



FARMER FODDER: Bob Irwin is fighting to save wombats.

Cruel reality that's killing native wildlife

Bob Irwin is so enraged at animal misery caused by greed it gave him a heart attack, writes **Glenis Green**

AUSTRALIA'S native animals have become collateral damage in a society consumed by greed and apathy, according to leading conservationist Bob Irwin, who has started a crusade to tip the scales back in favour of our wildlife.

Koalas, kangaroos, wombats, turtles, dugongs, Fraser Island dingoes and cassowaries are all heading for extinction under present government laws and practices, says Mr Irwin.

And he warns Australians are in no position to criticise Japan over its whaling program.

"Nobody likes the whaling issue but it's very hypocritical of our Government to even consider having a go at the Japanese when we ourselves are destroying our wildlife at a terrible, terrible rate," he said this week.

"We should be cleaning up our own backyard and then saying to the Japanese 'look, this is what we've done to fix our own problem' and then we can have a go at them about the whales."

In his first major interview since the severe heart attack that almost claimed his life last month, Mr Irwin said he had never been so angry as in the days before his collapse when he toiled in 40C heat in South Australia trying to rescue

southern hairy-nosed wombats trapped alive in burrows that had been filled in by farmers who claimed the animals ruined farmland.

"It was just blatant cruelty to animals and no one wanted to do anything about it," said the father of late Crocodile Hunter Steve Irwin.

"I don't think I've ever been so angry. That probably caused more problems to me than anything physical, just the mental situation. I was just beside myself. The farmers were blaming the wombats instead of their farming practices."

Mr Irwin said he estimated at least 700 wombats were being killed illegally each year by slowly suffocating in burrows filled in by farmers or even being sliced up by machinery discs as burrows were dug over, yet nobody was holding the farmers accountable.

"It was so frustrating to see that the State Government and the South Australian RSPCA would actually know this was happening - and we pointed it out - and they don't want to do anything about it," he said.

"And it's not just the wombats. It's the kangaroo industry and it's the koalas and it's the cassowaries and the dugongs and the turtles. You can go on and on."