

Habitat degradation, weed overgrowth and plant toxicity: threats to the health of the southern hairy-nosed wombat

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Summary The impact of noxious weeds on the health and welfare of domestic livestock is well known, however less is known of the impact of weed species on the health of Australian native wildlife. We have recently detected concerning levels of malnutrition and toxic liver disease in Southern hairy-nosed wombats (*Lasiorhinus latifrons* Owen) inhabiting degraded habitats in the Murraylands region of South Australia. Habitat surveys identified severe depletion of native grasses and other forages preferred by wombats, and replacement by invasive weeds such as *Asphodelus fistulosus* L., *Carrichtera annua* (L.) DC., *Heliotropium europaeum* L. and *Echium*

plantagineum L. Thin to emaciated body condition and death from starvation has been seen in adult wombats. Toxic liver disease has been identified in juvenile wombats and pathological and toxicological studies suggest ingestion of plants containing pyrrolizidine alkaloids as the underlying cause. This talk will discuss the impact of habitat degradation and weed overgrowth on the health of this iconic South Australian marsupial as an example of the currently underestimated threat to native wildlife, as well as the hurdles faced in the management of this problem and the restoration of degraded land.