

WILDLIFE ADVOCATE

Representing The Quiet Australian

ISSUE

Opposing the Use of Wildlife as Army Unit Mascots

Background

In late October a Wildlife Advocate member reported that the 161 Reconnaissance Squadron based in Darwin (NT) was considering a plan to acquire a ringtail possum as its unit mascot.

Action

After a detailed discussion with the reporting member, Wildlife Advocate promptly raised the issue with the Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment and followed up with letters to the Minister for the Environment, the Minister for Defence, the Northern Territory Minister for the Environment and the Officer Commanding the 161 Reconnaissance Squadron.

The essential arguments raised in Wildlife Advocate's opposition to the proposal were:

- ▶ Wildlife Advocate is opposed to the unnecessary capture and keeping of native Australian wildlife other than for educational purposes (eg. zoos). Free living native fauna should not be captured and removed from their native environment solely to be kept as pets and/or ceremonial mascots;
- ▶ The relocation of a ringtail possum from a southern state, where it is native, to the Northern Territory, where it is not native, will cause significant stress to the possum both in terms of heat stress and stress caused from being away from its native environment; and
- ▶ The use of a nocturnal animal, such as a possum, as a mascot to be part of day-time parades and ceremonies is totally inappropriate.

Wildlife Advocate went on to suggest that as an alternative the 161 Reconnaissance Squadron should provide financial assistance to sponsor the care of an animal being looked after by a local wildlife rehabilitation group and/or provide assistance to a local/national group concerned with preserving the habitat of possums.

The Officer Commanding the 161 Reconnaissance Squadron has replied stating that the unit does not intend to acquire a possum.

Another win for Wildlife Advocate, its members and Australia's native wildlife