

**Submission  
No 259**

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

**Organisation:** WIRES  
**Date Received:** 26 April 2021

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**NSW WILDLIFE  
INFORMATION  
RESCUE AND  
EDUCATION  
SERVICE Inc.**

The Director  
Portfolio Committee No. 7 – Planning and Environment  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

22 April 2021

**RE: Submission to Inquiry into the Health and Wellbeing of Kangaroos and Other Macropods in New South Wales**

To the Chair and Committee Members,

NSW Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service Inc. (WIRES) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Inquiry into the health and wellbeing of kangaroos and other macropods in New South Wales and its potential impact on our native wildlife and their habitat.

WIRES is Australia's largest wildlife rescue organisation and was formed in 1985. Thirty-five years later, WIRES has 28 branches, more than 3,500 members and assists hundreds of thousands of community members annually. WIRES mission is to actively rehabilitate and preserve Australian wildlife and inspire others to do the same. WIRES dedicated Rescue Office operates 365 days a year, acting as the first point of contact for the community to provide wildlife information, education, emergency rescue advice and assistance for sick, injured and orphaned native animals. We receive over 180,000 calls to our 1300 number annually, including thousands of interstate calls. In the last financial year, WIRES provided rescue advice and assistance for over 100,000 animals. On average, WIRES provides up to 80% of all wildlife rescue and care in NSW and plays an important role in national community wildlife education.

In addition, WIRES trains hundreds of new volunteers in wildlife rescue and care annually. Over 1,800 people registered for introductory training in 2020 alone and we are dedicated to the ongoing recruitment of new volunteers and the continued training of existing volunteers. This growing network of volunteer rescuers and carers is critical for the rescue and rehabilitation of our unique native wildlife.

After the catastrophic bushfires of Summer 2019-2020, where an estimated three billion animals perished or were displaced, we recognise that we are no longer operating under a 'business as usual' approach. In New South Wales alone, approximately 7% (5.37 million hectares) of land was burnt. This included 37% of the national park estate, 42% of state forests and 4% of freehold land<sup>1</sup>. With this new reality and so much of our natural bushland lost, it is crucial that we review how native species are protected and managed in Australia, particularly as such extreme events are only predicted to increase under climate change over the coming decades.

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<sup>1</sup> State of New South Wales and Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. 2020. NSW Fire and the Environment 2019–20 Summary. Environment, Energy and Science Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.



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WIREs supports the protection and welfare of native wildlife and acknowledges the impact overpopulation of a species can have on an ecosystem. However, WIREs is concerned that remaining complacent on the status of commonly occurring species places them at risk, and population declines should not be dismissed under the assumption that historical statistics will continue to predict population stability.

### Populations of Macropods in New South Wales

In the last two centuries in New South Wales alone, six macropod species have gone extinct<sup>2</sup>. There now remain only 15 species of macropod, each with varying levels of population size. Threatened species include the Black-striped Wallaby, Parma Wallaby, Rufous Bettong, Long-nosed Potoroo and Yellow-footed Rock Wallaby. With Australia on record as the leading country for mammal extinctions in the world, protection of these species is increasingly important. Especially after the devastating impact of the 2019-20 bushfires, with an estimated 800 million animals killed in NSW<sup>3</sup>.

Annual survey data from the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) has shown a decrease in kangaroo populations of 40% in the last ten years, from 17 million in 2016 to 10.5 million last year<sup>4</sup>. The droughts and devastating fire events of the last ten years will have significantly influenced this decline, however the full range of impacts on kangaroo populations are vast. Habitat destruction and land clearing, continued establishment of exclusion fencing and significant levels of uncontrolled shooting are factors that are increasingly impacting movements and growth of kangaroo populations<sup>4</sup>.

Human-induced impacts on kangaroo populations including habitat loss for residential and agricultural development are increasing drastically every year. After the laws for vegetation clearing in NSW were relaxed in 2017, government data showed land clearing increased by an alarming 1,300%<sup>5</sup>. Kangaroos that are displaced by residential development often move onto private properties, where they become pests and usually the target for non-commercial shooting. In other instances, mobs are culled to make way for housing developments.

Many threatened macropod species in NSW have habitats along the eastern coastal fringes, including the Long-nosed potoroo and Brush-tailed rock wallaby. Continued threats to their survival include habitat loss and land clearing, particularly as most major cities in NSW are on the coast. Proximity to urban areas results in increased risk of predation from foxes and cats, and increased risk of impacts from habitat fragmentation and increased road collisions. The growing urban sprawl and regional land-clearing will continue to see wildlife, like kangaroos, displaced or destroyed. With increasingly diminished environmental protection laws, it can only be expected that the rate of these impacts will be increasing if not drastically, then at least

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<sup>2</sup> NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. *Kangaroos, wallabies, pademelons, bettongs and potoroos*. Accessed 12 April 2021 <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/native-animals/native-animal-facts/kangaroos-and-wallabies>

<sup>3</sup> The University of Sydney News and Opinion (2020). *More than one billion animals killed in Australian bushfires*. Accessed 16 April 2021.

<sup>4</sup> NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. *Kangaroo population monitoring and reporting*. Accessed 13 April 2021 <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/wildlife-management/kangaroo-management/kangaroo-population-monitoring-and-reporting>

<sup>5</sup> Natural Resources Commission (2019). *Land management and biodiversity conservation reforms: Final advice on a response to the policy point of view*.



steadily over the coming decades. Ensuring the protection of vulnerable species that have specific habitat requirements is essential for ensuring their future, and the future of the Australian environment.

### Impacts of Climate Change

While historically, kangaroo populations have recovered after severe drought and fire events, they have been slow recoveries. Female kangaroos tend to have only three or four joeys survive in their lifetime, as juvenile mortality rates are high. As a whole, kangaroo populations do not grow more than 10% in a year<sup>6</sup>. With the predictions of increased frequency, length and severity of drought and fire events under climate change it would be imprudent to assume that population numbers will 'bounce back' as easily or as frequently as before. It is alarming that potential protections for kangaroos may be sidelined based purely on historical statistics and assumptions, without viewing the predicted impacts of climate change.

One study, modelling impacts of predicted climate change over the next 50 years on four different kangaroo species, found that geographic ranges of all four species will shrink as the climate warms<sup>7</sup>. The most significant effects of climate change will be on their habitats, specifically on the amount of available water as water holes dry up or become depleted and grazing pastures reduce. We therefore should not remain too comfortable, by continuing to use historical statistics as assurance of a controlled and managed population.

### Impacts of Culling on Animal Welfare

While studies have shown that the kangaroo culling programs in Australia have not impacted the sustainability of kangaroo populations over the last four decades<sup>8</sup>, there remain numerous animal welfare concerns with the program. The kangaroo industry Code of Practice requires that animals be killed by a single shot to the head, but even conservative estimates suggest that more than tens of thousands of adult kangaroos commercially 'processed' each year are not killed in this manner<sup>9</sup>. This represents an unacceptable lack of protection for the welfare of these kangaroos.

As part of the recent drought relief package, the government allowed anyone with a rifle the ability to apply for a License to Harm Kangaroos on private property, and for them to have additional unnamed shooters under that licence. Phone conversations and nameless individuals do not ensure professionalism in the shooting industry and raises numerous welfare concerns. Due to the remote locations of where the commercial kangaroo shoots take place, there is no effective monitoring of animal welfare. Given that by January 2021, 98% of NSW was declared to be drought-free or recovering<sup>10</sup>, WIRES strongly recommends that the legal restrictions on non-commercial shooting of kangaroos be reinstated.

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<sup>6</sup> Mjadwesch R (2011). *Nomination to List the Large Macropods as Threatened Species under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*

<sup>7</sup> Ritchie, E.G & Bolitho, E.E. 2008. Australia's savannah herbivores: bioclimatic distributions and an assessment of the potential impact of regional climate change. *Physiological and Biochemical Zoology*, 81(6):880-890.

<sup>8</sup> Lunney et al. (2018). Four decades of research and monitoring the populations of kangaroos in New South Wales: One of the best long-term datasets in Australia. *Australian Zoologist*, 39(4):784-800.

<sup>9</sup> A survey of the extent of compliance with the requirements of the Code of Practice for the humane shooting of kangaroos – Prepared for Environment Australia by RSPCA Australia, July 2002.

<sup>10</sup> NSW Department of Primary Industries 2021, NSW State Seasonal Update - January 2021, accessed 22 April 2021, <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/climate-and-emergencies/seasonal-conditions/ssu/january-2021>



The Code of Practice requires that adult male kangaroos are the preferred target, with females especially with joeys at foot or in pouch, to be avoided. However, at a distance it is difficult to tell if joeys are in pouch or if the targeted individual is male or female. Inspections on holding facilities for carcasses around NSW found that more than 60% of stored carcasses were 'non-preferred' females, with many barely above the minimum permitted 'human consumption' weight of 13kgs<sup>11</sup>. This is of great concern not only to the gene pool of kangaroos in Australia, by potentially causing an imbalance in populations, but to what it further represents. That large males may be becoming increasingly scarce due to a history of frequent culling, but also that the guidelines outlined in the handbook provide little influence on reality.

### Recommendations

1. Restrict permits for non-professional kangaroo shooters, to establish stronger integrity for animal welfare in the commercial culling industry.
2. Provide increased training to non-commercial shooters by potentially establishing a program whereby new shooters must be recommended by a professional prior to obtaining licences.
3. Photographic evidence must be obtained of kills, including joey destruction if required, for commercial culls.
4. Number of joey's destroyed must be recorded for culling events.
5. Historical statistics of kangaroo populations must be listed in comparison with predicted climate change impacts over the coming decade in reports.
6. Given that by January 2021, 98% of NSW was declared to be drought-free or recovering, WIRES recommends that the legal restrictions on non-commercial shooting of kangaroos be reinstated.

Taking into account the above information, WIRES strongly encourages following the precautionary principle, as referenced in the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)*, when determining population size of kangaroos in Australia and strongly advocates for increased protection of their welfare during culling events.

Your sincerely,

Leanne Taylor  
WIRES CEO

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<sup>11</sup> Animals Australia. *Kangaroo Shooting*. Accessed 12 April 2021 <[https://www.animalsaustralia.org/issues/kangaroo\\_shooting.php](https://www.animalsaustralia.org/issues/kangaroo_shooting.php)>