



MEDIA RELEASE

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FIRST SOD TURNED FOR NORTHERN RIVERS WILDLIFE HOSPITAL

In a major win for sick and injured wildlife, the Mayor of Ballina today turned the first sod for construction of a new \$2.8 million Northern Rivers Wildlife Hospital near Wollongbar.

Ballina Mayor Cr **Sharon Cadwallader** performed the honours at a special ceremony attended by local MPs, wildlife carers, environmental agencies as well as Members and Supporters of Northern Rivers Wildlife Hospital (NRWH).

Ninian Gemmell, Chair of the NRWH thanked the Mayor and Ballina Council for its role in approving the Development Application, and hopes for a close long term collaborative partnership. He acknowledged the invaluable assistance of NSW DPI who had facilitated a Crown Land Lease for the Not-for-Profit Wildlife Hospital at the rear of their property on Lindendale Rd.

Mr Gemmel commented "This journey has taken far longer than anyone had imagined so it is extra exciting to have reached this milestone where actual construction has commenced".

Kim Hollis-Simpson, a NRWH Board Member and Wildlife Vet Nurse spoke of surgeries and ICU equipped with state-of-the art technology, on a campus that will incorporate rehabilitation facilities, gardens to support feeding the patients, and a large flat site prepared for erection of emergency facilities to treat and accommodate mass casualties during disasters.

Ms Hollis-Simpson stressed the importance of research and training opportunities for professionals to expand the region's specialist skills treating local wildlife. "We are close to an agreement with TAFE to host their Vet Nurse interns and anticipate this will be a popular choice for their students."

The Wildlife Hospital project was the vision of Bangalow Wildlife Vet **Dr Megan Kearney** and the late **Tony Gilding** whose bequest was recalled by his close friend friend **Sue Higginson** MLC.

Tamara Smith MP (Ballina) presented the keys to the Wildlife Transport Vehicle – her Community Building Partnership Grant funded its purchase. The Northern Rivers Community Foundation provided an additional grant for the van fit out and signage.

Janelle Saffin MP (Lismore) concluded by noting the project has brought together the wildlife sector and will play a pivotal role across the region. Its Wollongbar location will serve wildlife and support rescuers and carers from Clarence to Tweed, and West to Kyogle. The new Northern Rivers Wildlife Hospital completes our Regional Network including Friends of Koala Specialist Hospital (Lismore), Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital Mobile Service (Knockrow) and Currumbin Wildlife Hospital (Gold Coast).

- **Regional Footprint:** Northern Rivers Wildlife Hospital will service a 21,000 sq km area encompassing Tweed, Byron, Ballina, Clarence, Lismore, Kyogle and Richmond Valley LGAs.
- **Completion:** The Hospital is expected to be commissioned in April 2024.

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