

Submission  
No 251

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

**Organisation:** Sentient - The Veterinary Institute for Animal Ethics

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## **Inquiry into the Health and Wellbeing of Kangaroos and Other Macropods in New South Wales: Submission from Sentient**

Sentient welcomes the opportunity to provide commentary on the Inquiry into the Health and Wellbeing of Kangaroos and Other Macropods in New South Wales.

Sentient is an independent Australian veterinary association dedicated to animal welfare advocacy. Our members are represented in academia, private practice (companion, equine and large animals), non-government, government and industry settings, with expertise in many fields including animal welfare, animal behaviour, clinical medicine, epidemiology and the use of animals in teaching and research. A number are qualified specialists in particular disciplines or have extensive experience within industries such as live export, horse racing and greyhound racing. Sentient has presented at international and national conferences, published papers, contributed numerous submissions to state and federal government inquiries, and provided evidence at parliamentary public hearings. We also host final year veterinary science students for Public, Industry and Community placements in animal welfare advocacy. Sentient is registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

### TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. That Portfolio Committee No 7 – Planning and Environment inquire into and report on the health and wellbeing of kangaroos, and other macropods, in New South Wales, and in particular: *(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.*

Of concern, there are indicators that kangaroo wellbeing is severely compromised by animals living in areas where they are exposed to the threat of hunting. Kangaroos can distinguish between benign human interactions (eg. recreationists) and those who pose them harm (eg., hunting).<sup>1</sup> Kangaroo populations at shooting sites have been shown to spend more time in a state of vigilance, with mothers keeping joeys in the pouch more. The impact of living with this kind of chronic stress is profound for overall welfare, and includes lack of engagement in natural behaviours, stunted juvenile development and reduced immune capacity.<sup>2</sup>

For animals who are not killed, there are short term impacts such as a flight response.<sup>1</sup> Long term changes to natural behaviour occur in harvesting areas e.g. less time foraging, more time in a state of antipredator vigilance, shorter flight response distance, smaller group sizes,<sup>1</sup> and joeys

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<sup>1</sup> Austin & Ramp (2019) Flight responses of eastern gray kangaroos to benign or harmful human behavior. *Ecology and evolution*, vol. 9, no. 24, pp.13824-13834.

<sup>2</sup> Austin (2020) Life in the countryside: How human behaviour shapes fear in eastern grey kangaroos. *PhD dissertation*.

remaining in pouch and spending less time playing, nursing, allogrooming and exploring.<sup>2</sup> It is also possible that when larger kangaroos are removed there are impacts on the remaining members of a social group, though such impacts are not well studied.<sup>3</sup>

*(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.*

This is not Sentient's area of expertise but we submit that to be accurate, extensive aerial surveys should be employed at regular intervals using a standardised and consistent methodology. Accurate calculations are in the public interest. They will provide information that is critical to macropod welfare (eg. the impact of overabundance in particular areas on food resources) and may also provide evidence to support certain species being listed as endangered. The level of confusion about macropod numbers is maintained by inconsistency and constant changes to methodology. The use of 'correction factors' (or 'detection probabilities') in NSW is likely to inflate the estimate of kangaroo numbers and this system lacks transparency. It is also noteworthy that in Queensland, *"the EPA does not employ correction factors to its aerial surveys for eastern grey kangaroos and common wallaroos as comparisons of ground surveys and aerial surveys concluded that surveys using the helicopter line-transect method were both accurate and precise in determining population densities for both species over a range of habitats, seasons and densities."*

<sup>4</sup>

*(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,*

All of these human-driven factors pose a serious threat to macropod habitats. In this context, Sentient advocates a Federal inquiry into the sustainability of the current killing of kangaroos and wallabies. The cumulative impact of climate change and other threats to macropod habitats and the current 'sustainable' killing may well be leading us towards further loss of biodiversity. Australia's policy of doing 'more of the same' and putting the interests of industry over the environment and its unique fauna have already left us in disrepute internationally.

*(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,*

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<sup>3</sup> McLeod & Sharp (2020) The Australian kangaroo industry: male-only harvesting, sustainability and an assessment of animal welfare impacts. Report to AgriFutures

<sup>4</sup> Mjadwesch R 2011 *Nomination to List the Large Macropods as Threatened Species under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* MESS Bathurst

(i) The national quota for an upper harvest limit set by the Commonwealth Government is not an effective way of gauging the sustainability of kangaroo killing. The quota is often met or exceeded in smaller zones, such as in 2006 in the Upper Hunter for eastern greys and in Bourke for red kangaroos. There has also been concern raised that quota numbers and population estimates exclude the killing of joeys and all macropods killed outside the commercial harvest zones.<sup>5</sup>

(ii) RSPCA Australia has acknowledged that non-commercial shooting is less humane, and this is associated with poor monitoring of the Australian National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Non-Commercial Purposes (2008); lack of requirement to undertake a competency test in shooting or training in adhering to the Code; and lack of any incentive to comply with the Code.<sup>6</sup> Sentient advocates an immediate end to the issuing of licences for non-commercial kangaroo culling.

(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 Australian National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Commercial Purposes (2020)<sup>7</sup> recommends decapitation, cervical dislocation or blunt head trauma for pouched young (depending on their size and furred status) and shooting of dependent young at foot. We submit that this is unnecessary killing and should not be referred to as 'euthanasia'. Aside from the ethical issues raised, there is no proof that these methods always render the joeys instantly insensible, and in any case, to do so would depend on operator training,<sup>8</sup> compliance with codes of practice, and monitoring. When considering that this killing also occurs in low light conditions in remote locations, it is impossible for the industry to reassure the public that pouched young and dependent young at foot are killed humanely. Research into the use of a captive-bolt gun as an alternative to blunt trauma to the head on joeys found that unacceptably high proportion of animals were not successfully stunned with a single shot.<sup>8</sup> Extrapolating from this finding, we consider it unlikely that the blunt trauma techniques used by harvesters are capable of rendering instant insensibility. Furthermore, the killing of dependent young is not monitored.<sup>9</sup> Even the Commercial Code of Practice<sup>7</sup> states: "Euthanasing young-at-foot can be problematic as they are usually mobile and will often flee after the female has been

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<sup>5</sup> [http://s3.amazonaws.com/thinkk\\_production/resources/13/2597\\_UTS\\_policy\\_report.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/thinkk_production/resources/13/2597_UTS_policy_report.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-the-difference-between-non-commercial-and-commercial-kangaroo-shooting/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.agrifutures.com.au/product/national-code-of-practice-for-the-humane-shooting-of-kangaroos-and-wallabies-for-commercial-purposes>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.agrifutures.com.au/wp-content/uploads/publications/13-116.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> RSPCA Australia (2002) A Survey of the Extent of Compliance with the Requirements of the Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos, S.4.4.1(b), Environment Australia, Australian Government.

shot.” This explains why joeys are often left to die of predation, starvation, dehydration and exposure.<sup>10</sup>

Sentient advocates for a national ban on the commercial and non-commercial shooting of female macropods to be implemented as soon as possible because the killing of their dependent young cannot be guaranteed to be humane, and cannot even be guaranteed to occur at all, which leaves them at risk of a slow death exposed to the elements and predators. Without accurate data about the actual numbers of various species of macropods, we should be cautious and discontinue practices that may accelerate their decline.

(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,

RSPCA Australia has acknowledged that: “Large numbers of kangaroos are shot inhumanely every year, particularly under the non-commercial system, with no on-the-ground animal welfare monitoring of shooters.”<sup>10</sup> We believe the establishment of such welfare monitoring, which would need to be independent, will be deemed unfeasible. One of the major welfare issues in the industry is that large numbers of kangaroos are killed by body shots rather than head shots.<sup>9</sup> Mandatory codes of practice cannot safeguard animal welfare if they are not enforceable and this needs to occur at all points – at the point of kill and carcass inspections (which only applies to commercial shooting). There is documentary evidence for non-compliance with the Codes of Practice for kangaroo shooting,<sup>11</sup> and this includes harvesters rarely euthanasing young-at-foot, which left these animals exposed to severe welfare impacts after their mothers had been shot.<sup>8</sup>

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

We recommend government funding and support for ecotourism activities that promote the appreciation of macropods in their natural environment. Shooting is potentially detrimental to tourism and to public safety.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/is-there-a-need-to-kill-kangaroos-or-wallabies/>

<sup>11</sup> RSPCA Australia: *A Survey of the Extent of Compliance with the Requirements of the Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos* (2002). S.4.4.1(b), Environment Australia, Australian Government.

<https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20050829040045/http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/51748/20050829-0000/www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/trade-use/publications/kangaroo-report/index.html>



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Conclusion:

On animal welfare grounds, Sentient opposes the commercial and non-commercial shooting of kangaroos and wallabies. There are no available measures that could safeguard the welfare of affected macropods to an acceptable level and with a lack of accurate data on actual population levels, ongoing shooting may pose a risk to the conservation of some species in selected areas. We submit that the only reason for shooting to reduce macropod populations is on humane grounds, such as when they are severely affected by drought and malnutrition or other conditions and no alternative measures are available. Sentient advocates for a Federal inquiry into the health and welfare of kangaroos and other macropods, including the sustainability of the current killing of these native species; an immediate end to the issuing of non-commercial shooting licenses; and an end to the shooting of females (and associated killing of pouched young and dependent young at foot).

26/4/2021