'One Health Investigation Fund' (OHIF) administered by the Program Manager for Emergencies has been set up and bolsters support for multi-sector collaborative field, laboratory and epidemiological investigations into wildlife disease events and issues in Australia with a One Health focus. Projects supported through the OHIF this year included the development of a tool for evaluating the role of climate change in wildlife infectious disease epidemiology, investigation of genetic causes for flying fox cleft palate syndrome and the development of a range of output materials for HPAI planning and preparedness.

In terms of emergency animal disease (EAD) preparedness, WHA continues to provide technical advice regarding how the growing impacts and global spread of HPAI to all continents except Oceania could impact Australia. WHA contributed to national and international outputs, including drafting of the WOA. Considerations for emergency vaccination of wild birds against HPAI in specific situations and presented at the Asia and the Pacific webinar on protecting wildlife from avian influenza in UNESCO World Heritage sites, Biosphere Reserves and Ramsar sites.

# COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

*WHA leads, coordinates and collaboratively partners to deliver a nationally integrated wildlife health system in Australia*

## Objectives & Deliverables:

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WHA is the WOAHP international collaborating centre on wildlife health risk management for Australia and the Indo-Pacific.

An International Collaborating Centre on the Health of Antarctic wildlife that incorporates the Australian Antarctic Territory into Australia's national wildlife health system.

## Progress:

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Through the International One Health program, in its role as a **WOAH Collaborating Centre** in Wildlife Health Risk Management, WHA specialises in identifying and managing drivers of emerging risk for Australia and the Indo-Pacific region. The program works globally to support delivery of the **WOAH Wildlife Health Framework**. This year, Australia (via WHA) was nominated as co-chair for the WOAHP Collaborating Centre Network for Wildlife Health, the secretariat for the WOAHP Regional Wildlife Health Network and re-appointed as chair of the WOAHP Pacific Wildlife Health Network. Find out more about these networks and others in the Asia-Pacific region [here](#).

The International One Health Program continued to promote systems approaches, including via the IUCN/ WOAHP Wildlife Health Risk Analysis process, following an all-hazards framework and incentivising country and regional level application.

In addition, work continued to build trusted partnerships between global organisations, government, industry, NGO's, communities and academia by providing multiple continuing professional development opportunities online and offline, encouraging collaboration, networking and information sharing between partners.

# RESEARCH

*A national strategic research agenda that creates positive outcomes for wildlife health in Australia.*

## Objectives & Deliverables:

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A prioritised national wildlife health research strategy, built collaboratively with all stakeholders.

Collaborative, interdisciplinary wildlife health research that uses multiple data sources.

Shared research findings that maximise positive outcomes and iteratively inform the national strategic research agenda.

## Progress:

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WHA continues to foster and maintain current interdisciplinary research-based networks and partnerships in support of core WHA areas of focus, including the national surveillance system, and wildlife health policy advice, through the Universities Focus Group and university surveillance partners. A consideration for future planning for WHA is to identify any potential future role in a national wildlife research agenda for the country.





# CAPACITY BUILDING

*Increased capacity of Australia to protect and promote wildlife health.*

## Objectives & Deliverables:

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A rapid response network in all states and territories to:

- investigate wildlife disease events provide expert cross-disciplinary guidance on best practice responses
- Improve skills for wildlife carers through training programs and evidence-based standards for wildlife rehabilitation
- Enhance technical advice on wildlife health to the nation, through the employment of wildlife epidemiologists, ecologists and public health experts
- Bring wildlife carer groups into the national wildlife health system.

## Progress:

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Capacity building projects in the WHA One Health program have continued to focus on engagement with feral animal disease surveillance and management experts to explore and identify how best to support Australia's freedom from disease claims and early warning and management of potential risks posed by feral animal populations. A survey was conducted to identify who, and for what purpose, is undertaking feral animal disease surveillance and management in Australia. The survey demonstrated a high level of interest from respondents in joining a national feral animal surveillance and management network. Work exploring what this network could look like and how it might be supported has commenced.

Engagement activities to broaden WHA's stakeholder network in the environment and human health sectors included presentations to natural resource managers at the NT NRM conference, environmental health practitioners at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health Conference, public health practitioners at the Communicable Disease & Immunisation Conference in addition to presentations at the Australian Wildlife Rehabilitation Council Conference and an emerging collaboration with the NRM Biosecurity Hub. In 2024-25 WHA will continue to explore synergies and support for these sectors.

*Two-way trusted partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and peoples.*

## Objectives & Deliverables:

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Mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations that have close ties to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Enhanced wildlife health surveillance and support for ecosystem health, through collaborative work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

Increased awareness across the WHA membership base of wildlife issues that are of concern for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander project officers employed to assist WHA build trusted partnerships.

## Progress:

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Under the One Health Program, relationship building with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations remained a priority this year. WHA's first RAP was formally launched in November 2023, showcasing the beautiful artwork of Indigenous artist, Lani Balzan. Our recruitment and procurement policies were reviewed to include consideration of procurement of services from First Nations business and culturally appropriate ways to employ and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. To increase knowledge and awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and share 'two-way' science, monthly lunch time yarns with young Indigenous researchers commenced in January 2024.

WHA, along with our partners in the Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy (NAQS) team and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) Indigenous Rangers & Business Management Section, facilitated simulation workshops on biosecurity and HPAI at the Indigenous Rangers biosecurity fundamental training in Darwin and Kununurra. These events enabled WHA to engage with over **60** Indigenous Rangers groups from across Northern Australia. WHA also presented at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health Conference on how wildlife health relates to environmental health practice.

This is a very significant area for all Australians. We are especially grateful for the help and guidance of members of the RAP team, all of whom give up their time and energies voluntarily to support this area of our work.

# AWARENESS

*Increased awareness of wildlife health, One Health and ecosystems health.*

## Objectives & Deliverables:

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Impactful, compelling messages and data that demonstrate how wildlife health is crucial to human and ecosystem health.

A national plan for Australian wildlife health and wellbeing, updated every two years, with national, state and territory recommendations.

## Progress:

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WHA has successfully increased its presence on social media in 2023-2024, through the enhancement of profiles on X, LinkedIn and Instagram.

Between July 2023 and June 2024 we saw significant growth across all platforms:

- X followers increased **30%** from **631** to **821**
- LinkedIn followers increased **44%** from **2771** to **4000**
- Instagram followers increased **20%** from **897** to **1078**.

WHA also attended and presented at a number of webinars, workshops, training sessions, conferences and workshops this year to engage with key stakeholders and raise awareness of wildlife health.



WHA will be streamlining public-facing reporting, and an **Annual Operating Plan** has now been incorporated into the annual planning documentation available to all members and the public. The WHA Annual Operating Plan for 2024-25 can be found on the WHA website and demonstrates the increasing scope and breadth of activities which WHA is being called on to deliver for the nation.

# Reconciliation Action Plan

Our Board identified a lack of diversity within the organisation and recognised early on that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives were needed not just for the Board, but across the business and all WHA activities. As the national coordinating body for wildlife health in Australia, it is important to have a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to promote recognition of the knowledge and skills of First Nations peoples to better address wildlife health issues for Australia.

A RAP is a formal recognition by WHA of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' continuing custodianship of wildlife and wild environments with over **60,000** years of knowledge and experience contributing to wildlife health planning and decision-making. WHA have a progressive and highly motivated staff who believe in social justice and reconciliation, and want to do more, increase visibility and importantly, show leadership around this issue for the public and our partners. See our [Reconciliation Action Plan](#).

Our long-term aim is for WHA to be recognised as a culturally competent and culturally safe organisation to do business with which is evidenced by strong partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations and two-way learning that informs our work. We see the process of reconciliation as a journey, whereby, we as an organisation work together with our Board and key stakeholders to ready our workplace to be a culturally safe workplace. We are exploring operationally how WHA can embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in all areas of our work including wildlife health, surveillance, preparedness, and management. It is also WHA's long-term aim to prepare our organisation for the employment of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander team members; and WHA as a culturally competent and safe workplace would attract, retain and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff long-term.



## About the Artist

Lani Balzan is an Aboriginal artist and graphic designer specialising in designing Indigenous canvas art, graphic design, logo design, Reconciliation Actions Plans Design and document design.

Lani is a proud Aboriginal woman from the Wiradjuri people of the three-river tribe. Her family originates from Mudgee but she grew up all over Australia and lived in many different towns starting her business in the Illawarra NSW and recently relocating to Mid-North QLD.

Read Lani's story [here](#).

# Programs and Projects



## Administration of Australia's general wildlife health surveillance system

WHA administers Australia's general wildlife health surveillance system, in partnership with government and non-government agencies. Information on wildlife disease events from across Australia is collected, analysed and reported through the surveillance system.

The general wildlife health surveillance system involves the reporting and investigation of sick and dead free-ranging wildlife, both native and feral species, and also captive wildlife where relevant for free-ranging populations. WHA coordinates a number of programs and focus groups that report wildlife health into a national database, the electronic Wildlife Health Information System (eWHIS) (see page 22 for more information). Information is submitted by WHA surveillance partners including state and territory WHA Coordinators and Environment Representatives, veterinarians at sentinel zoo-based wildlife hospitals, veterinary clinics and universities, as well as wildlife rehabilitators, researchers, other wildlife health professionals and members of the public.

Key components of Australia's general wildlife health surveillance system include:

- WHA Coordinators and WHA Environment Representatives
- the Sentinel Wildlife Disease Surveillance Program
- A web-enabled national database of wildlife health information (eWHIS).

It is estimated that partners in Australia's general surveillance system see over **60,000** wildlife cases each year, from which **800 - 1,000** events covering over **300** species meet the criteria for capture and are included in eWHIS.

- Wildlife Health Surveillance and Intelligence Reports to Chief Veterinary Officers (CVOs) and environment agencies are produced each quarter.
- A Wildlife Health Report in each issue of Animal Health Surveillance quarterly.
- Wildlife Health Surveillance summary contributed to Animal Health in Australia annually.



## eWHIS

WHA administers Australia's national database of wildlife health information. WHA receives data from more than **45 surveillance partner agencies and organisations** including government agencies; sentinel zoo-based wildlife hospitals, veterinary clinics and universities; wildlife rehabilitators; and a range of other organisations and individuals. Every report to the database is moderated by WHA staff. WHA maintains and regularly reviews data sharing and security procedures.

Surveillance information captured through Australia's general wildlife health surveillance system allows WHA to support Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer, DAFF, DCCEEW, AHC, Animal Health Australia (AHA), and Australia's states and territories to better prepare for and protect Australia against the adverse effects of wildlife diseases.

WHA ensures that nationally collated wildlife health information is available to inform decision-making and policy development for the management of emergency disease incidents, international reporting, and more generally to protect Australia's environment, biodiversity, animal and human health, trade and economy. Summary reports on a selection of wildlife disease and mortality events recorded in eWHIS are published quarterly through the National Animal Health Information Program (NAHIP) in each issue of Animal Health Surveillance Quarterly (AHSQ). WHA also provides information to help fulfil Australia's reporting requirements to WOA. H.

Data in eWHIS contributes to and informs wildlife health research projects, disease risk assessments and publications. WHA manages requests for data access under the WHA Data Management Principles, ensuring appropriate approval from data submitters and acknowledgement for use of the information.

- Over **800** wildlife disease events reported by surveillance partners into the national eWHIS database this year.
- Over **250** wildlife disease events captured in eWHIS from non-government sentinel surveillance partners.
- Close to **200** different native wildlife and feral species represented in events reported to eWHIS.

## WHA Coordinators

The WHA Coordinator Group provides a framework to identify, coordinate, discuss and report wildlife disease information into eWHIS. Each of Australia's state and territory agricultural agencies have a WHA Coordinator, appointed by their respective state or territory CVOs. The WHA Coordinators provide a primary point of contact for reporting wildlife disease events for each state or territory and also ensure that their CVOs are kept informed of any national wildlife health issues or developments. Wildlife disease events investigated through state and territory agricultural or environmental agencies are entered directly into eWHIS by the WHA Coordinators.

To further promote collaborative links in the investigation and management of wildlife health, representatives from each jurisdiction's environment agency, WHA Environment Representatives, are included as part of Australia's wildlife disease surveillance system. Each WHA Environment Representative works closely with their respective WHA Coordinator and ensures a second point of contact in the jurisdiction.

Alongside the WHA Coordinators, the Group includes representatives from DAFF, the Australian Registry of Wildlife Health, CSIRO Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP), NAQS and AHA.

The national surveillance program is primarily funded through a cost-shared model with funding from DAFF and all Australian state and territory governments. In addition, the program is supported by an estimated additional \$5.6M per year in-kind from participating agencies and their laboratories.

## Sentinel Wildlife Disease Surveillance Program

WHA coordinates the **Sentinel Wildlife Disease Surveillance Program**, which is a collective group comprising the Zoo based, Sentinel Veterinary Clinic and University based Surveillance Programs. This surveillance program captures information on free-ranging and rehabilitation wildlife cases from around the country. Each participating organisation has one or more surveillance coordinators; over **130** coordinators have been trained by WHA to select and enter cases directly into eWHIS. Surveillance coordinators are brought together via four program meetings annually, to build a collaborative network and share information at a national level. The program continues to capture useful data from the frontline of wildlife triage and treatment, while also facilitating communication between program participants and the WHA Coordinators.

The Zoo Based Surveillance Program, a collaboration between WHA and the Zoo and Aquarium Association, was established in 2010 and includes nine zoo-based veterinary hospitals seeing free-ranging wildlife. Over **3,400** records from over **300** different species have been entered by the zoos since the program began.

The Sentinel Clinic Surveillance Program commenced in 2014 and now includes **10** key wildlife veterinary clinics that have a high wildlife caseload or that enhance the geographic and species coverage of the surveillance system, with further expansion into two new clinics underway. WHA are currently undertaking a scoping project to explore expansion of the sentinel veterinary clinic

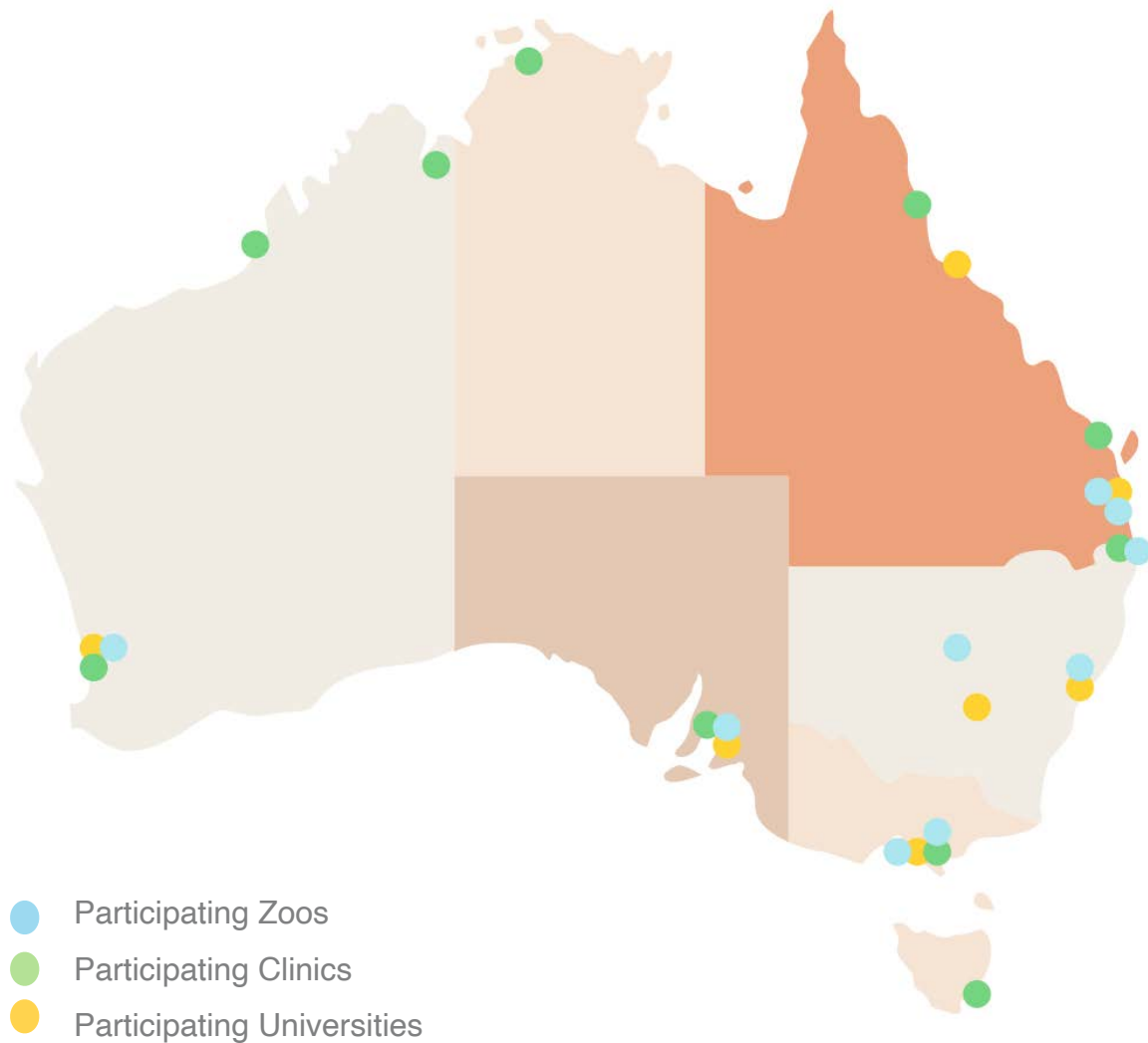


program, including a national survey of veterinary clinics to gauge their interest and capacity to be involved in different types of activities.

The university sector's involvement in WHA's wildlife health surveillance system further facilitates the direct linkage of recognised experts working within Australia's universities with the national framework and wildlife practitioners.

The information provided through this surveillance program is used to better understand disease threats to biodiversity, human health and domestic animals and contributes to our national picture of wildlife health. This is an invaluable surveillance effort providing data that may not be otherwise available to the national system.

The Sentinel Wildlife Disease Surveillance Program - Participating Organisations		
Zoo Based Surveillance Program	Sentinel Clinic Surveillance Program	University Based Surveillance Program
<b>Nine</b> participating zoos	<b>10</b> key wildlife veterinary clinics	<b>Seven</b> universities
Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital, Qld	Adelaide Koala & Wildlife Centre	The University of Melbourne
Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary, Qld	The Ark Animal Hospital, Darwin	The University of Queensland
Healesville Sanctuary, Vic	Bonorong Wildlife Hospital, Hobart	Murdoch University
Melbourne Zoo, Vic	Boongarry Veterinary Services, Cairns	James Cook University
Perth Zoo, WA	Broome Veterinary Hospital	The University of Adelaide
Sea World, Qld	Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital	The University of Sydney
Taronga Western Plains Zoo, NSW	Kimberley Vet Centre, Kununurra	Charles Sturt University
Taronga Zoo, NSW	Lort Smith Animal Hospital, Melbourne	
Zoos SA, SA	RSPCA QLD Wildlife Hospital, Walcol and Eumundi	
	WA Wildlife, Perth	



## Universities Focus Group

Members of WHA who are affiliated with Australia’s universities and research institutions make up a significant component of the WHA network. The Universities Focus Group was formed in 2008 to provide a forum to enhance the contributions that this sector makes to wildlife and biosecurity.

The group acts as a focus point to improve communication and coordination around Australian wildlife health, primarily in the areas of research, education, training, capacity-building and foresight. The group meets regularly to share information and discuss issues of mutual concern as “Hot Topics”, which promotes discussion on emerging and challenging wildlife health issues.

WHA also continues activities in several other important areas of research and knowledge including scanning, analysis and collating and providing information and intelligence to stakeholders.



## Bat Health Focus Group

The Bat Health Focus Group uses a collaborative, One Health approach to consider bat health issues within the broader context of biosecurity, public health, domestic animal health, and environmental impacts in Australia.

Members are from a range of organisations including Australian and state and territory government departments of agriculture, public health and environment, ACDP, universities, the Australasian Bat Society and the Australian Speleological Federation. There is a broad range of expertise across the group including veterinarians, biologists, ecologists, virologists, epidemiologists and bat carers.

Working with the Bat Health Focus Group and WHA Coordinators, WHA maintains a national dataset of Australian bat lyssavirus (ABLV) testing. Summary reports of ABLV testing are provided in AHSQ and published every six months in a dedicated publication '**ABLV Bat Stats**'. WHA produces a monthly 'Bat News' e-newsletter of media and publications relating to bat health, with the aim of raising awareness and to counter misinformation about diseases associated with bats.

The Bat Health Focus Group provides technical input to the development of national emergency plans and public health guidelines, and with collaborators has produced **personal protective equipment (PPE) information for bat handlers, a disease risk assessment for SARS-CoV-2 transmission from humans to bats, flying-fox transport and translocation guidelines**, a suite of resources on **white-nose syndrome prevention and preparedness**, and most recently a **public health communication guide for government media teams**.

- Public health communication guide developed to promote balanced messaging
- Bat News sent monthly to **275** people

## Expert advice and representation

WHA proactively supported and/or responded to **152** requests for information, including **five** relating to antimicrobial resistance and **87** relating to avian influenza, additional to information provided as part of ongoing wildlife disease investigations. WHA has also responded to and/or provided submissions to **58** state/territory, national and/or international queries, request for input, reviews and/or public consultations.

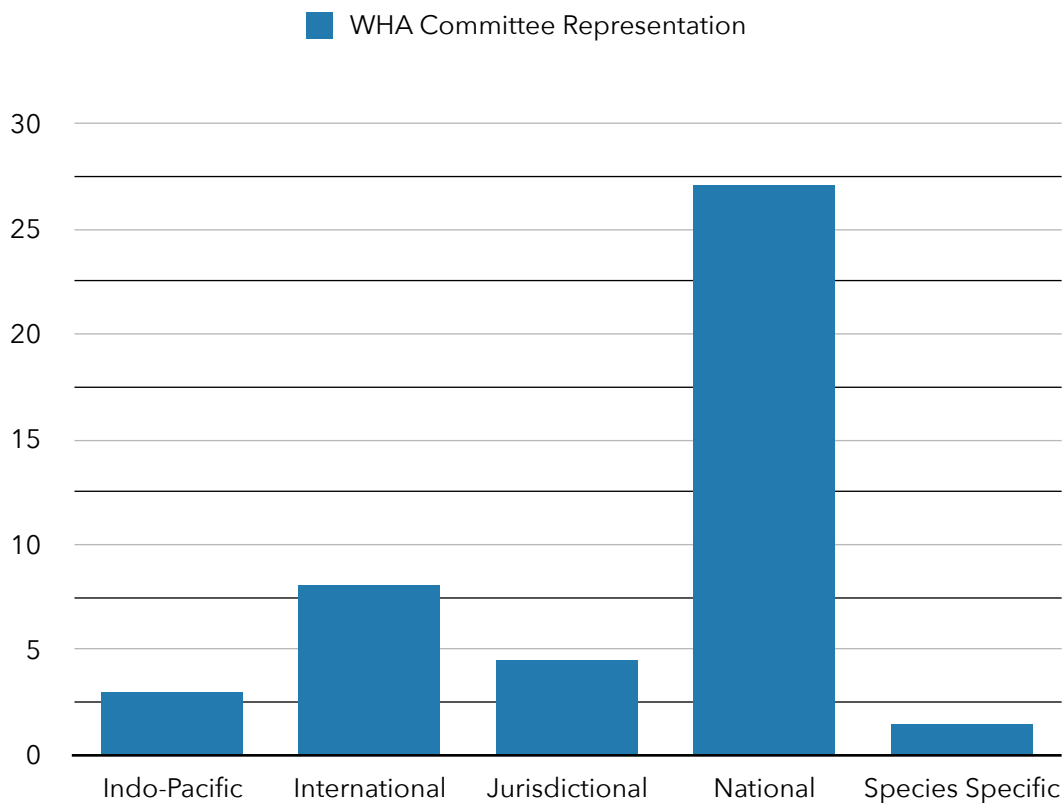
WHA has observer status on several National Biosecurity Committee (NBC) sectoral committees. A high priority is to assist the work of this committee by providing a national wildlife health perspective. These include the **Environment and Invasives Committee (EIC)**, **AHC** and the **National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network (NBCEN)**.

The inclusion of WHA as an observer on EIC and AHC assists members in the provision of information, depth of discussion and decision-making on issues relating to wildlife and wildlife diseases in relation to agricultural and environmental biosecurity, preparedness, detection and response.

WHA has been an observer on EIC since 2018. EIC provides NBC with consistent and consolidated advice on environmental biosecurity issues through national policy leadership on the identification, prevention and management of invasive species that adversely impact the environment, economy and community. The committee members include representatives from Commonwealth, states and territories biosecurity and environment agencies, along with representatives from CSIRO, AHA, Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences, Centre for Invasive Species Solutions and Plant Health Australia (PHA). This year, WHA attended two in-person meetings. WHA also joined two EIC sub-committees: Terrestrial Vertebrates Working Group and the Environmental Biosecurity Advisory Group. Find information including **meeting communiqués** on the **EIC website**.

WHA has had observer status on **AHC** for almost a decade. The committee members include the CVOs of the Commonwealth, states and territories, along with representatives from ACDP and AHA. The main purpose of AHC is to deliver strategic policy, science-based technical and regulatory advice and national leadership on animal health and biosecurity matters to NBC. In doing so, AHC provides leadership in developing and implementing policy, programs, operational strategies and standards for government in the areas of animal health, domestic quarantine, animal welfare and veterinary public health. Updates from WHA during the two in-person meetings this year summarised undertaken to prepare for the increasing threat from HPAI H5 (clade 2.3.4.4b) to Australia's wildlife.

As well as AHC and EIC, WHA also represented its members on over **25** important national committees and/or by contributing to their outputs, including the NAHIP and National Significant Disease Investigation (NSDI) Program. WHA also provided representation on NBCEN and Human Animal Spillover and Emerging Diseases Scanning (HASEDS) Group.



## Support for Wildlife Disease Investigations

The **NSDI Program** is managed by AHA and subsidises veterinary practitioners who investigate and report on significant disease incidents in livestock and wildlife. WHA administers NSDI Program funds for wildlife and promotes the program to WHA's surveillance partners and other private veterinarians. For eligible events, funds are provided to the investigating veterinarian and to the laboratory for diagnostic testing. In addition, WHA supports investigations into current or ongoing wildlife disease events that might otherwise not proceed, utilising the **WHA Wildlife Disease Investigation Fund (WDIF)**. This year, the WHA WDIF supported projects in various mammal, bird and reptile species across a wide geographic range, including botulism testing for a duck mortality event, herpesvirus screening in gliders and investigation of skin lesions in bearded dragons.

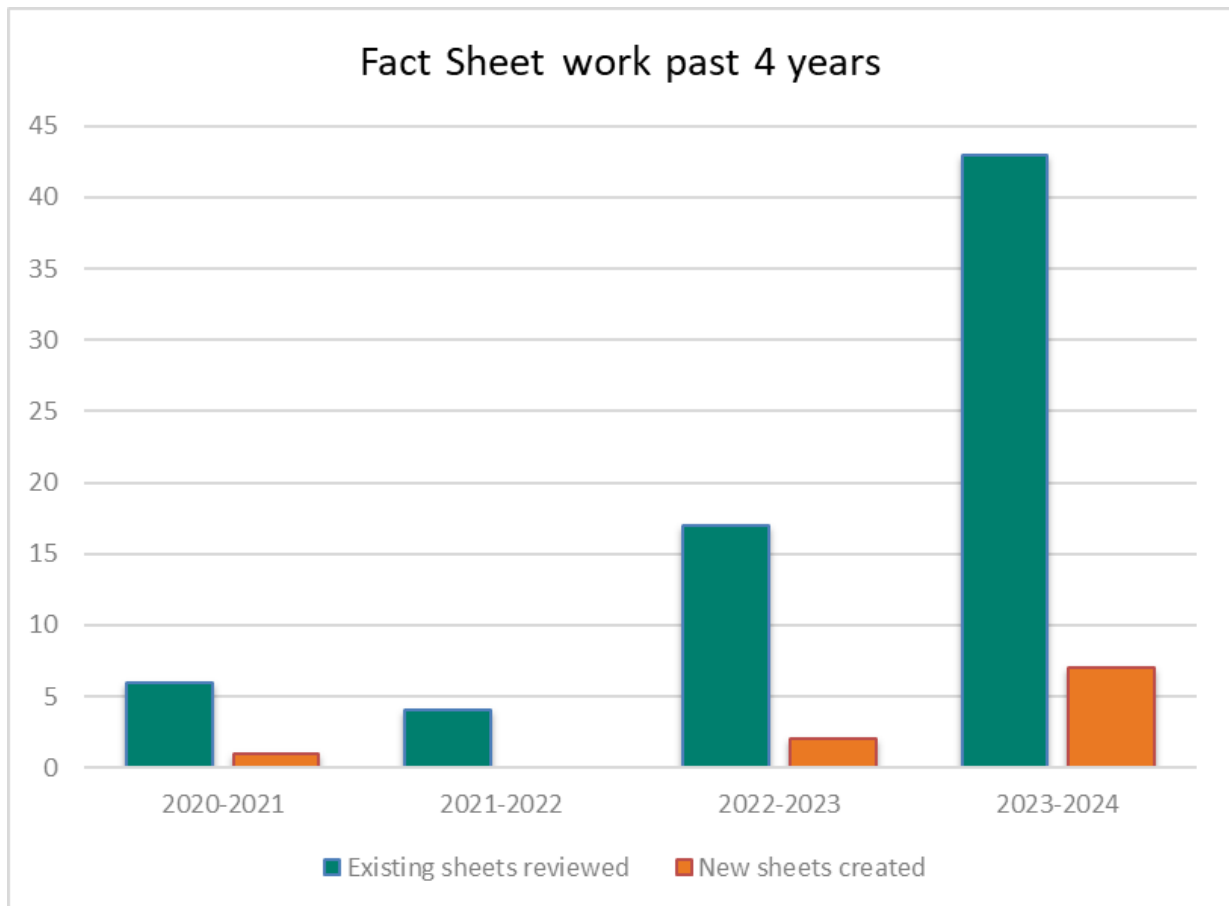
Wildlife disease investigations are often complex and logistically difficult. Funding made available through the NSDI Program and WHA WDIF can support elements of field and diagnostic investigations to help achieve a diagnosis, and thereby allow an informed assessment of the risk of the wildlife health event to human health, livestock health and biodiversity.

- Ad hoc support to government agencies and non-government organisations in response to over **90** wildlife disease events and issues
- A total of **15** events were funded by NSDI and a further **11** via the WHA WDIF.

## Fact Sheets

There are over **150 WHA Fact Sheets** on the WHA Website, with **43** fact sheets updated in 2023-24 and **seven** new Fact Sheets created, including "Impacts of climate change on Australian wildlife", "Devil facial tumour disease", "Nidovirus in freshwater turtles" and "*Neospora caninum* in Australian wildlife"). This is more than double the stats compared to the previous year (**19** published, of which **17** were reviewed and two were new). With **151** fact sheets, this means one third were rewritten or created in the past 12 months. In addition, almost all of the existing fact sheets were reformatted to the new WHA style. This was a considerable achievement.

To complement information contained in the fact sheets, the website contains technical documents and publications developed by the organisation on behalf and in collaboration with the wildlife community. The website also provides comprehensive information on current and past activities relevant to wildlife health for Australia and the region.



# Separately Funded Programs and Projects



## One Health Program

The One Health Program (One Health Surveillance Initiative), funded by the Commonwealth Government, is positioning Australia at the forefront of the global transformational change agenda aimed at preventing future pandemic and other zoonotic disease risks emerging from the human animal-environmental interface, through the implementation of a true One Health approach.

Key elements include:

- Strengthening Australia's national wildlife health framework
- Management of a 'One Health Investigation Fund', administered by WHA, to bolster support for multi-sector collaborative field, laboratory, and epidemiological investigation into selected wildlife disease events
- Aligning activities and outputs of the WHA World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) Collaborating Centre in Wildlife Health Risk Management (Collaborating Centre) with WOAHS Wildlife Health Framework to enhance impact
- Further expansion and establishment of mutually beneficial partnerships, including with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and feral animal disease experts
- Supporting expert contribution into development and review of human health, conservation, and agricultural guidelines, standards and policies in Australia and overseas to ensure wildlife health and the drivers of disease emergence are considered.

The Collaborating Centre builds on WHA's community-based approach to wildlife health in Australia, to support community-led, bespoke services to the Indo-Pacific region based on One Health principles and practice.

The Collaborating Centre continued to:

- Build a sustainable cadre of professionals in the Asia-Pacific able to manage drivers of emerging health risks
- Improve wildlife health and biodiversity resilience via integration into One Health frameworks
- Enhance political recognition of healthy natural systems' social, health and economic benefits.

An iterative approach is used to create communities of practice led by a clear understanding of how different groups see the world around them and how they share knowledge. This understanding is especially required where wildlife health knowledge and capacity-building needs to consider the audiences' preferred means of communication.

This year, the Collaborating Centre activities included:

- Enhancing regional wildlife health governance frameworks through
  - The establishment of the global *WOAH Collaborating Centre Network for Wildlife Health* and provision of the network Co-chair
  - Continuing to support both the *WOAH Regional Wildlife Health Network for Asia and the Pacific*, by providing the secretariat, and *WOAH Pacific Wildlife Health Network*, providing the chair the secretariat. Find out more [here](#)



- Providing capability and capacity development utilising systems approaches, which have included:
  - Running a **Wildlife Disease Risk Analysis** course with partners, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission Conservation Planning Specialist Group, from which regionally focused, multi-national training groups were formed from Australia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Timor Leste, Indonesia and Malaysia. This sparked an Indonesian team to run an Orangutan health risk analysis which was approved by the Indonesian Government as a template for wildlife health risk management processes in the region
  - Co-convening and facilitating an annual regional workshop via the Orangutan Veterinary Advisory Group, which continues to serve as a trusted forum for regional wildlife health networking opportunities that fill gaps in One Health practice in the region
  - Providing input into regional transboundary capacity building and knowledge exchange on HPAI via WOAAH and other partners
  - Supporting Indonesian and Papua New Guinea representatives participation at the Australian Registry for Wildlife Health Pathology Short Course in February 2024
  - Working with partners, including Mahidol University, to support expansion of WOAAH Collaborating Centres for wildlife health, to enhance knowledge and network sustainability across the Indo-Pacific region
  - Facilitating connections and continuing professional development on *Rabies in Borneo* conference, involving Indonesian animal health authorities, WOAAH and DAFF
  - Contributing to continuing professional development materials with WOAAH and other partners including:
    - Development of a Nipah Virus desktop exercise in an Asian context
    - review and input of WOAAH e-Modules on wildlife surveillance.
  
- Improving risk communication/raising awareness:
  - Co-facilitating a workshop series with WOAAH South East Asia, Mahidol University, OHHLEP, TRAFFIC USGS and DEFRA to pilot WOAAH's **Guidelines for Addressing Disease Risks in Wildlife Trade** (funded by the Australian government) and inform future capability-building approaches to support implementation of these guidelines and align with IUCN/WOAAH wildlife disease risk analysis process
  - Development of a regional-focused mental health and resilience program with stakeholders **Open Rivers Consultants**. This program began in July 2023, designed by a South East Asia team to help set the scene for sustainable wildlife health capability in the region.

- Helped establish the **WOAH Collaborating Centre Network for Wildlife Health** as network co-chair.
- Continued regional wildlife health network and communities of practice development and support in the Indo-Pacific, including linkage with WOAAH staff, WOAAH National Focal Points for Wildlife and numerous organisations in South-east Asia and the Pacific.



## World Organisation for Animal Health and other international activities

WHA supports Australia in its role as an international good citizen. The importance of healthy wildlife populations is recognised by World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) - the influential global intergovernmental organisation responsible for improving animal health worldwide. WOAH recognises that the health of animals (including wild and domestic), humans and ecosystems is interdependent and that there is a need to better integrate and strengthen the wildlife and environmental component of One Health globally. In 2020, a comprehensive **Wildlife Health Programme** was developed to better integrate wildlife health into WOAH's core activities and reinforce One Health strategies.

Australia's WOAH Focal Point for Wildlife is Tiggy Grillo, WHA's National Coordinator, who provides support for Australia's WOAH Delegate, the Australian government CVO, Beth Cookson. The Focal Point engages in regional and national wildlife health issues and provides advice on wildlife issues to state and Australian Government agricultural, human health and environmental agencies. Through the Focal Point, WHA also engages with members to ensure that Australia's scientific view and position relating to wildlife is considered when developing international policies and guidelines. WHA assists members by acting as the link between Australia and overseas wildlife health centres and focal points for wildlife within the region and internationally. Reports from Australia to WOAH can be found on the **WAHIS interface**.

A small scientific advisory group, WOAH's **Working Group on Wildlife** provides advice to WOAH on health problems relating to wild animals, whether in the wild or in captivity. WHA's CEO, Rupert Woods, is a member of this group and assists in bringing an Australian perspective.

A priority this year has been support for WOAH's **Wildlife Health Programme**, an activity seen as crucial to the global advancement of wildlife health management following identification of issues relating to the emergence of disease, in addition to the spread of a number of significant diseases such as HPAI.

International collaborations are maintained via regular communication with the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative and the United States Geological Survey National Wildlife Health Center, as well as via participation in an international working group on national wildlife health programs.

In 2020, the **Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research** (SCAR) for birds and marine mammals held a workshop on Polar Wildlife Health and subsequently established the SCAR Antarctic Wildlife Health Monitoring Working Group. The group has formed the following six sub-groups: Disease surveillance network, Unusual mortality plan, Web page, Sample collection protocols, sample collection database and Database of labs/Diagnostic facilities. WHA provides input into the Disease Surveillance network and Unusual Mortality Plan sub-working groups.

In addition to work through WHA's WOAH Collaborating Centre, Dr Tiggy Grillo, is also the co-chair of IUCN Species Survival Commission **Wildlife Health Specialist Group**, alongside Billy Karesh.

The One Health Program also enables WHA to contribute further to the development and implementation of international standards, guidelines and reporting development activities relating to wildlife health and One Health.

- Contributed to a number of global guidelines, communiqués and workshops, including:
  - **WOAH Considerations for Emergency Vaccination of Wild Birds against High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza in specific situations**
  - **WOAH Guidelines for Addressing Disease Risks in Wildlife Trade**
  - Expertise on wildlife management during emergencies (e.g. bushfire) to the **WOAH Platform Action Plans' bridging workshop** on Disaster Management and Risk Reduction Europe and North Africa.
- Participated in a focus group, as a member of the WOAHP WG, which resulted in the report entitled **"Biodiversity and pandemics: Interdisciplinary research and action priorities"** produced by the **Eclipse Expert Working Group on biodiversity and pandemics**.
- Supported Australia's contribution (via DCCEEW) to the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals via provision of expert comment on the resolutions presented for Wildlife Health and Migratory Species and Avian Influenza ([UNEP/CMS/COP14/Doc.30.4.3](#)).

## National Avian Influenza Wild Bird (NAIWB) Surveillance

The **NAIWB Steering Group** was established in 2006 to ensure national coordination and collaboration of wild bird avian influenza surveillance activities across Australia. It includes members from Australian national and jurisdictional government animal health and environment agencies, non-government organisations, laboratories, universities and relevant industries. WHA administers the NAIWB Steering Group, coordinates the surveillance program, supports collaboration and information sharing, and collates and reports on surveillance data for avian influenza in wild birds in Australia. Funding is provided by DAFF, with significant in-kind support provided by the jurisdictional agencies, researchers and representative's institutions.

### Australia's **NAIWB Surveillance Program**

comprises two sampling components. Targeted surveillance is undertaken at key locations following a risk-based approach. Faecal environmental swabs and cloacal and/or oropharyngeal samples are collected and tested from apparently 'healthy' wild birds of known avian influenza virus (AIV) reservoir species (including waterfowl and shorebirds). Samples are collected through various state and territory government agency programs, university-based research projects and NAQS, whilst testing is undertaken through approved laboratories and research facilities, including ACDP. General surveillance involves investigation of significant morbidity and mortality events in wild birds (including zoo bird populations), as reported by private veterinarians, universities, zoo wildlife clinics, wildlife rehabilitators, and members of the public.

Data generated by the NAIWB program is used to monitor and understand distribution of AIV infection in wild birds and inform risks to industry. Subsequent characterisation of the AIVs detected in wild birds, using techniques such as subtyping and sequencing, further contributes to the understanding of avian influenza virus evolution and dynamics in Australia, helping to maintain currency of diagnostic tests, and contributing to an AIV sequence library allowing comparison of Australian and overseas strains.

In addition, wild bird AIV data generated through the NAIWB surveillance program is utilised in special projects, including epidemiological analysis and sequence data collected through the program. WHA produce a twice yearly publication **Wild Bird News** which makes results of the program available for the general public.



- Updated the **Technical Issue Update – Global High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza Events** with support from NAIWB members.
- Supported NAIWB partners to conduct expanded targeted HPAI surveillance on shorebirds and seabirds during the 2023 migratory season.
- Secured funding for another three years of surveillance activities and expansion of the surveillance program to include all major jurisdictions in Australia.
- Contributed to, or in part supported, a series of publications:
  - **HPAI incursion risk assessment**
  - **Long Distance Avian Migrants Fail to Bring 2.3.4.4b HPAI H5N1 Into Australia for a Second Year in a Row**
  - **Contrasting dynamics of two incursions of low pathogenicity avian influenza virus into Australia**

## Support for Environmental Health and Biosecurity

Wildlife health is an important area for ecosystem health and environmental biosecurity. Diseases in wildlife can lead to species extinctions (e.g. the introduction of chytridiomycosis in frogs in Australia) or severely impact upon populations (e.g. Tasmanian devil facial tumour disease). The risks will become greater with changing land use, climate change, animal movements and as societal attitudes bring wildlife, livestock and people into closer contact. It is essential that Australia can effectively identify and manage these risks. Through the One Health Program and other funding streams, WHA continued to contribute expert advice into national, state and territory policies, guidelines and plans, coordinate biodiversity investigations that involve disease and raise awareness of diseases with potential biodiversity impacts.

WHA has been at the forefront of provision of support to response agencies with regard to HPAI preparedness activities for Australian wildlife. WHA facilitated several bespoke inter-agency meetings on HPAI preparedness and response this year, including a meeting of commonwealth and jurisdictional biosecurity and environment agencies and government participants in the NAIWB surveillance program in February which attracted **62** participants. WHA also coordinated a HPAI preparedness workshop for Marine Parks of DCCEEW, which was attended by approximately **40** participants from marine parks across Australia. Two **risk mitigation toolboxes** were published to assist wildlife care providers or people managing populations of wildlife. The toolboxes are guidance documents that help them to understand the risk posed by HPAI and develop a risk mitigation plan. In addition, a WHA HPAI **Communications Guide** for Managers of Wild Animal Populations was developed.

In addition to the focus on HPAI H5N1 blade 2.3.4.4b, since 2019, WHA has continued its support as a member of the national recovery team for the critically endangered southern bent-wing bat, providing input on disease-related issues such as white-nose syndrome, surveillance and biosecurity.

## Support for Human Health

The majority of emerging diseases that affect people arise from wildlife. In 2023-24, WHA provided support for human health activities around zoonoses and emerging infectious disease, antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in addition to:

- Chairing and coordination of the Bat Health Focus Group and National Avian Influenza Wild Bird (NAIWB) Surveillance Program
- Providing public information on significant zoonotic diseases that involve wildlife
- Providing *ad hoc* information to the Australian government Department of Health and Aged Care (DoHAC) on wildlife disease events that may involve human health
- Providing *ad hoc* information to DAFF and other key stakeholders working on Australia's national approach to AMR
- Representation to the Human Spillover and Emerging Disease Scanning (HASEDS) Group, whose activities included a rapid risk analysis for HPAI.

From 2021, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b has caused ongoing outbreaks of disease in wild birds throughout much of the North America, Europe, Asia and Africa. Mortalities have been observed in a wide range of species, seen as individual bird deaths and mass mortalities. While previous research has determined the risk of HPAI strains entering Australia via migratory birds to be low, the current global situation means an increased level of risk to Australia. WHA in collaboration with DAFF, DCCEEW and DoHAC and the NAIWB Steering Group continued to work to support Australian preparedness activities in relation to HPAI to ensure surveillance and response activities relating to a potential HPAI outbreak continue to be well informed.

The potential role of environmental contamination in the transfer of AMR between wildlife, domestic animals and humans has been documented, and highlights the need for further surveillance and research to determine the extent and significance of this process. Cases of multi-resistant bacterial infections and AMR in free-ranging wildlife in Australia are reported to WHA through the national wildlife disease surveillance program. As well as its many other activities, WHA also tracks research occurring on AMR and free-ranging wildlife and there is the opportunity to capture further surveillance data from these and other projects into eWHIS should funding be secured to do so.

In recognition of the need for greater investment in environmental health and AMR, WHA has supported the following projects through the OHIF:

- a desktop assessment of the environmental impact of antiparasitic medication of free-ranging wombats to control sarcoptic mange
- development of a training module for veterinary personnel on AMR in wildlife.

In addition, WHA continues to provide input as part of consultation process for the Interim Australian Centre for Disease Control (CDC), highlighting that the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants and ecosystems are closely linked and interdependent. WHA recommends One Health principles be the cornerstone of CDC design and governance, whereby human health is safeguarded by also understanding, promoting, protecting and monitoring environmental and animal health.

- Providing continued input into development of the Australian CDC highlighting the need for a One Health approach that is inclusive of wildlife.
- Supporting HPAI Preparedness.
- Supporting agriculture, environment and human health government agencies on matters relating to wildlife health and pathogens in wildlife.

## Contribution to national policy development

On behalf of the Australian wildlife community, WHA contributes to relevant national and state and territory policy documents, committees and working groups including the Series of National Guidelines, Australia's Veterinary Emergency Plan (AUSVETPLAN), AnimalPLAN, National Biosecurity Strategy, and Threatened Species Recovery Plans. Notable contributions this year include participation in the working group for the AUSVETPLAN Wild Animal Response Strategy, Avian Influenza Disease strategy and a submission to consultations on the design of the Australian CDC. In 2023-24, WHA also made a number of submissions regarding native wildlife, feral animals and health and diseases, including submission on the *Draft updated Threat Abatement Plan for Predation by Feral Cats*, *Updating Australia's Strategy for Nature 2019–2030* and to the NSW government on the *NSW Koala Strategy*. WHA submissions can be found on the [WHA website](#).



## Remote and Rural Communities

WHA has an interest in animal health surveillance activities in remote and rural communities around Australia, in particular in health data collected from community dogs and associated animals in view of the potential risk of spread of rabies from Australia's near northern neighbour countries. WHA continues to engage with DAFF's **NAQS** program and **Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities** and will look for opportunities for further networking with other organisations and individuals that provide animal health services to Indigenous communities.

## National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network (NBCEN)

The NBCEN produces nationally consistent public information and education programs in response to pest and disease outbreaks (biosecurity incidents) that impact on Australia's agricultural industries. The network consists of communication managers from the Australian, state and territory agriculture and primary industries agencies, PHA, AHA, ACDP, DoHAC, Australian Local Government Association, Centre for Invasive Species Solutions, WHA and various industry peak bodies.

Biosecurity incidents can impact on many people including affected producers and growers, local communities, overseas trading partners, exporters, supply chain service providers, the general public and media. The NBCEN facilitates the rapid and consistent dissemination of information that affected people need to prevent and respond to a pest or disease outbreak.

The NBCEN also plays a pivotal role in pest and disease prevention and preparedness communication and stakeholder engagement activities. WHA provides information and advice regarding wildlife health stakeholders and issues, and during a response assists the NBCEN in ensure consistency and alignment of messaging





# Corporate Governance



## Funding Members and Subscriptions

WHA is funded under a shared subscription model with contributions from the Australian and state and territory governments as agreed by the National Biosecurity Committee. These subscriptions form the foundation of WHA's core funding.

## Partner Agencies

WHA works with a broad group of partner agencies, including individual and associate members, wildlife networks, peak bodies, academia, zoos and carers. All of these partners bring a very broad range of expertise and insights to inform the national outlook on Australia's unique wildlife. This ranges from policy perspectives to clinical innovations, disease discoveries and investigative breakthroughs.



*WHA's greatest strength is its ability to engage a large and varied group of stakeholders, many of whom may have valuable information, expertise and experience with wildlife health issues, and can participate in discussions on these issues through WHA.*

# Financial Overview

For the majority of 2023-24, WHA was registered as an Incorporated Association under the Associations Incorporated Act 2009 in NSW. WHA is a Tier 1 association and requires independent audit and reporting of its financial affairs each year. Members are informed of the financial situation of WHA by presentation of audited financial reports each year at the Annual General Meeting. Audited financial reports are publicly available through the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission. In May 2024, WHA transitioned to a public company limited by guarantee.

## Subscription Funding

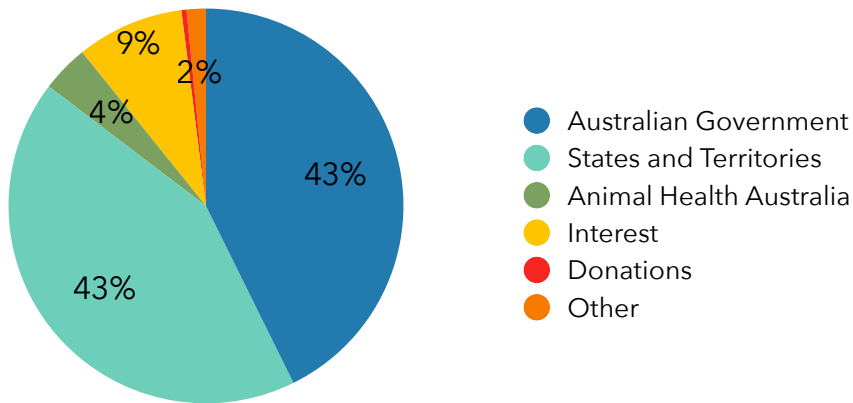
A shared subscription model agreed through the NBC provides the core funding for WHA. These funds support the employment of 5.8 staff, whose primary role is in provision of support for the surveillance component of the national animal health biosecurity system, and the administration and business function necessary to support the business foundations.

2023 - 2024 Core Income and Expenditure		
Income	Project Revenue	\$1,185,377
	Other Income	\$20,933
	Interest	\$116,907
	<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$1,323,217</b>
Expenditure	Project Expenses	\$645,166
	Staff and Administration	\$391,198
	Depreciation Expense	\$1,671
	Promotion & Development	\$8,970
	Rental Expenses	\$14,593
	Other Expenses	\$175,246
	<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,236,844</b>

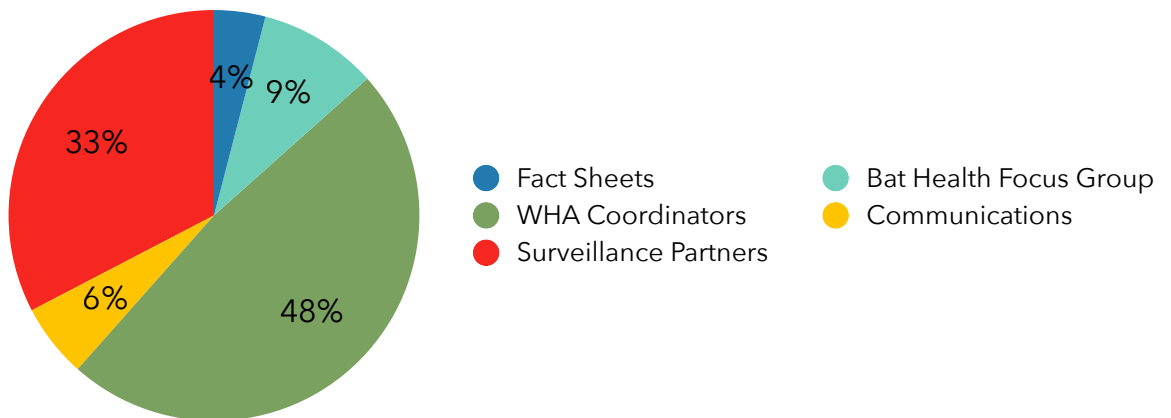


# Core Income and Expenditure 2023-2024

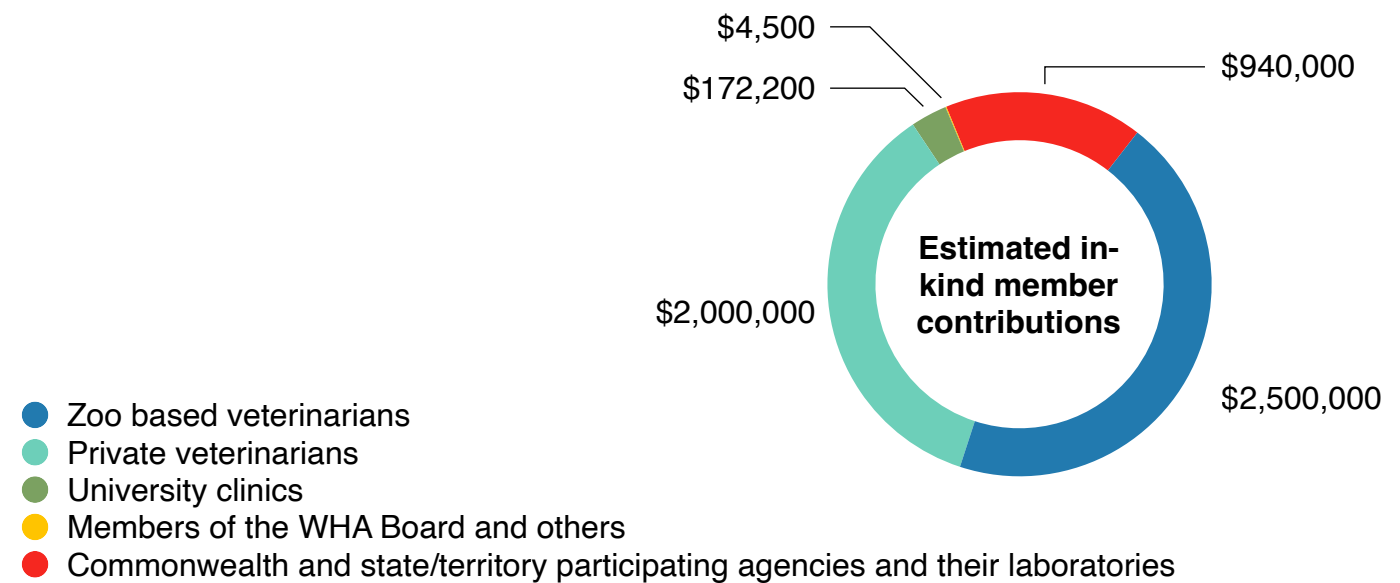
## Core Funding Income



## Core Project Expenditure



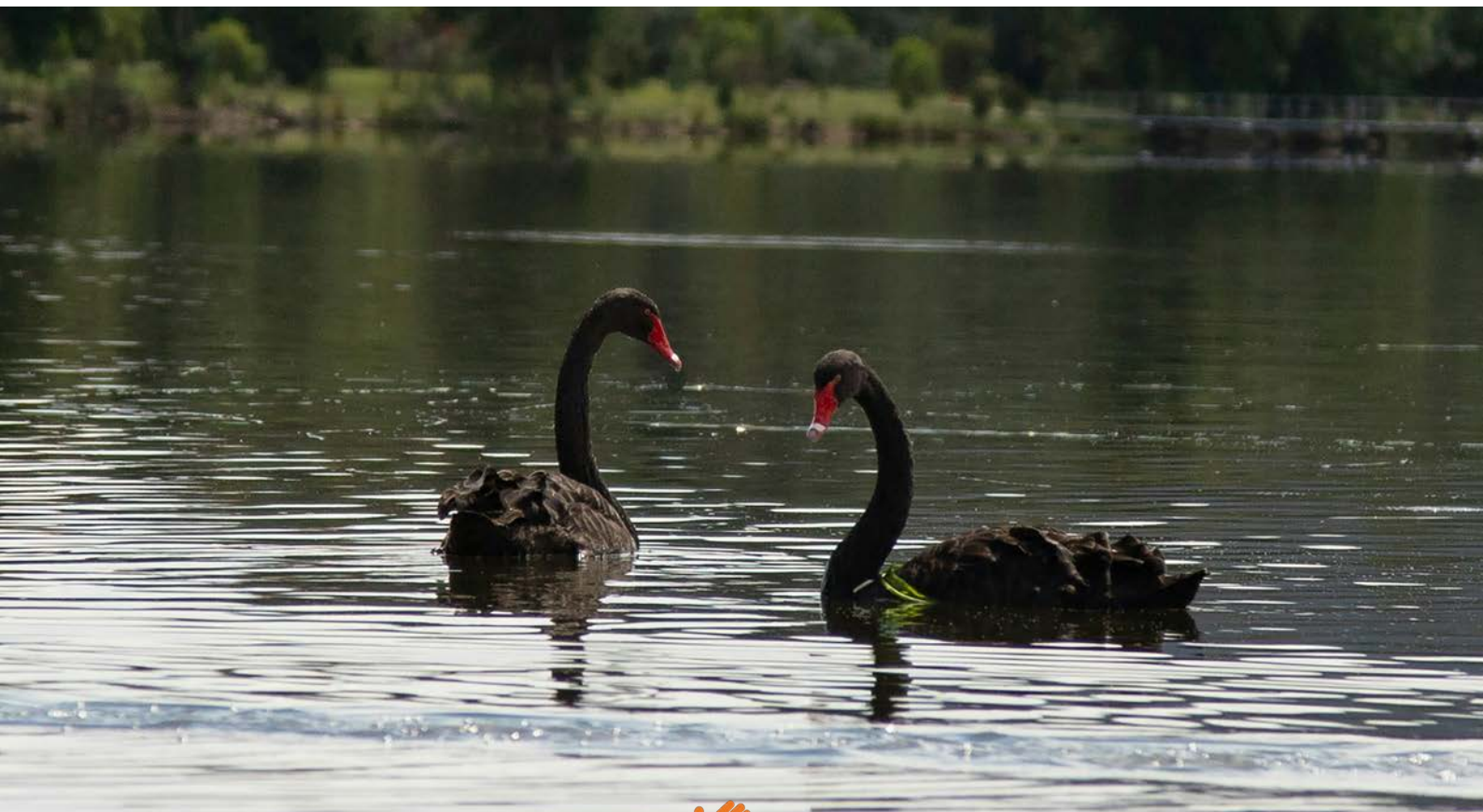
## In-kind Contributions



## One Health Program

In 2022, the Commonwealth Government committed \$8.4 million over four years to bolster and build on the existing surveillance activities and extensive networks of WHA in order to strengthen our ability to prevent, detect and respond to emerging diseases, including those with pandemic potential. The initiative allowed expansion of core (surveillance) activities, as well as enabling WHA to take on the responsibilities of a WOAHC Collaborating Centre in Wildlife Health Risk Management for the Indo-Pacific region. This has allowed WHA to adopt a One Health systems approach across all its programs.

2023 - 2024 One Health Program	
Staff funded through One Health in 2023 - 2024: 12.1 FTE	
Opening Balance	\$2,731,235
Add: funds received	\$4,592,532
Less: funds disbursed/allocated	\$575,223
Less: FTE wages expenditure	\$1,380,969
<b>Closing Balance</b>	<b>\$5,367,575</b>



# Emerging Roles and Developments

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The Australian Government-sponsored One Health program builds upon WHA's existing range of core functionalities with the aim to protect native wildlife and ecosystems, prevent future pandemics and monitor for the emergence of disease in wildlife.

WHA's immediate future includes driving forward projects relating to One Health and broadening stakeholders to include First Nations people, feral animal experts and others, and expanding its operations into the Indo-Pacific region.

More about future activities for WHA can be found in our updated [Annual Operating Plan](#) for 2024-25.

## Governance and Legal

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The organisation prides itself on good governance and is administered under best practise organisational governance principles with an elected **board** that oversees activities on behalf of the nation.

For the majority of 2023-24 WHA operated as a 'for purpose' (not-for-profit), incorporated association registered under the Associations Incorporation Act (2009) in NSW. A significant achievement during the year was completion of the transition of WHA from an incorporated association to a public company limited by guarantee.

WHA retains its objects, charity and deductible gift recipient status. However, the move presents a more appropriate legal and regulatory structure for an organisation of this size and purpose as required by the regulators. The move of WHA from the unincorporated entity, the Australian Wildlife Health Network, hosted by Taronga Conservation Society Australia, to the separate legal entity WHA Inc. and now WHA Ltd., represents a logical and staged progression in its development and sets the organisation, and its many members and supporters, up well to face the challenges of the years ahead.

## Donations, Bequests & Corporate Partners

WHA has deductible gift recipient status, meaning any donations to the organisation are tax deductible. By making a tax-deductible donation to WHA, you will be supporting an organisation that is working to protect our amazing wildlife for future generations. Donations can be made [here](#). If you would like to discuss leaving a gift for WHA in your will, please contact Rupert Woods, CEO, on 0438 755 078, or [rwoods@wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au](mailto:rwoods@wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au).

WHA is a sponsorship-friendly organisation looking for partners. Please contact Rupert Woods, CEO, at [rwoods@wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au](mailto:rwoods@wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au) if you are interested in helping with our work.

# Image Credits

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Page 27	Flying-fox	<a href="#">René Riegal, Unsplash</a>
Page 31	Koala	<a href="#">Tarryn Myburgh, Unsplash</a>
Page 36	Brolgas	<a href="#">René Riegal, Unsplash</a>
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Page 41	Frilled-neck lizard	<a href="#">David Clode, Unsplash</a>
Page 42	Australian Sea Lion	Shana Ahmed, WHA
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# Acronyms and Initialisms

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ABLV	Australian Bat Lyssavirus
ACDP	Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (CSIRO)
AHA	Animal Health Australia
AHC	Animal Health Committee
AHSQ	Animal Health Surveillance Quarterly
AIV	Avian Influenza Virus
AMR	Antimicrobial Resistance
AUSVETPLAN	Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan
CDC	Centre for Disease Control
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
CVO	Chief Veterinary Officer
DAFF	Australian Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
DEFRA	Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (UK)
DCCEEW	Australian Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
DoHAC	Australian Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
EAD	Emergency Animal Disease
EIC	Environment and Invasives Committee
eWHIS	electronic Wildlife Health Information System
HASEDS	Human Animal Spillover & Emerging Diseases Scanning
HPAI	High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
NAHIP	National Animal Health Information Program
NAIWB	National Avian Influenza in Wild Birds
NAQS	Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy
NBC	National Biosecurity Committee
NBCEN	National Biosecurity Communications and Engagement Network
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NSDI	National Significant Disease Investigation
OHHLEP	One Health High-Level Expert Panel
OHIF	One Health Investigation Fund
PHA	Plant Health Australia
RAP	Reconciliation Action Plan
USGS	United States Geological Survey
WDIF	Wildlife Disease Investigation Fund
WHA	Wildlife Health Australia
WILDDeST	Australian Wildlife Health Incident Decision Support Tool
WOAH	World Organisation for Animal Health