

Australian Society for Kangaroos

'Dedicated to the victims of the largest wildlife slaughter in the world'



Health and wellbeing of kangaroos and other macropods in New South Wales - Post-hearing responses - 11 June 2021

1. When and why did ASK form and when did you become aware of the commercial industry?

ASK formed in 2007 after we became aware of the commercial industry, which was about 10 years prior.

2. How has community awareness about the commercial kangaroo industry changed since ASK formed?

There has been a significant increase in community awareness since ASK formed.

I clearly remember when we started that there was never any discussion about kangaroo culls in the media. They were just announced and that was that. There were never any opposing viewpoints in the media or groups for journalists to interview, let alone people saving kangaroos. Things have changed dramatically and there are now multiple groups and individuals out there fighting for kangaroos all around the world.

3. Given 'Improving the welfare and humaneness of commercially harvested kangaroos' was published in 2014, with regard to ethics and animal welfare, how do you think the industry's practices have changed since 2014?

It appears to have gotten worse as they have completely removed any potential protections for females with young so there will now be uncontrolled killing of females and joeys being killed inhumanely or just left to die alone in the bush. But no one will ever know if it is better or worse or in fact what is going on out there as there is absolutely no oversight at the point of kill. It is up to the will of the shooter how he treats that kangaroo or the orphan, as they are all alone with no supervision whatsoever. It's very disturbing to think that there is absolutely no one out there protecting kangaroos.

These were the recommendations of the government researchers in the study, but as far as we know, none of this has been put into action. It's all rhetoric designed to appear as though they care, but in fact nothing ever changes because they have never felt the need to.

'One of the most important factors in assuring the humane death of animals, is that the operators are properly skilled and conscientious (Whiting et al. 2011). Harvesters have an ethical responsibility to ensure that the most appropriate methods are used and that death of kangaroos is as painless and distress free as possible. Development of a more prescriptive standard operating procedure for kangaroo harvesting and training of harvesters in best practice application of euthanasia methods will ultimately lead to more humane harvesting practices. Further recommendations regarding ways to improve the attitude, knowledge and skill level of harvesters are outlined in Chapter 4'.

4. Why do you think professional shooters leave 99% of dependent at-foot joeys to die alone after their mothers are shot - ignorance, apathy, or something else?

It has been quoted by shooters in many forums that they don't have the time, will, care or petrol to go around looking for orphaned joeys that have taken off in the dark of night. It will take too much time when they could be killing more kangaroos, and no one is watching so why do they care? It is up to them as to what they do as they have no oversight, so the reasons would be individual to each shooter, with no accountability to any authority at all. So most lie laziness, apathy, economics and impunity.

5. As an organisation representing the community, what aspects of the kangaroo industry's practices do you find are most disturbing or shocking to members of the community?

The treatment of joeys eg. bludgeoning and decapitation. Most people you tell are shocked and block their ears as it is too painful for them to hear. The fact that it is also done for profit shocks people. They don't realise it is a profit driven industry in meat and skins. They're brainwashed to believe it is for necessary reasons such as population/pest control.

6. Why do you think kangaroo harvesters report a strong intention to euthanase young-at-foot, but rarely follow through?

Too difficult to find them as most of the joeys bolt after the first shot is fired. If any joeys remain, the shooter isn't going to shoot the orphan as they know this might scatter the mob and they'll miss out on taking another adult, so they shoot the adults first after which the joeys have gone, and won't come back to find their mum until the shooter is gone. Also no one is watching that they do the right thing, so they don't. Even when the researchers were watching them in the government study they still didn't do the right thing. I hate to think what they do when no one is watching them. They have complete impunity.

These are direct quotes from the government study (McLeod&Sharp,2014)

'Of the 24 young-at-foot that were observed, only one was euthanased by a shot to the head, in accordance with the Code. Another suspect young-at-foot was shot at twice but both shots missed and the animal escaped.'

'In all the other instances when a young-at-foot was seen, there was no attempt to euthanase it. Fourteen (58%) of the observed young-at-foot responded to the shooting of the female with an alarmed flight response whilst 8 (33%) remained stationary and appeared calm. Although it may have been possible to shoot the 8 stationary young-at-foot it was not done. Also, when the alarmed young-at-foot took flight, none of the harvesters pursued or searched for the young-at-foot or waited to see if they would return to the location where

their mother was shot. If a young-at-foot was not seen, but the female had a long teat indicating she was likely to be suckling a young-at-foot, none of the harvesters spent time searching for a young-at-foot, nor did they wait to see if a young-at-foot returned to the location where the female was shot'

'Despite the Code stating that young-at-foot must be euthanased, during this study, only one out of the 24 observed YAF was euthanased. Another young-at-foot was shot at twice but these missed'.

'Of the 24 young-at-foot that were observed, only one was euthanased by a shot to the head, in accordance with the Code. Atypically, this young-at-foot was shot before its mother was shot (and she was successfully shot after). Another suspect young-at-foot was shot at twice but both shots missed and the animal escaped. On another occasion a harvester considered shooting a young-at-foot but believed it to be large enough to survive on its own.'

'One way to potentially avoid the escape of dependent young-at-foot could be to shoot them before the female is shot—this is how the single young-at-foot was shot during our observations. If this were to be used as an alternative approach to shooting females with visible young-at-foot first, then further investigation might be warranted to determine the common reaction of females of different species. During our research with western grey kangaroos (Chapter 3) we observed that females mostly remained calm and did not flee when their young-at-foot was shot nearby'.

7. Why do you think the national code was updated in November 2020 to allow females / does to be killed?

Going by the government's own data, kangaroos are declining and they need to get every kangaroo they find to maintain their profits. The industry's lie to the public that they don't kill females probably hasn't changed people's attitudes towards the industry anyway so they have gone back to killing females. The reason the industry now operates in Victoria is because they're running out in the original commercial states. The Victorian government hasn't had an industry in Victoria for decades due to low numbers and community opposition, but the industry was so desperate for kangaroos they lobbied their way into Victoria as they were running out of kangaroos in other states. Just look at the take versus quotas. It is less than 10% across most Australia. The kangaroos are being wiped out and killing females will temporarily increase their potential take/profits. Also farmers wanted all the kangaroos killed on their property, not just the males, and if the commercial shooters didn't shoot the females they wouldn't let them in. So being able to kill females and joeys now, farmers will let commercial shooters onto their property as they will get rid of all their kangaroos. It's all about profit and the needs of farmers, not about animal welfare or conservation. Never has been, never will be.

8. What do you think are the biggest factors contributing to a lack of public knowledge about the commercial industry?

Most of the media is refusing to report the truth, covers up the truth, and only promotes the false propaganda lobbied by government and the industry. The government also has an

interest in keeping it quiet as they make money out of the tags and promote this horrific cruelty.

Also the public has been fed centuries of negative publicity about kangaroos so they have no real connection or empathy with kangaroos. Kangaroos have been demonised so people think they are pests, over populated and need to be killed. Case closed. No discussion. Minds closed. It's a propaganda machine and all levels of government, industry and media are following it as they' don't want to upset farmers or rural industries etc.

9. Have you corresponded with any commercial or non commercial shooters or shooting organisations about their practices, particularly when it comes to joeys, and if so, what is their general attitude or response to you?

We have had some correspondence with a couple of old school shooters who don't like what is happening now. They claim the 'cowboys' have taken over who go shooting on the weekends and come home with trucks full of females and underweight juveniles.

We have also spoken to shooters who used to shoot when they were young and are now haunted by what they did. They are traumatised by what they did and saw and are now speaking out about what really goes on in the industry which is horrific cruelty and profit driven greed.

We've also witnessed a lot of shooters on our Facebook page who boast about killing and torturing females and joeys when shooting. They think it's tough and manly to treat animals this way and they don't need any qualifications or degrees to go out on the weekend and earn a few thousand tax free dollars. It is very attractive for young unemployed men from rural areas for a bit of fun and quick cash.

Most shooters don't like being called out on what they do and just deny it's a problem or lie and say they don't kill females. The old shooters show respect to us and claim they try to do the right thing and can see we are trying to do the right thing too. Some get very angry when confronted about what they do. They probably don't realise how cruel and unethical it is what they are doing and will defend it to the death.

10. Do you think the community will ever accept blunt force trauma or decapitation as an acceptable method of joey euthanasia? What are the implications of this to the future of the industry?

Well, they already have accepted it as there is very little outcry about it as they are told it is humane and necessary. But if they are truly aware and confronted with it, no they wouldn't accept it. Most people go to jail for doing that to animals so it is clearly unacceptable to most people but apparently it is ok to do it to kangaroo joeys in this country.

There doesn't seem to be any implications of this for the industry. They are still doing it despite the cruelty and there is no sign this will change in the short term because farmers have too much power and farmers want them all dead. Kangaroos will become so rare that this will be the end of the industry, not concerns about the cruelty.

Maybe the RSPCA should do some more public awareness programs about it. They claim to be for "All creatures great and small" but stay silent on the largest, cruellest wildlife slaughter in the world, in their own back yard. They have millions of dollars to spend, maybe

they could do a media awareness program and tell their members and lobby the government to stop it. That would have a big effect if the RSPCA did their job and actually did something about this cruelty, but they don't, I suspect because they rely on their government funding too much. Just a guess?

Here are quotes directly from the government research report (McLeod & Sharp, 2014)

'Animal welfare organisations (e.g. RSPCA Australia 1985, RSPCA Australia 2002), animal rights groups (e.g. Voiceless undated, Animals Australia undated) as well as the general public have voiced their concern, and in some cases outright disgust (Holland 2009), about the current methods used to kill dependent joeys'

'Another report detailing the extent of compliance with the requirements of the National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies was prepared by RSPCA Australia for Environment Australia in 2002 (RSPCA Australia 2002). In this report, the fate of pouch young and young-at-foot after a female is shot is also highlighted as a significant welfare issue'.

'The results indicate that the general public has a strong positive affective association with kangaroos'

'The view of the general public toward blunt trauma could be categorised as strongly negative'

**** Questions on notice**

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: So we are clear on the at-foot or out-of-pouch joey, if we were to look at a mob of 100 kangaroos, what percentage of the does would have an at-foot joey?

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: When we are talking about joeys—does, or females, with joeys—what is the percentage of time that a female has one joey and has two joeys—one in pouch and one at foot? Once she is capable of having joeys, what is the percentage of time that she is carrying one or two?

These quotes are direct from the government study 'Improving the humaneness of the commercial kangaroo harvest', McLeod & Sharp, 2014.

'Of the 90 adult females that were shot, 77 (86%) had a pouch young, 11 had no pouch young, and the pouch of one female was not checked. Four of the females that did not have a pouch young had a long teat, thus were presumed to have a young-at-foot. No long teat was present in the other seven females and no young-at-foot were observed with any of these 11 females. Based on the number of long teats, age of in-pouch young and number of observed young-at-foot we estimated that approximately one-third of the females with a pouch young also had a young-at-foot. These numbers are similar to that reported in a study of 2528 mature female red kangaroos by (Frith & Sharman 1964). Seventy-nine per cent of these females had pouch young, 22% of the females with pouch young also had a young-at-foot and 9% had a young-at-foot but no pouch young'.

'The total number of adult kangaroos harvested over the 15 nights of observations was 278. Of these, 187 were males and 90 were females. This equates to about 30% female, which is close to the long-term average in NSW.'

'Of the 24 young-at-foot that were observed, only one was euthanased by a shot to the head, in accordance with the Code. Another suspect young-at-foot was shot at twice but both shots missed and the animal escaped.'

'In a study of red kangaroos, 78.7% of 2528 mature females examined had pouch young and 21.5% of the females with pouch young also had a young-at-foot (Frith & Sharman, 1964). In another study that examined the impact of harvesting on eastern grey, western grey and red kangaroos, Hacker et al. (2003) estimated that about 19% of all adult females would have a young-at-foot. A similar figure was found by Pople (1996) in a study on red kangaroos. Consequently, many females that are harvested are likely to have a young-at-foot. Based on these studies we can estimate the number of young-at-foot affected by commercial harvesting. For example, in New South Wales the long-term proportion of female kangaroos in the commercial harvest—determined from harvest returns 1999–2011—has been about 30% 5 (the proportion of females in the harvest declined in 2012 to 23.5%)'.

'Based on an estimate of the number of females shot in NSW in 1999–2012 (3,236,600), we estimate that over 600,000 females were shot that were likely to have a young-at-foot, and the proportion of these young that were euthanased by shooters is unknown. However, data collected during observations for another part of this study indicate that the proportion of young-at-foot euthanased was likely to be low (Chapter 1). Furthermore, the current recommended practice of targeting females with no obvious or large pouch young is likely to exacerbate the problem since many females without large pouch young will have a young-at-foot.'

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: Did any of the studies look at whether the average shooter or harvester could identify a female as opposed to a male by looking at a kangaroo at night-time from 80 metres away under a floodlight?

No I cant find any studies on this unfortunately.

During the inquiry I was asked this question that I would like to elaborate on:

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: In the report delivered by the RSPCA and in other reports you have studied, if a doe has a joey at foot or out of pouch when a female kangaroo is shot, what usually happens to the joey at foot?

In the government study, (McLeod& Sharp,2014) they researched the effects of losing their mother on orphaned at foot joeys. Here are just some of the findings from the research.

This quote from the report shows that starvation was established in the joeys after 10 days of being separated from their mother:

'Post-mortem examination revealed that there was no visible mesenteric fat in young-at-foot at ten days post separation but mesenteric fat was present in all control and young-at-foot separated for one day'.

'Separated young-at-foot were more frequently the recipients of aggressive acts from others after separation'.

'On two separate occasions, we observed two separated joeys with their head in the pouch of another female. It was unclear if the young-at-foot were suckling or placing their head into the pouch of the female for comfort, which has been observed in captive kangaroos'.

'Prior to separation young-at-foot spent were involved in an average of 8.6 play events, including solitary and social play, per day. After separation the variance in the proportion of time spent playing declined'.

'Even when they are at the in-out stage of development, the young kangaroo is unable to maintain its deep body temperature for long periods out of the pouch and returns to it for warmth (Frith & Sharman, 1964; Sharman et al., 1964)'.

'Work done by Munn and Dawson (Munn & Dawson, 2001) showed that, consistent with most young mammals, young-at-foot red kangaroos have a resting metabolism that is relatively much greater than adults. They have a higher requirement for energy and water and this has implications for how kangaroo young maintain their deep body temperature under thermal extremes. During the experiment reported here, environmental extremes were not experienced. Consequently, we were not able to provide data on the extent of negative welfare impact in this domain'.

'We observed an increase in risky behaviours, such as separated young-at-foot repeatedly approaching adult female kangaroos and an increase in the number of vocalisations, which may alert predators'.

'We found that separated young-at-foot greatly increased the frequency of vocalisations, especially in the first two days following separation'.

*'Whilst there may not be any studies that provide compelling evidence for social learning in kangaroos at an ecological or population level it is likely that young animals benefit from the knowledge and experience of their mother. Ashworth (1995) suggests that female offspring of euros (*Macropus robustus erubescens*) may learn from their mothers the location and distribution of food resources as well as the location of refuges and shelters and even mothering skills. If learning is important, separated young will be denied the opportunity to learn from their mother. If biological fitness, defined as lifetime reproductive success, is impaired then welfare is compromised (Broom, 1991). In the context of the welfare of young-at-foot, if a separated young-at-foot's lifetime reproductive success is impaired because it has lost the opportunity to learn from its mother, then its welfare too is compromised'.*

'If orphaned young-at-foot do suffer after their mother is shot—and we hypothesise that this is likely—then the magnitude of this problem is very large'.

'Although not all changes reported in other species were observed for the separated young-at-foot in this study, the changes we detected provide sufficient evidence to conclude that maternal separation causes a negative welfare impact. It was in Domains 4 and 5 that we observed the greatest compromise, which indicates that, in the short-term, the mental state of young-at-foot is highly affected by an abrupt and permanent separation from maternal care. The other domains— nutritional, environmental and health—are likely to be affected

by longer-term separation. It is likely to take more than ten days for responses in these domains to become evident; however there were some indications that changes were already starting to occur'.

Thank you, and very best of luck with this inquiry.

Kind regards

Nikki Sutterby and

The ASK TEAM