

Submission
No 247

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

Organisation: Center for a Humane Economy

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Submission to the inquiry into the health and wellbeing of kangaroos and other macropods in New South Wales

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Americans were dismayed during the black summer bushfires in Australia, mourning the loss of some three billion animals, 500,000 of which were estimated to be kangaroos and other macropods. That sadness turned to anger when Americans learned that despite the devastation and loss of life and habitat, the Australian government permitted the killing of kangaroos for the commercial trade. This is unfathomable to the American public.

The Center for a Humane Economy (Center) is the first animal protection organization in the United States singly focused on corporate engagement to bring about policy changes that spare animals from suffering. In our white paper, "The Moral Fabric of Athletic Footwear," the Center reported a 50% drop in leather over the past decade in athletic shoes, thanks to the adoption and popularity of lighter, stronger materials. While the Center noted breakthrough developments by adidas, Nike and others – fabrics made from ocean plastic, polyester made from recycled bottles, leather made from mushrooms and pineapple, fully vegan shoes – the Center also noted the manufacturers' use of kangaroo skin for football boots, a relic from the 1960's and a driving force enabling Australia's commercial kangaroo industry.

Given advanced synthetic materials of mesh and knit are more popular with football players from recreational to professional (based on market share), and the barbarity with which the so-called 'K-Leather' boots is becoming associated, the market for kangaroo leather is indisputably closing. Adidas has advised the Center it will stop sourcing kangaroos as soon as an alternative, currently under development, satisfies a small segment of customers. Puma has announced a 2025 target to stop using kangaroos. Diadora, the fourth largest football brand in the United States, stopped using kangaroo skin last year.

Kangaroo skin is becoming too controversial and problematic for big companies to use, given the preference for alternatives in the marketplace that do not require the large-scale slaughter of wildlife. It is not a matter of *if* but *when* the last kangaroo is killed for shoes.

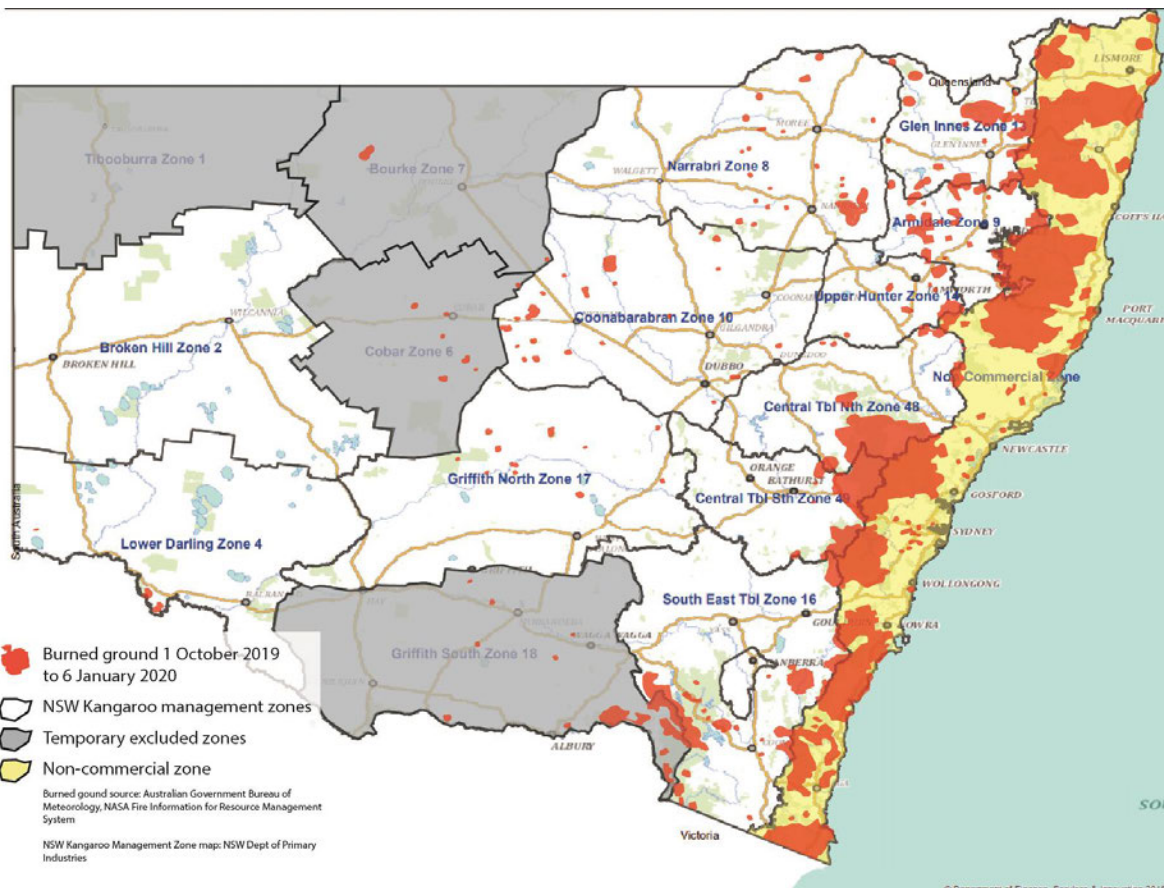
Understanding that selling skin to boot manufacturers is currently key to the economics of the commercial kangaroo industry, the Center undertook the *Kangaroos Are Not Shoes* campaign to persuade Nike, the industry leader as the world's largest athletic wear maker, to stop using kangaroo skin in football boots. The Center has been involved with various means of engagement with Nike, educated millions of viewers by way of a [short film](#) of Nike's role in kangaroo shooting, encouraged scientists, academics, and Olympic athletes to speak up, worked with state law enforcement authorities

to stop the sale of kangaroo skin "soccer cleats" in California and teamed up with a coalition of groups in Europe to debate kangaroo imports into the European Union.

The Center has also worked with Representatives Salud Carbajal and Brian Fitzpatrick to introduce the Kangaroo Protection Act, H.R. 917, into the United State Congress, prohibiting the import or sale of products sourced from kangaroos. The Australian Ambassador to the United States and embassy staff members are currently devoting much energy to lobbying against the bill.

Commercial shooters in multiple states in Australia – sanctioned by the government and acting as proxies for athletic shoe companies and pet food makers – execute a running slaughter of wild kangaroos in their native habitats. The New South Wales (NSW) government is perpetuating this cruelty and violence upon one of the world’s most beloved and iconic animals.

The “sustainability” of commercial kangaroo shooting has been called into question by independent scientists pointing out that population estimates are inflated, not considering the slow reproduction rate of kangaroos due to high juvenile mortality, environmental factors like fires, drought, and loss of habitat, and the unmonitored non-commercial killing of kangaroos by farmers. Local and regional extinctions have been observed in 2019 and 2020, with kangaroo populations further decimated by the months-long devastating Australian bushfires and drought. Despite this, the Australian government continues to authorize the commercial killing of kangaroos without any updated assessments, closing off areas that have been "used up" and opening new "harvest zones."



In NSW bushfires occurred across the commercial kangaroo zones. The figure below shows the extent of burnt areas to January, yet significant fires occurred in February 2020.

The era of commercial slaughter of wildlife is waning. This entire enterprise, when it comes to wildlife exploitation, is unique to Australia in its scale and inhumanity. The philosophy guiding contemporary wildlife management programs in the United States – where wildlife use is primarily for personal consumption and not commercial sale – came as a compensatory reaction to the late 19th- and early 20th-century slaughter of buffalo and other mammals for their hides, and birds for their feathers in the millinery trade. Through law and moral codes, there have been limits imposed on the killing of native wildlife and a credo that any slain wildlife must be utilized by the hunter or that person's family, not commercial trade.

Indeed, the slaughter of the bison and other wildlife more than a century ago, before states began to regulate wildlife use, was a moral, ecological, and cultural calamity. And to be sure, there was more to the liquidation of buffalo than just clearing the Great Plains of wildlife to make way for cattle and sheep. The federal government enabled commercial exploitation to enrich the shooters, but also as a means of gutting and then starving native cultures in North America. It was a land grab, and commercial slaughter was anything but a jobs program for the Lakota or the Sioux. It was a strategic play enabling the expropriation of their lands.

The only contemporary spectacle that compares with the kangaroo slaughter in scale and the assault on juvenile animals is Canada's assault on baby harp and hooded seals. There, men of European descent, as in Australia, do the shooting and the bludgeoning, almost entirely for export of their parts. This seal "hunt" is so grisly and inhumane that many nations throughout the world now ban the trade. The U.S. has the longest-standing ban on seal skin imports, established under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. Trade restrictions have been maintained despite the ongoing objections of federal and provincial governments in Canada. More recently, the European Union banned the trade, as did Mexico, Russia, and other nations.

With the market for seal fur closing, the annual kill dropped from 300,000 seals to perhaps 20,000 today. The hunt persists because Canada's government subsidizes it, trying to pry open foreign markets and even buying up pelts as a sort of life-support action.

The Australian kangaroo slaughter has evaded the same level of scrutiny as the Canadian seal hunt because kangaroo killing occurs at night, in remote locations where no one can see. Yet it is no less brutal. The sealers have not been the only ones targeting newborn animals. After kangaroo shooters kill the adults, they are instructed, under the government's unenforceable "National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Commercial Purposes," to bludgeon to death any joeys found "in pouch" or "at foot" of their slain mothers. The toll is in the hundreds of thousands each year.

With the introduction of the Kangaroo Protection Act earlier this year, lawmakers are placing the Australian slaughter of kangaroos next to the Norwegian harpooning of whales, Canadian clubbing of seals and Japanese butchering of dolphins – as activities to which the United States will not be an economic partner. Distinct from forbidding trade in animals threatened or endangered in some part of the world, these prohibitions signify an intolerance for animal cruelty on its face.

The Center recommends an immediate ban on commercial killing of kangaroos and trade in their body parts.