



## Bob's battle to save the wombats

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WILDLIFE warrior Bob Irwin was down on his hands and knees desperately trying to rescue rare trapped wombats from the path of "slice and dice" earthmoving equipment in South Australia just two days before his heart attack.

The tireless 69-year-old conservationist was in the eastern Mount Lofty Ranges near Adelaide, striving to save up to 10 southern hairy-nosed wombats buried alive by ploughing near Cambrai and Sedan.

It was shortly after his return to his 259ha property, near Kingaroy, that Mr Irwin is believed to have suffered a severe heart attack on Sunday night. Mr Irwin, father to the late Steve Irwin, was reported to be recovering well at a private Brisbane hospital yesterday.

A long-time friend, Tony Kirby, said the Irwin family patriarch was already back to his usual self, even reportedly telling wife Judy to "get me the bloody hell out of here".

Mr Kirby wrote a book on the childhood friend who went on to become the Crocodile Hunter, Steve Irwin - Bob's son. He said Bob would be fighting the battle to save Australia's native wildlife for years. "He made a commitment by his son's grave to carry on what Steve started," he said.

"This is a guy who was crawling down wombat holes as recently as last week trying to save these 'tough as nails' wombats." Mr Kirby said Bob and wife Judy had told him they hoped to be back at their Wattle Camp home, near Kingaroy, by the weekend.

Original Australia Zoo founder Bob Irwin featured on the ABC's Australian Story program on Monday night in a story on the life of wealthy Gold Coast businessman Kenton Campbell. The Zarraffa's Coffee chain magnate sponsors several programs in the Bob Irwin Wildlife Fund, including koala research and a breeding program for endangered turtles on the Mary River.

Mr Campbell was responsible for flying Mr Irwin the 2000km from western Queensland to South Australia last week as he joined the desperate bid to save the 10 southern hairy-nosed wombats buried alive by the ploughing on farms.

"If they just bury the wombats then they are going to die slowly over a period of weeks and you know that's a very sad situation," he said. South Australian RSPCA spokesman Russell Jarman did not wish to comment on Mr Irwin's condition or his work last week. Mr Jarman said the 10 wombats Mr Irwin and others were attempting to save, still had not been rescued.