

More pain for wildlife carers

Animals | Raelene Wilson

ANIMAL carers have been dealt another blow after Wildlife Victoria axed its overnight rescue service and volunteer rebates.

The *Leader* revealed in December that despite receiving a massive \$4.3 million in donations after 2009's Black Saturday fires, financial statements showed the group could be bankrupt within three years.

In an email sent to the organis-

ation's membership last week, chief executive Karen Masson announced the 24-hour emergency hotline would be scaled back to a daytime operation from February 1.

The group has also cut food and fuel support for carers and rescuers who rely on a 50 per cent rebate on the cost of specially formulated milk and 10 cents a kilometre when attending call outs.

St Andrews carer Stella Reid said the changes would make little dif-

ference to volunteers who already received hardly any support from Wildlife Victoria.

But Noble Park shelter operator and pensioner Paula Rowntree said she would be forced to cap the number of animals she accepted to just four.

South Oakleigh carer Michele Phillips said the overnight service's closure "wouldn't make a difference" as she often carried out night time rescues when members of the public called the hotline only

to get an answering machine message.

Wildlife Victoria president Rob Gell said the measures would stop "excess losses in the short term" saving "five figures" and allow the group to get its finances in order.

Karen Masson would review the organisation's policies and "re-engage" with the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the RSPCA to determine how much free work the group did for those agencies, he said.



South Oakleigh carer Michele Phillips.