

**Submission
No 217**

**INQUIRY INTO HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF
KANGAROOS AND OTHER MACROPODS IN NEW SOUTH
WALES**

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SUBMISSION

Inquiry into the health and wellbeing of kangaroos and other macropods in New South Wales

Web form: <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/lodge-a-submission.aspx?pk=2707>

By Simon Validzic
22 April 2021

To whom it may concern:

I am writing a submission in support of stopping the commercial and non-commercial killing of kangaroos and other native animals. I am writing even though I do not live in Australia to show that people around the world are concerned about native animals.

Since I have been informed that it is more desirable if a submission consists of personal accounts and stories regarding kangaroos and other animals than if it simply refers to experts, I have put my personal comments first even though I usually put them at the bottom of my letters and e-mails and I usually include much less about myself. However, I have also included responses under the specified Terms of Reference that are not my own observations but information that I have compiled over the years from various organizations and individual activists and wildlife carers. I have added some of my own thoughts to them. To avoid naming some of them and forgetting others, I will simply state here that I have worked mostly with the Australian Wildlife Protection Council (<http://www.awpc.org.au/>) and VIVA-UK (<https://viva.org.uk/>).

About myself and my concern for native animals and nature

I lived in Australia from 1970 to 1992 but never saw a kangaroo in the wild, even though I travelled a lot, including going to school excursions and camps, and doing farm work, such as picking potatoes and peas. During that period, I travelled to New South Wales in 1980, 1988 and 1991. It is not that I was not observant because I have been concerned about animals since early childhood and, in those days, we did not have smartphones or other electronic devices to divert attention away from the natural landscape. I returned to my country of origin because I did not wish to be part of a country in which the large-scale destruction of natural habitats, the logging of forests and the extermination of native animals continues to take place and which is the result of genocide against indigenous peoples. For the same reasons, I avoid products from Australia, North and South America, Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

I have been involved in animal rights activism in Croatia since it began in 1999 and I helped to form the first animal rights organization, Animal Friends Croatia (<http://www.animal-friends-croatia.org/>). However, I only do animal rights activism in my free time and do work that is unrelated to activism for an income.

It is a myth that Australia has high standards of animal welfare. By contrast, we have achieved a lot for animal rights and the environment in Croatia although a lot more needs to be done. A ban on fur-farming in went into effect in 2018. The keeping of dolphins in captivity is banned as is the use of wild animals in circus acts. The testing of non-medical products on animals is banned. No primates are used in experiments although they are not actually banned. The sowing of GMOs is banned. Interestingly, all this progress happened whilst a conservative government was in power and animal rights organizations are actually eligible for some government funding. About 47% of the land is covered in natural and nature-identical forests and an additional 15% is abandoned farmland. Croatia is a relatively good European example of humans co-existing with native animals such as deer, bears, wolves, lynx and foxes. There are 'green bridges' over highways so that animals can cross safely and there are fences on both sides.

I have been involved I the campaign against the killing of kangaroos since early 2002. That was after a news report on Croatian Radio-Television about the Australian government increasing the killing quota from 5.5 million to 7 million kangaroos. The president of Animal Friends Croatia asked me to do something. I telephoned some organizations around the world to ask them if they had any information and PETA (UK) referred me to VIVA-UK. I produced some campaign materials of my own and sent them to the Australian Wildlife Protection Council and their president asked me to join them.

My responses to the specified Terms of Reference

(a) Historical and long-term health and wellbeing indicators of kangaroos, and other macropods, at the local, bioregional and state levels, including the risk of localised extinction in New South Wales.

It is logical that kangaroo populations are much lower now than they were before the white colonization of Australia since so much natural habitat has been destroyed and converted to farmland, mines, roads, and housing.

Kangaroo shooters kill the largest and physically superior individuals first since they are paid per kilogram. Over time, this weakens the population structure so much so that a smaller, genetically weaker species remains, which reduces its survival ability and strength.

Kangaroos do not need to be killed, because their population is self-regulating and their populations crash during droughts and recover in periods of higher rainfall. It is not kangaroos but sheep and rabbits that are responsible for overgrazing. Actually, a certain degree of overgrazing is not a problem because it helps to prevent wildfires.

The kangaroo slaughter is the largest massacre of wild land animals ever to take place in the world, similar to the massacre of the American bison at the end of the 19th century.

Six kangaroo species are already extinct with 17 more species listed as endangered or vulnerable. Australia has the worst record in the world when it comes to species extinctions.

(b) The accuracy with which kangaroo, and other macropod, numbers are calculated when determining population size, and the means by which the health and wellbeing of populations is assessed.

Population estimates are unreliable. Populations are estimated by flying over transect grid lines and then multiplying the number of counted kangaroos by various correction factors. Only a third of the area is counted each year, on a rotational basis. Kangaroos are mobile animals, but the count may be spread over three years. Kangaroo surveys vary in their frequency and methodology, and have been frequently changed over the last 30 years. A survey methodology was abandoned in the state of New South Wales in 2019 after 45 years of use because it had been found to be invalid for the purposes of making kangaroo population estimates. It resulted in systematic over-inflation of population estimates and 'quotas' for the killing of kangaroos.

Although kangaroos can have two joeys at a time, which makes it seem like their population can 'explode', the facts are that only one of those will mature to independence every 12 months. It takes 2-3 years for them to reach sexual maturity. In good times, there is a 75% mortality rate, so only 1 in 4 will even survive to adulthood in perfect conditions. (*In drought conditions there is a 100% mortality rate*). In a female's 8 years of breeding, only 2 joeys will survive to rebreed, if all goes well. However, if she dies, 3 possible generations die with her. It has been scientifically proven that, in reality, a 14% quota results in a 40% population decline due to joeys being killed, and they are not accounted for in the kill figures. Kill quotas are rarely met - not for lack of shooters trying, but the numbers are simply not there. In 20 years, carcass sizes have dropped from 40 kg to as low as 12 kg now. The kangaroos being shot are either not even adults or the gene pool has been seriously depleted if these are current adult sizes.

Kangaroos are not in plague proportions and not a single person has been able to take a photograph or video recording of these plagues, because they simply do not exist. They believe that 20 kangaroos in one place is a plague, when mobs should be 200 strong.

Local kangaroo population densities may appear high but that is because humans are continually taking all the land for farming, roads and housing.

(c) Threats to kangaroo, and other macropod, habitat, including the impact of: (i) climate change, drought and diversion and depletion of surface water sources, (ii) bushfires, (iii) land clearing for agriculture, mining and urban development, (iv) the growing prevalence of exclusion fencing which restricts and disrupts the movement of kangaroos.

I do not like the term "climate change" (*because some people claim that it is not caused by human activity or even that it is not happening at all*) but prefer to use the term "ecological destruction" (*because it is easy to compare satellite images that were taken over the past 50 years or so and see how human activities have destroyed natural ecosystems*).

Drought and the fires across Australia in early 2020 have devastated populations of kangaroos and other native animals. Over 110,000 square kilometres of natural habitats were destroyed. An estimated one billion vertebrate animals died, including 5 million kangaroos. Now floods are causing further suffering and death through drowning and infections.

Numerous kangaroos get killed by vehicles on roads. Collisions with kangaroos can be prevented by avoiding driving long distance between dusk and dawn or when tired or, if that cannot be avoided, then by watching the sides of the road, slowing down, not sounding the horn, and installing the "Shoo Roo" device.

Introduced species, such as wild pigs, dogs, foxes and cats are a threat to kangaroos and especially to smaller native animals. They can kill joeys, injure adult kangaroos and spread disease.

It is unacceptable that restrictions to the destruction of natural habitats (*'land clearing'*) have been removed in New South Wales in recent years. It is necessary to stop this continual destruction of natural habitats that is caused by human population growth. That can be reduced by cutting baby payments and family allowances, especially to those with more than two children, and by not encouraging people to immigrate into Australia. It is unacceptable that I sometimes come across advertisements and articles that encourage people to immigrate into Australia and North America. (*A person living in Europe has an ecological impact about half that of a person living in Australia or North America*).

Australia is as bad as Brazil when it comes to the scale of destruction of natural ecosystems.

The increasing use of exclusion fences can harm or kill kangaroos and other native animals because they often extend for hundreds of kilometres. While most animals encountering a fence will move along or away from it, some will attempt to go underneath, over the top or push through it. This may result in entrapment. Kangaroos are likely to injure themselves if they are being chased, are desperately seeking food and water or trying to escape a wildfire. Entrapped or severely injured animals may suffer predation or a prolonged death. Barbed wire can also inflict painful wounds. Even when they do not kill or injure, exclusion fences prevent natural migrations, social mixing and breeding of kangaroos and other native animals. Exclusion fencing can create genetically isolated populations and cause inbreeding.

(d) Current government policies and programs for kangaroo management, including: (i) the method used for setting quotas for kangaroo culling, (ii) the management of licences to cull kangaroos, (iii) temporary drought relief policies and programs.

The method used for setting quotas is unacceptable because kangaroo population estimates are unreliable. Populations are estimated by flying over transect grid lines and then multiplying the number of counted kangaroos by various correction factors. Only a third of the area is counted each year, on a rotational basis. Kangaroos are mobile animals, but the count may be spread over three years. Kangaroo surveys vary in their frequency and methodology, and have been frequently changed over the last 30 years. A survey methodology was abandoned in the state of New South Wales in 2019 after 45 years of use because it had been found to be invalid for the purposes of making kangaroo population estimates. It resulted in systematic over-inflation of population estimates and quotas for the killing of kangaroos.

Controls on the killing of kangaroos have been reduced in New South Wales over the past few years. Farmers can apply for licences over the telephone or via e-mail instead of having to visit a *National Parks and Wildlife Service* office in person. More shooters, including amateurs, can operate on a farm under the same licence. Previous and current licence holders can apply for licences over the telephone. Kangaroo carcasses no longer need to be tagged and left in the field and landholders can use the carcass for a range of non-commercial purposes. There are increased limits on the number of kangaroos that may be killed, based on farm size. All sizes from young to adult can be shot. Shooting can take place anywhere across the state, outside previous shooting zones. In addition to legal non-commercial shooting, there is illegal killing.

Temporary drought relief policies and programs are inadequate due to the sheer size of natural habitat and number of kangaroos and other native animals affected.

(e) Current government policies and programs in regards to 'in pouch' and 'at foot joeys' given the high infant mortality rate of joeys and the unrecorded deaths of orphaned young where females are killed.

The killing of kangaroos is cruel and there is no such thing as 'humane' killing. Kangaroos are shot at night in the remote outback where nobody can monitor the shooting. The national '*Code of Practice for the humane killing of kangaroos*' is voluntary and there are no penalties for not complying. Adult kangaroos are shot and dragged to trucks, struggling and still conscious. Some are still alive when their leg is cut open, a large hook inserted through the gash, and they are hauled up onto the truck. Their throat is slit and they bleed to death.

Newborn kangaroos (or '*in pouch*' joeys) are killed after their mothers are shot. The method of killing these baby animals is to chop off their head with an axe, or for them to receive a blow to the head with a heavy blunt instrument. Female kangaroos often have a young kangaroo (or '*at foot*' joey) that no longer lives in the pouch but still needs the mother for milk and protection from predation and to learn life skills. When a shooter intrudes on a family unit and shoots the mother, this young kangaroo hops away frightened and will die a slow death due to starvation or be captured by a predator.

Killing kangaroos destroys the social group and causes suffering to the surviving members.

(f) Regulatory and compliance mechanisms to ensure that commercial and non-commercial killing of kangaroos and other macropods is undertaken according to the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* and other relevant regulations and codes.

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The presence of a commercial industry leads to an increase in the number of kangaroos killed as has happened in Victoria since 2015.

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Six kangaroo species are already extinct with 17 more species listed as endangered or vulnerable. Australia has the worst record in the world when it comes to species extinctions.

(g) The impact of commercial and non-commercial killing of kangaroos and other macropods, including the difficulty of establishing numbers killed by landholders since the removal of the requirement for drop tags.

The presence of a commercial industry leads to an increase in the number of kangaroos killed. A damning report into the Victorian KPFT (*Kangaroo Pet Food Trial*) in 2019 exposed fraud, corruption, illegal activity, overshooting, and a totally unregulated, unsupervised profit-driven kangaroo meat and skins industry that has contributed to the death of nearly half of Victoria's kangaroos. Since the trial began, there has been a 250% increase in the number kangaroos killed in Victoria. Shooters are influencing the number of kangaroos that landholders are requesting to be killed. Shooters and landholders are exaggerating the scale of the kangaroo problem or suggesting landholders apply for larger numbers than necessary.

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(h) Current and alternative measures to provide an incentive for and accelerate public and private conservation of kangaroos and other macropods.

Non-lethal measures should be exhausted before protected native animals can be killed yet no effort is generally made to utilize non-lethal alternatives.

Farmers claim that kangaroos are pests. However, scientific studies did not find any evidence of red kangaroos competing with sheep for grazing or destroying wheat crops. A study by the CSIRO in Western Australia showed that kangaroos never visit 95 percent of wheat crops.

Humans should find ways to co-exist with native animals. It is necessary to stop this continual destruction of natural habitats. It is unacceptable that restrictions to the destruction of natural habitats (*'land clearing'*) have been removed in New South Wales in recent years. Protected natural areas should be connected by wildlife corridors and overpasses or underpasses should be built over or under highways so that native animals can cross safely, as is done in European countries.

Kangaroos and other native animals are threatened by human population growth and that can be reduced by cutting baby payments and family allowances, especially to those with more than two children, and by not encouraging people to immigrate into Australia. It is unacceptable that I sometimes come across advertisements and articles that encourage people to immigrate into Australia and North America.

Concern for animals is increasing around the world. Even people who eat meat are often opposed to the killing of native animals.

Russia banned the import of kangaroo meat in 2014 and it appears that China does not want it either. Supermarket chains in the United Kingdom stopped selling kangaroo meat by 2002; those in Belgium stopped selling it in 2020 as did most supermarket chains in Germany. Attempts by several restaurants to offer kangaroo meat in Croatia ended soon due to lack of demand. California banned the import of kangaroo products and there are campaigns to ban them in the entire United States of America and the European Union.

The killing of kangaroos in Australia (*and bison in North America and deer in Europe*) makes campaigns against the killing of gorillas and elephants for 'bush meat' in Africa; or the Chinese killing of sharks; or the Japanese or Norwegian killing of dolphins look as though they are not due to genuine concern.

Tourists come to Australia to see kangaroos living in their natural habitat. The same applies to native animals living in other countries. Nature-based tourism can create new income opportunities because it brings tourists to remote parts of the country and it extends the tourist season to the whole year instead of tourism being concentrated in city locations or beaches.

Indigenous Australian Elders oppose the commercial killing of kangaroos and other native animals. Although Indigenous Australians hunted kangaroos in the past, there is no excuse to do it today because the present human population of Australia is about 100 times larger than it was before the white colonization.

Similarly, the fact that carnivorous animals eat other animals is no excuse because the global population of such a species rarely reaches one million, whereas the global human population is over 7.6 billion. Kangaroos can never replace more than a small percentage of meat consumption because that would mean killing the entire population of kangaroos in a year.

It is unacceptable that about 5 billion dollars is spent annually on dogs and cats in Australia whereas only about 200 million dollars is spent to protect all endangered species combined.

Kangaroo meat is not healthy. Kangaroos are processed in the wild and the shooter is not trained nor does he have the ability to cleanly gut the kangaroo after spending a night shooting. Carcasses often contain parasitic worms and they are left wide open to contamination. That happens at temperatures which promote bacteria and pathogen growth. The chillers have been shown to be unreliable when it comes to keeping temperatures low enough to kill bacteria. Swab results revealed contamination of carcasses with the bacteria *Escherichia coli*, *Streptococcus* and *Staphylococcus*. Kangaroo meat can contain but is not tested for *Toxoplasma gondii*. This parasite can cause permanent disabilities and incurable diseases of the heart, liver, spleen and brain damage in humans and is suspected of causing schizophrenia. It can infect unborn babies.

A compound in red meat called *L-carnitine* is associated with the formation of plaque in arteries which causes heart attacks, strokes and vascular disease. When *L-carnitine* was metabolised by gut bacteria, it turned into high amounts of TMAO (*trimethylamine N-oxide*), which damages arteries supplying blood to the heart and brain.

Sulphites are used to disguise decomposition in cat and dog food and they can cause brain damage and death to cats and dogs.

Kangaroo skins are not ecologically more acceptable than synthetic fibres because toxic chemicals are used to in tanning. The solution is to improve recycling of synthetic materials and to use those which cannot be recycled to waste-to-energy plants or cement factories. It is also necessary to filter waste water to remove micro-plastics and to ban single-use plastics.

Kangaroos and other native animals do not exist just to be killed by humans but they have an intrinsic value. There is no need to add new species of animals to those that humans already kill on a large scale for meat. Those animals still living their original natural way of life should be left in peace to continue living in their homeland, as they have done for millions of years.

It is necessary to stop supporting human population-growth and the expansion of housing, roads, mining, logging and farming, especially animal farming, and return land to nature and indigenous peoples.

Thank you for this opportunity to make a submission for this *Inquiry into the health and wellbeing of kangaroos and other macropods in New South Wales*.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Validzic