

# Dr Marisa Paterson MLA

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBIDGEE

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Forget snakes on a plane, its snakes in the Assembly this week!**

#### ***A motion to change the ACT Snake Regulationss***

Snakes, along with local trusty snake catcher Gavin Smith will join MLAs in the ACT Legislative Assembly today. The snakes have been invited to the Assembly by Dr Marisa Paterson who is today moving a motion calling on the government to do more to protect snakes, educate the community, and implement important changes to legislation around snakes handling.

“Snakes are essential to maintaining a healthy biodiversity in our environment. I am concerned about the level of fear of snakes in our community and reports that snakes are being brutalised by people or dogs because people just do not understand how to live alongside these native reptiles!” Dr Paterson said.

Whilst snakes do not have the glamour or ‘cute’ draws that other native animals have, they are a critically important part of the region’s ecosystem. The ACT’s Environment Directorate praises snakes as “important in the web of life and food chain”. Your kitchen pantry may well be rodent free as a result of Canberra’s native snakes having an impact on reducing population numbers!

Elle Lawless, Executive Director of the Conservation Council ACT highlights the importance of maintaining such biodiversity, "Biodiversity is essential for the processes that support all life on Earth, including humans. Without a wide range of animals and plants together [including] snakes we cannot have the healthy ecosystems that we rely on to provide us with the air we breathe, water we drink and the food we eat" she said.

Dr Paterson acknowledges ‘While few people may delight in finding a snake slithering around their backyard or kitchen, there is nothing to fear. The ACT has qualified professionals can quickly catch, and safely release our legless friends – however, our current regulations around snake handling make this process difficult’ .

Where an injured snake is caught, current regulations demand it be released within 48 hours regardless of its health. When a snake requires further care, this means that the snakes have to then be moved to a veterinary clinic or euthanised. This puts extra unnecessary pressure on veterinary clinics, that are often not set up for housing snakes or don’t have trained staff to administer treatment, when a licensed and trained snake catcher could continue care through to release.

ACT Snake Catcher Gavin Smith highlighted the need for increasing education and protections, “It is important for snakes to be respected and cared for, like they have been for thousands of years by the Ngunnawal peoples. As Canberra grows in population, it is essential that the community understand how to live alongside our native snakes in a respectful and safe way. In my work both as a researcher and a snake catcher, it is increasingly apparent how essential it is for more to be done both in regard to education of the community and care of snakes when they are injured”.

While she acknowledges the importance of regulations around the keeping of native animals, Dr Paterson calls on the ACT Government to recognise the lack of public education surrounding snakes in the ACT. Snake catchers do a lot of the education work in the community, however under current legislation, they cannot keep venomous snakes for the purposes of educating the community about the behaviour and ecology of locally occurring snakes. This had led to cases where snakes have been flown in from interstate (for training courses), creating a momentous effort and expense to educate Canberrans of the dangers of snakes and safe practices around them.

The motion calls on the ACT to consider ways to better allow trained and licenced professionals to keep native snakes for the purposes of education. It will also ask for the ACT Government to explore the possibility of extending the 48-hr window that licensed snake catchers can care for an injured snake that has been caught to allow them to be cared for, for as long as they need veterinary supervision.

### **Media Opportunities**

Gavin Smith will be hosting an education program from MLAs in the Legislative Assembly tomorrow from 12:15pm (subject to vary slightly depending on the scheduling in the Assembly).

Dr Paterson, MLA is available for comment via phone prior around Assembly Sitting, and in person in the Assembly during the education program.

Gavin Smith, PhD, ACT Snake Catcher is available for comment in the Assembly, and potentially via phone.

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