

Submission  
No 238

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

**Organisation:** Australian Society for Kangaroos

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# Australian Society for Kangaroos

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



## **SUBMISSION**

### **INQUIRY INTO THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF KANGAROOS AND OTHER MACROPODS IN NSW- PARLIAMENT NSW**

**25 April 2021**

Following decades of pressure from the RSPCA and wildlife advocacy groups against the cruel treatment of kangaroos and joeys killed and orphaned by the commercial kangaroo industry, in 2014 the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (now Ag Force) commissioned a study into the 'humaneness' of the kangaroo industry and the fate of baby joeys killed and orphaned by the commercial kangaroo 'harvest' industry. RIRDC (Ag Force) was established by the Australian Government to work with industry to invest in research and development for a more profitable, sustainable and dynamic rural sector.

The results of the study, which observed the practices of commercial shooters in Queensland and NSW and titled, *'Improving the welfare and humaneness of commercially harvested kangaroos'*, is extremely disturbing, exposing ongoing, inherent, legalised, government sanctioned cruelty and neglect of kangaroo joeys who fall victim to this industry after their mother is shot for her meat and skins. The research reveals that despite claims by industry representatives that females are no longer targeted by the kangaroo 'harvest' industry, hundreds of thousands of lactating female kangaroos continue to be slaughtered annually by this industry leaving their pouch young to a barbaric, slow and painful death and their at-foot young abandoned and left to die alone from stress, starvation, dehydration, predation and exposure. The study reports that large, fully furred pouch young are not killed humanely by this industry, but terrorised and brutalised for up to ten seconds before their traumatic death. The study describes how shooters wrench fully furred joeys from their warm pouch, swing them by their hind legs and bash them over tow bars, tail gates and rocks, or throw them on the ground and stomp on their heads, with shooters rarely checking that the joey has died afterwards. Some pouch joeys are just let go into the bush. The research reveals that when furless pouch young are killed by decapitation, or mistakenly have their spines severed, they can take up to 30 seconds or longer to die, resulting in prolonged suffering and pain for the joey. Hundreds of thousands of pouch joeys are dying this way every year, legally, at the hands of the commercial kangaroo harvest industry.

The report also reveals how 99% of dependent at-foot joeys who are still feeding from their mothers are being left to die alone after their mother is shot by the industry, with no attempt made by professional shooters to locate and euthanase the orphan, which is in clear breach of the National Code of Practice for the Humane Killing of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Commercial Purposes. Despite these findings of abhorrent abuse and torture of these gentle and vulnerable creatures by this industry, NO attempt has been made to ban or control the killing of pregnant females by government, despite the RSPCA repeatedly recommending this. In fact the government has now increased the potential scale and suffering of orphaned joeys by removing all protections for pregnant females and their orphans in the recently revised code of practice. The National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies was updated in November 2020 and shooters are now fully authorised to shoot female kangaroos including those carrying pouch young or feeding dependent at foot young. This recent change in the code of practice and the open season on female kangaroos and their young reflects the industry's desperate need to maintain kill rates and maximise profits with zero concern for the fate of pouch or at foot young who suffer severely at the hands of this industry when their mother is killed.

This inherent and institutionalised cruelty is being inflicted upon hundreds of thousands of baby kangaroo joeys every year, with the full support of the Australian legal system and our state and federal governments, who continue to promote this industry domestically and overseas, as clean, green and humane. The kangaroo industry also promotes its meat and leather products as environmentally friendly and 'ethically sourced', yet according to the results of the RSPCA (2002) study, "the view of the general public toward blunt trauma could be categorised as strongly negative", with most people likely to agree that bashing to death baby animals and abandoning dependent young after killing their mother for profit, is far from ethical.

The hypocrisy and neglect involved in this abhorrent treatment of kangaroos and their young in Australia is profound, where our government not only fails to protect them, but openly encourages this brutality towards kangaroos in the name of commerce and the promotion of 'rural industries'. Blatant and legalised cruelty is being inflicted upon our national icon night after night in the remote Australian outback, far from the authorities or any supervision whatsoever, and while it is a crime to bash to death a puppy, or any other animal, according to Australian law it is legal to do this to baby joeys. In fact in 2015, a NSW man was jailed for 18 months for bashing to death nine puppies, with the judge finding that the man's actions were "senseless, brutal, cold-hearted and callous", that he had "no insight into the enormity of his actions" and with an "appalling lack of empathy for the plight of each animal" (ABC), yet it is considered acceptable, legal, humane and apparently ethical for professional kangaroo shooters and the kangaroo 'harvest' industry to do this to hundreds of thousands of baby kangaroos every year after they kill their mother for profit, to be sold as pet food, sports shoes and kanga bangers.

It is also important to note that the findings of this research are not limited to the commercial harvest of kangaroos, but also relates to the treatment and neglect of kangaroos and joeys killed and orphaned by all professional kangaroo shooters, including those contracted for 'conservation' culls by the ACT government, and other so called 'professional' kangaroo culls conducted across Australia by local and state governments and other non-government bodies and private landholders.

Below are just some of the disturbing results and extracts from the government commissioned research published in 2014, which going by it's title was meant to be improving the humaneness of the commercial kangaroo meat and skins industry, but which appears to have failed, as there have been NO improvements in the welfare outcomes of joeys killed and orphaned by this industry, and with the limitations on killing pregnant females now removed from the industries code of practice, the suffering looks set to worsen, with the full support of the government, the legal system and this profit driven industry.

**Please find below disturbing excerpts from the government research report, 'Improving the welfare and humaneness of commercially harvested kangaroos', 2014, Sharp,T and McLeod,S. RIRDC.**

*'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'*

*'During the period from October 2011 to February 2013, we made observations of harvesters in New South Wales and Queensland. We accompanied a total of 14 kangaroo harvesters on 15 different nights to make behavioural and procedural observations and collect specific information on the euthanasia of kangaroo young during harvesting operations. One of the harvesters was observed on two separate occasions.'*

*'At the start and during this project, some of the larger kangaroo processors had given us assurances that they would encourage harvesters to participate however we did not see any evidence of this and we had even been told by some harvesters that they had been instructed by a processor not to provide us with any assistance'*

*'Harvesters report a strong intention to euthanase young-at-foot, but this happens only rarely.'*

*'This research shows that kangaroo harvesters need to make a greater effort to locate and euthanase orphaned young-at-foot. Failure to do so will have significant animal welfare implications.'*

*'Our research has demonstrated that the welfare impact on young-at-foot can be severe when they lose their mother.'*

*'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. Sex could not be determined for one kangaroo – it was shot and presumed killed, but the carcass could not be located due to thick vegetation. Another animal (a female with a large visible in-pouch joey) was wounded but not killed and it escaped and could not be found.'*

*'Euthanasia methods used by harvesters in the field'*

*'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'.*

*'They(pouch young) were removed from the teat then taken out of the pouch and either firmly stamped on or decapitated by removing the head from the body with either a knife or with the thumb and finger'*

*'if the pouch was not checked and a small furless pouch was present then it was left to die attached to the teat whilst still in the pouch. The pouch was then removed and discarded as part of the field dressing of the female carcass'.*

*'...a single forceful blow to the head. This was done by holding the joey by the hindquarters and swinging it in an arc so that its head hit a hard object such as a large rock or side of the vehicle tray'*

*'placing on the ground and firmly stomping on the head'*

*'holding by the hindquarters and hitting the head firmly with a heavy object (e.g.iron bar)'*

*'occasionally larger furred(pouch) young were left to escape'.*

*'One eastern grey male joey was found dead in the pouch when the female was processed (estimated age from tail length was 145 days). At post-mortem, numerous contusions and haemorrhages were seen over the body and head consistent with injury. It is possible that this joey died from being crushed by the female when she fell to the ground after being shot'*

*'Another furred joey (unknown age but furred) escaped from the pouch before it could be euthanased by the harvester. A further in-pouch joey (age unknown) was observed in the pouch of the female that was shot and wounded but escaped. Neither the female nor joey was found'.*

*'In only one case was death(of the pouch joey) confirmed by the harvester'.*

*'Stunning was never used prior to decapitation'.*

*'However, the humaneness of decapitation as a sole euthanasia method is still debated (Bates 2010)'*

*'..experts argue that if decapitation (method of euthanasing pouch young as per Code Practice) is performed without prior concussion to the head, unconsciousness is unlikely to be instantaneous (Gregory 2007). A number of studies in a range of species have*

*demonstrated that electrical activity in the brain can persist for up anywhere up to 29 seconds in disembodied heads (Bates 2010)'*

*'With small unfurred joeys, separating of the head from the body using a thumb is a form of cervical dislocation rather than decapitation since neither a sharp blade nor guillotine is used'.*

*'However other studies provide evidence that cervical dislocation does not always result in rapid and successful euthanasia'.*

*'However with older furred and partially furred in-pouch joeys that have developed (or are developing) sentience, cervical dislocation and decapitation in animals that have not been stunned can potentially cause a period of distress and or pain and thus should be considered not acceptable'.*

*'We observed that harvesters used a few different ways of using blunt trauma to the head of young. Most held the animals by the hind legs and swung them in an arc so that their head hit the tray of the utility (Figure 7). Some did the same action but hit the head on the bar on the top of the utility rack or on a large rock on the ground. Another method was to hold the joey by the back legs, so that the head was hanging freely downwards and then hit the head with an iron bar. Sometimes the head of the joeys was also stamped on with a foot after hitting the joeys head on the utility tray or on a rock. This was done to ensure complete destruction of the brain'.*

*'With two joeys, the head came off the body in the action of hitting it on the bar on the top of the utility (see Figure 7). The head could not be found with one animal but we were able to examine the head of the other. On post-mortem examination, this joey (animal ID 10/36, see the Appendix in this chapter for details), had no haemorrhages on the head, there were no skull fractures and the brain appeared grossly undamaged. Thus, it appears that this animal was decapitated, with the point of impact at the neck rather than the head. Although death would have been quick for this animal, it may have taken longer to become unconscious since the head was not the point of impact. Another joey that we examined had fractures of the right forearm. These injuries are likely to have occurred at the same time as the impact to the head'.*

*'It was also observed that when joeys were held by the back legs and hit on the head with an iron bar they struggled and moved their head, making it a more difficult target to hit. These animals sometimes required two or more blows to cause unconsciousness, which is unacceptable as it could result in pain and suffering prior to losing consciousness. With blunt trauma to the head, applying the blow to the correct position with sufficient force to cause immediate insensibility is essential for this method to be humane'.*

*'There have only been a few studies to evaluate the effectiveness of blunt trauma as a method of euthanasia'.*

*'However, it is important to note that the skill and confidence of the operator has a significant influence on welfare. If blunt trauma is not performed correctly there will be varying degrees of consciousness and it is likely that the animal will experience pain and distress prior to death. If the first blow does not hit the calvarium but hits for example, the*

*jaw or a limb, or if only one cerebral cortex is destroyed and the other cortex is still functioning, then the animal will experience pain (The EFSA Journal 2007).'*

*'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'*

*'Some approaches to the application of these euthanasia methods are more effective and humane than others, therefore we recommend that they be standardised. For example, joeys should not be hit against the railings of the utility rack as this can result in decapitation rather than the intended skull fracture and brain destruction. Also, joeys should not be held by the hindquarters and the head hit with an iron bar (or similar) as they can move about making it difficult for the harvesters to hit the correct spot and may require more than one strike to render them unconscious. Stunning must be conducted so that the joey is hit against a large solid surface that will not move or compress during the impact (e.g. the tray of a utility vehicle)'*

*'Post-mortem examination of in-pouch joeys killed by blunt trauma to the head'*

*Animal ID 02/08*

*Species Eastern grey*

*Age 180 days (26 weeks)*

*'time from removal from pouch to insensibility was 5-10 seconds'*

*Animal ID 03/18*

*Species Red*

*Age 196 days (28 weeks)*

*PM findings Extensive damage to skull and brain with multiple skull fractures and haemorrhages present. At least 5 or 6 intersecting fractures. Comments The joey was removed from the pouch and hit against the ute tray. Time to insensibility was rated as*

*instantaneous and time from removal from pouch to insensibility was around 4 seconds. The joey was vocalising when removed from the pouch.*

*Animal ID 10/36*

*Species Red*

*Age 180 days (26 weeks)*

*PM findings No fractures felt on palpation of skull. The head was separated from neck at 3rd intervertebral joint. No haemorrhage on head, no fractures seen, brain appeared grossly undamaged.*

*Comments The joey was attached to a long teat prior to being removed from the pouch. Blunt trauma was applied by hitting the joey against the rack of the ute. However, it appears that the impact was at the neck rather than the skull and the animal was decapitated by the action. Time to insensibility was rated in the field as instantaneous but in light of the PM findings this may not have been the case. Time from removal of pouch to insensible was around 5 seconds.*

*'Evaluation of the welfare impacts on kangaroo young-at-foot after separation from their mother.'*

*'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'.*

*'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.'*

*'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'.*

*Photograph attached was taken by researchers during the study. This joey was legally bludgeoned to death by a professional kangaroo shooter after it's mother was shot for her meat and skins.*



