



20th October 2007

Letter of recommendation for Dr Faith Walker

To whom it may concern,

I was Dr Walker's primary PhD dissertation adviser, for her research on an under-studied Australian marsupial, the southern hairy-nosed wombat. She developed a tremendous passion for the study of the species during her first trip to Australia in the early 1990s. She maintained that interest for several years while pursuing other potential projects, but securing funding and a graduate position at Monash University allowed her to realise her goals. Her research was pioneering and world class, involving development of cutting edge laboratory techniques to genotype wombats from single hairs collected at burrow entrances. This seemingly simple tool opened up pathways to addressing fundamental aspects of the species biology under a number of different ecological conditions (including changing soil structure and anthropogenic fragmentation). No previous method came close to enabling these issues to be addressed. Dr Walker contributed a tremendous effort in both the laboratory and field, to produce a huge data set to which she applied novel analyses to glean exciting new knowledge. She has had three papers published or accepted for publication from her PhD research, and a fourth is in review. All are in high quality journals.

As one of the first students to join me in my new lab at Monash, Dr Walker was invaluable in setting up lab protocols and systems, as well as in training less experienced lab members in various research methods. She was also successful in attracting funding for her research from a variety of sources, and independently planned and executed her fieldwork.

To summarise her achievements, Faith Walker is a highly efficient and talented field and laboratory worker, with excellent skills in production and management of large genetic data sets, via both sequencing and microsatellite genotyping. She is expert in a plethora of genetic analyses of dispersal and population structure as well as many diverse ecological analyses. Her communication skills are excellent, and her presentations at national and international conferences highly regarded. I would rank her as among the brightest of the graduate students I have supervised formally and informally. She shows an extraordinary level of dedication and enthusiasm for molecular ecology. The passion with which she approached her wombat work is mirrored in her general fascination for, and dedication to, ecological research. For example she dedicated some time during her PhD candidature to preliminary trials for extracting beaver DNA from wood chippings, with a view to future research on this species. She also has a long-standing interest in interpreting exciting contemporary ecological research findings for various audiences and lay publications. This ability to simplify often complex concepts would make her an extraordinary educator, which in addition to her impressive research skills makes her eminently qualified for an academic position.

Sincerely

Dr Andrea Taylor
Senior Research Fellow