

Submission
No 253

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

Organisation: GAIA
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1. GAIA's submission on an inquiry into the health and wellbeing of kangaroos and other macropods in New South Wales

1.1. Introduction of GAIA – a Belgian animal welfare organization

Global Action in the Interest of Animals (GAIA) is an influential animal welfare organization in Belgium. GAIA was founded in 1992 and has more than 80.000 members and supporters. Considering Belgium is the world's largest importer of kangaroo meat, we have a vested interest in the wellbeing of Australia's - in particular New South Wales - kangaroos and other macropods. Kangaroos from NSW are being imported in Belgium (Belgium is mainly a distribution hub) and sold in Belgium and Europe as meat.

GAIA collaborates with an international network of Australian, European and American NGOs opposing the kangaroo hunt and, with this submission, formulates comments regarding terms of reference (e) and (f) (see below, at 1.3).

1.2. The EU and Belgian context

1.2.1. EU context

The European Union is the largest single market for exported kangaroo products which include skins, meat, and pet food. In 2019, the amount of exported skins and meat that was exported to the EU was 235 tonnes and 2684 tonnes respectively (Table 1). Meat is 65% of the total meat export amount and 73% of the meat export value. The meat exports are particularly valuable to the kangaroo industry because kangaroos cannot be shot for skins only.

The European market has a substantial impact on the commercial kill in NSW. In 2019, 561.352 adult kangaroos were commercially killed in NSW. About 40%, or 224,541 kangaroos, are for the export market. Therefore the 65% of meat export to Europe represents roughly 135,000 kangaroos, or about 25% of the commercial kill in NSW.

The European Union holds high standards for both the welfare and the conservation of wildlife both within the EU and from countries it imports from. As such, animal protection organizations will hold the EU responsible for maintaining these standards. We seek to address several

concerns regarding animal welfare and conservation in the current format of the NSW Kangaroo Management Plan.

Table 1. Kangaroo skins and meat exports for 2019 (Tynan 2021)

(a) Skins

Country of Destination	Gross Weight (Tonnes)	Value (FOB) (\$'000)
Turkey	1198.545	1118.204
Pakistan	1033.395	853.041
India	249.367	466.822
Germany	115.395	1608.149
Italy (includes Holy See and San Marino)	102.399	1621.46
Vietnam	79.885	8681.819
Japan	66.442	3129.331
China (excludes SARs and Taiwan)	50.739	653.681
Thailand	29.602	310.145
Haiti	20	21.406
Portugal	17.5	14.632
Bangladesh	12.225	12.225
United States of America	9.471	1173.166
Singapore	6.55	129.277
Hong Kong (SAR of China)	6.414	763.606
Mexico	6	93.526
Korea	3.925	360.193
Fiji	1.031	50.468
New Zealand	0.746	13.499
Vanuatu	0.185	14.394
Taiwan	0.118	11.241
Canada	0.09	27.893
United Kingdom	0.088	13.067
Switzerland (includes Liechtenstein)	0.013	8.745
Total	3010.125	21149.99

(b) Meat

Country of Destination	Gross Weight (Tonnes)	Value (FOB) (\$'000)
Belgium	774.517	5148.988
Germany	545.017	2779.966
Paupa New Guinea	455.21	1631.387
Netherlands	423.278	2903.146
Canada	146.509	513.043

Korea	75.723	230.264
Japan	62.243	378.155
United States	52.472	549.972
New Zealand	29.181	98.462
Solomon Islands	27.113	85.279
Singapore	26.739	136.414
Switzerland	21.859	209.722
Spain	18.425	66.192
Indonesia	17.85	41.8
HongKong	7.36	70.77
Seychelles	0.514	5.432
Total	2684.01	14848.99

1.2.2. Belgian context

1.2.2.1. *The world's largest importer of kangaroo meat*

In 2016, Belgium imported more than 632 tons kangaroo meat. In 2019 this number has increased to almost 750 tons of imported kangaroo meat. Belgium is thus the world's largest importer of kangaroo meat. The meat is mostly exported again to other countries.

1.2.2.2. *Supermarkets*

In 2020, all Belgian supermarkets decided to end the sale of kangaroo meat because of animal welfare, public health and environmental concerns.

1.2.2.3. *Legislation*

On 13 February 2020, a legislative proposal to ban the import of kangaroo products was drafted by members of the green, socialist, and conservative parties in the federal parliament. The proposal was put on the agenda in the Commission of Economy of the Federal Chamber of Representatives in July 2020. The political parties indicated to be unsure about the impact of the kangaroo hunt on animal welfare, public health and species protection. The results of the work of the Parliamentary Inquiry may have a significant impact on a future vote on the legislative proposal.

1.3. **The relevant terms of reference**

1.3.1. The relevant terms of reference

1. (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;

According to GAIA the welfare cost of harming dependent young and adult kangaroos is unacceptable

2. (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;

According to GAIA the population estimates are unverifiable

1.4. GAIA’s position

1.4.1. Concerning term of reference (e): the welfare cost of harming dependent young and adult kangaroos is unacceptable

1.4.1.1. The welfare cost of harming dependent young

The current annual Kangaroo Management Plan (KMP) reports record the number of adult kangaroos killed, both male and female percentages, but not the number of dependent young that are killed as collateral. The code of practice states that the dependent young will be disposed of humanely. Such an important welfare concern should be addressed and recorded transparently. It can only be assumed that there is no supervision in the field to record the actions of hunters towards dependent young. Incidental reports from wildlife carers and independent reporting suggest that there is a grave problem.

The current code of practice requires decapitation and a blow to the head (Agrifutures 2020), an unacceptable killing method. It is the same method used for killing Canadian Harp Seals, whose products have been banned in Europe and elsewhere. Furthermore, studies suggest that in many cases dependent kangaroo young escape, only to die a painful death of dehydration, predation, or starvation (Croft 2004, Sharp and Mcleod 2014). These outcomes are not acceptable for GAIA.

Table 1: Summary of acceptable euthanasia methods for kangaroo and wallaby pouch young (Agrifutures 2020)

<i>Stage of development</i>	<i>Acceptable Method</i>	<i>Notes</i>
In pouch – unfurred <5cm length (including	Decapitation or cervical dislocation	Using thumb and finger or sharp blade

tail)

In pouch – unfurred >5cm(including tail)	Decapitation	Using a sharp blade
In pouch – partially furred In pouch – furred Out of pouch – can be caught by harvester	Manually applied concussive blow to the head	The concussive blow must be conducted so that the joey’s head is hit against a large solid surface that will not move or compress during the impact (e.g., the <i>tray</i> of a utility vehicle). Animals must not be hit against the utility <i>rack</i> or held upside down by the hindquarters or tail and hit.

In 2019 there were 561,352 adult kangaroos killed no percentages of males and females were given, indicating a lack of transparency (Anon 2021). In 2018, some 467,456 kangaroos were killed: an average of 10% of killed kangaroos were females (Anon 2020) killed by the commercial harvest in NSW. An estimate based on the reproduction biology of female kangaroos (the Grey and Red kangaroos) suggests that 33,000 dependent young (see Ben-Ami, Boom et al. 2014) were either killed, or likely have died without protection and care of their mothers. None of these outcomes, the lack of transparency in the 2021 quota report and the collateral harm of dependent young deaths, are legitimate for a food and skins-based wildlife industry supplying the EU and Belgium.

Until recently the Kangaroo Industry and Australian trade representatives have asserted that the Code of Practice and guidelines for killing dependent young are endorsed by Australia’s animal welfare body, the RSPCA Australia. On its website the RSPCA finds the killing of dependent young problematic (i.e. not humane) because of the difficulties of execution and supervision of the process in the field. It also does not support the commercial industry as a means of controlling kangaroo populations (RSPCA Australia 2020). It summarizes its position statement on the (commercial) killing of kangaroos and wallabies as follows:

“questions remain about the humaneness of kangaroo shooting and the basis for current government policies on the management and killing of kangaroos.”

Recent independent kangaroo processor efforts to implement a male only kill have been met with resistance by farmers (Ampt 2018, Mcleod and Hacker 2019). In fact, farmers have become so dissatisfied with this measure that new cluster fencing, supported by state subsidies, has been placed to minimize kangaroo presence in the QLD and now in western NSW. This

creates additional welfare and conservation concern to all wildlife sharing space with kangaroos.

Recommendations:

- Females with dependent young should not be killed
- This should be mandated by the NSW Kangaroo Management Plan (and not independently by industry)
- All hunters should be supervised in the field, at the very least by body cameras

1.4.1.2. The welfare cost of harming adult kangaroos

Commercially killed kangaroos are meant to be killed by a single shot to the head with a high-powered rifle. The hunter must have passed a shooting proficiency test. Although the industry claims the accuracy is about 98%, this is a statistic that is hard to believe. The shooting occurs at night. Some shooters are fulltime professionals and expert marksmen, but many are not. This is particularly true in NSW which is encouraging non-professional shooters to take part in the commercial kill.

The unfortunate outcome is that many adult kangaroos are miss shot, either in the body, neck or jaw. An independent assessment of carcasses in chillers showed that up to 40% of kangaroos were not hit in the head (Ben-Ami 2009). Another independent assessment of carcass leftover in the field, over an 8 year period, by commercial industry hunters has shown that over 40% of heads collected where without entry points (Keightley, G. pers comm – data provided on request).

Importantly, there is no supervision in the field to determine whether a clean head shot was made. The industry reports that only head shot kangaroos are accepted for processing. Non-headshot kangaroos may be left in the field. Others that were shot in the neck or jaw are still brought in. The evidence of non-head shot is hidden by severing the head below the occipital joint in the neck (where the cut is unhindered), as was recorded by Des Sibraa, former Chief Food Safety Inspector for NSW (Ben-Ami 2009).

Recommendations:

- Only fully professional hunters should engage in the commercial kill
- On site regulation should include body cameras on commercial hunters

1.4.2. Concerning term of reference (f): the population estimates are unverifiable

As a primary importer of kangaroo products, Belgium has an obligation to independently ascertain that kangaroo populations are ecologically sustainable. However, it is impossible to

assess sustainability independently, either by calculating kangaroo population numbers in the present nor comparing to historic estimates. This is because the Quota Reports of the NSW Kangaroo Management Plan fail to include the raw data from the surveys, the correction factors used at various times, the addition of new management zones and the mathematical models used to estimate populations on government websites (for example see Anon 2020, Anon 2021).

Recommendations:

- The NSW KMP Quota Reports should include raw data collected from surveys
- The NSW KPM Reports (and Quota Reports) should include long-term population trends correlated to changing correction factors and the addition of new management zones.

3. Conclusion

GAIA closely follows the work of the parliamentary inquiry and hopes its investigation results in a clarification on the extent of the animal welfare, sustainability and public health concerns that rise regarding the kangaroo hunt.

4. References

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Ann De Greef
Director of GAIA

Michel Vandebosch
President of GAIA