

Submission
No 271

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

Organisation: Wild 2 Free Inc.
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Partially
Confidential



KANGAROO INQUIRY SUBMISSION

REQUEST FOR CONFIDENTIALITY – WE STRONGLY REQUEST THAT ANYTHING IN GREEN TEXT PROVIDED ON THIS LETTERHEAD AND ITS CONTENTS, ARE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL. OUR FOUNDER AND THE WRITER OF THIS SUBMISSION LIVES ALONE AND IN FEAR OF PEOPLE COMING ONTO THE PROPERTY TO SHOOT KANGAROOS. EVERY OTHER PART OF THIS SUBMISSION CAN BE MADE PUBLIC.

My name is Rae Harvey and I am the co-founder and current President for Wild 2 Free, an animal welfare charity. Although we help almost any animal in need, it was upon discovery of the emotional, sensitive and fragile nature of eastern grey kangaroos, that much of our focus has gone into the welfare of Kangaroos. I personally own the property that Wild 2 Free operates on, providing a much-needed and rare release site for rehabilitated kangaroos reared not only by our members, but by other wildlife carers from WIRES and Wildlife Rescue South Coast.

When we first began operating here, a wild mob of approximately 30 kangaroos, 4 swamp wallabies (all male) and several red-necked wallabies were present and living on the property. This number grew to 70-80 kangaroos and a dozen wallabies from 2016-2019 due to the ex-orphaned macropods released on the property and the joeys they subsequently gave birth to. The released macropods included female swamp wallabies, which pleased the all-male wild population very much.

Although not located in a commercial shooting zone, we have sadly still experienced raising traumatised orphaned joeys.

The first shooting orphan arrived in May 2017. Scratch was reportedly rescued by a couple directly from an area known for recreational shooting near Nowra. He was 9 months old and 4kg on arrival. Being 'at foot', she probably witnessed the shooting, which would explain why he was the most stressed and traumatised joey we had experienced. He refused to eat solid food for over a week and had to be prescribed diazepam (Valium) to enable him to settle into his new life with the same species of predator that killed his mother. He was successfully rehabilitated and released on the property. He returned completely to the wild in mid-2020.

A little-known fact is that some kangaroos return to the wild soon after rehabilitation and release, whereas others can take a number of years, depending on the trauma they suffered prior to rescue, whether they are male or female or due to other 'political' factors within the mob structure.

The second shooting orphan, Winnie, was pulled from her shot dead mother's pouch at Farm near Moruya, in August 2017. Winnie's mother had NOT been tagged, despite the Code of Conduct insisting they be so. The operator had called a 'professional' shooter in to remove the kangaroos. and the WIRES rescuer met with me on the highway to deliver her to me. Despite Winnie being 7kg and 12-months old, she was so traumatised that even at her size, she had managed to get back into her mother's pouch, despite



eastern grey kangaroos being permanently out of pouch at her age and size. Winnie required a prescription from a vet for Modecate (a drug no longer on the market), to help settle her into care and it took untold hours of dedication. She was soft-released onto the property in late 2017 but sadly died from snake bite on October 19, 2018. Despite her death, we still deem that she probably lived longer than she would have, had she remained on that property. A local rescuer confirmed that she had been to [redacted] Farm again months after the event, and had to request police come out to euthanise a male kangaroo (once again not tagged), who had been shot 24 hours earlier, but was still alive.

In September 2017, a six-month old joey was rescued when an RFS volunteer spotted a wedge-tailed Eagle perched on a kangaroo in Bodalla. When he got closer to investigate, he discovered the kangaroo had been shot dead and the eagle was investigating a potential dinner in the joey left surviving in her pouch. She was then transferred to Wild 2 Free for immediate care and then to a carer from Wildlife Rescue South Coast, who specialised in furless joeys otherwise known as 'pinkies', who require 3 hourly feeding and a temperature-controlled environment. Two months later, she returned to Wild 2 Free for continued rehab and release on November 25, 2017. She was soft-released in June 2018 and by 2019 had her first joey at foot. Most females continue to live on the property permanently, despite being released and free to leave, preferring to stay close to where they were raised. Venus escaped the bushfire without injury (presumably due to the estuary and high tide water available) and so did her son. Immediately after the bushfire, Venus began feeding Bo, an orphaned joey we were raising but no longer able to feed. She did this in addition to feeding her own son.

Rufus was rescued at [redacted] by a lady who discovered the joey lying in the pouch of a female who had been shot [redacted], and told her daughter, a local vet nurse. The vet nurse contacted Wild 2 Free and arranged for us to collect the joey.

Rufus was just 8-months old at rescue in October 2017 and would have spent the majority of his time in his mother's pouch and would have experienced the entire trauma and felt his mother fall and die while he lay there in terror. He was one of the most difficult joeys to ever be reared at Wild 2 Free. If a magpie flapped its wings too loudly, he would take off in fear, causing all the other kangaroos to flee. Dozens of hours were spent looking for joeys who had bolted in fear due to Rufus causing a 'stress event' for a reason that wouldn't cause that response to less stressed joeys. Due to his flightiness, Rufus remained inside at night (in the joey room) for months longer than other joeys, prior to him being deemed strong enough to handle being outside at night without supervision. He was soft-released in May 2018 and made a full return to the wild with his best friend Mars, in late 2019. Whether he survived the bushfire, is unknown.

In January 2019 a local and caring security guard bought a joey to us who was almost 7-months old. A pouch joey whose feet would have never touched the ground prior, was found alone hopping around a paddock after a farmer requested a shooter kill the kangaroos on his property [redacted] at 1pm the following afternoon. I was told the shooter only managed to see and kill two kangaroos (one male and one female) despite the 'kangaroo problem' on the property. Morty was the fastest shooting orphan to settle into care to date. This is most likely due to him being found dehydrated, hungry and not in a pouch. He was so relieved to receive the darkness and 'safety' of a false pouch and a bottle of electrolytes, that he adjusted quickly. Morty had been weaned from his bottle in October 2019 and soft-released. He survived the bushfire with just minor burns to his feet and returned fully to the wild around July 2020 after enjoying six-months of support care via shelter, food and water post bushfire.



In late 2018 the drought hit us hard and we ran out of water. It was purchased and trucked in regularly to help the wildlife and animals being rehabilitated. This continued throughout 2019 and particularly in December 2019 when food began getting distributed in less human impacted areas around the property to support the wild macropods.

The Currowan Bushfire started on November 26, just 20km north west of the property. We could see the smoke billowing high in the sky every day and fire-fighting planes began to fill up on the river in front of us. The noise from the planes flying overhead and into the river and the smoke had an impact on the rehabilitated and wild animals on the property, but they got used to it after a number of weeks.

On 5th December, 2019, I cried myself to sleep. I felt helpless as I watched the planes fill up with water to try and save properties in East Lynne and Bawley Point – I knew wildlife carers in both areas who were being impacted and once the fire hit the water at Pebbly Beach, I felt like the kangaroos who could flee, had run out of land to flee to. I cried again the following night, unsure of how to help. I noticed that WIRES and Wildlife Rescue South Coast had started fundraising to help rehabilitate the very few wildlife that had been rescued from the fires. At that time, there was only two kangaroo joeys and one possum that I was aware of, who had been rescued. But who was helping the wild animals? No one.

That's when I quickly used my personal account on Go Fund Me and nominated Wild 2 Free to be the charity to receive the funds. In a 3-week period, we sourced donations of fruit and vegetables from major supermarkets and a local grocer, donations of wire baskets from Bunnings to provide feed for bats and birds and raised funds to buy feed and additional containers for water. Around \$12,000 was raised and 8,000kg of feed was distributed with water to approximately 150 feed stations, tended to by 60 volunteers. The feed was housed at 7 different distribution points from Batemans Bay up to Ulladulla.

On December 31st, my home and the entire Wild 2 Free sanctuary and property, was completely destroyed by the bushfire. Unable to continue the program, it was handed over to Wildlife Rescue South Coast and WIRES to continue the work, enabling me to return to the property (after me and another volunteer Karen, were rescued by boat), to care for any surviving wildlife.

We were luckier than most, Due to the dams having trees around them, although the trees burned, they had provided shade to the dams which still had water in them despite the drought. The tide was in at the time of the fire, so the estuary and mangroves provided a place for wildlife to flee to.

The day before the bushfire, around 40 previously rehabilitated kangaroos (including their joeys) and 3 wallabies were still living wild on the property, alongside 30 wild kangaroos and a handful of wild wallabies. A search of the property post-fire was easy because you could clearly see through every piece of bush, which had been decimated and reduced to a ground of ash and completely blackened trees including the canopy.

Only one dead kangaroo, one dead wallaby, one dead bird and a very much alive wild boar were located. 16 of the 50+ kangaroo orphans raised here remained and 8 of their joeys. 24 in total. 2 swamp wallabies survived. No red-necked wallabies survived (wild or released ones). Red-necked wallabies have not been seen on the property nor in the Mogo State Forest whatsoever since the bushfire though they have been sighted at another property several kilometres away.



Of the 30+ wild population, only 5 kangaroos and one wild male swamp wallaby (thankfully) remained, which enabled the female ex-orphans to subsequently have joeys.

7 female kangaroos received vet treatment onsite for burns, some of which continued treatment through February and March. One kangaroo, Bee, the daughter of a kangaroo reared and released here, was euthanised by a vet on January 8, her burns deemed too severe for rehabilitation. The remaining ones are still alive today.

Despite the loss of kangaroos here, we mainly credit the estuary with providing the shelter, which ensured we did have survivors. Since the fire, the wild population has grown to 13, including some large males that were not here prior to the fire. Shelters were quickly constructed around the property after the fire and feed and water was provided on the property and throughout the Mogo State Forest immediately – they all depended on it for survival.

In my experience, there has been a major impact on kangaroos, their mob structure and the joeys carelessly left behind, due to both shooting and the bushfires.

After the bushfire, we only received two calls in relation to a bushfire impacted macropod. The first was a swamp wallaby several kilometres away. She was brought to the property and received vet attention, but died from her burns that night, some 8 DAYS after the fire. Her tiny joey, unable to survive without her, was euthanised.

In March 2020, a 9-month-old joey was brought here after having been pulled from his mother's pouch. He had been rescued by a family in Jeramadra when he was 7 months old in January. His mother was so badly burnt, she was reduced to mostly muscle. The joey, named Koa, had burnt feet, suggesting he exited the pouch after impact and climbed back in again. The family surrendered him when realising they couldn't continue caring for him correctly without macropod care knowledge.

People think kangaroos manage OK in bushfire, but I disagree. Countless wild animals only survived because we distributed so much food and water both onsite and through the Mogo State Forest after the bushfire for months. The fact that 3 males waited until June 2020 to return to the wild is telling. It wasn't until around that time, that food was becoming plentiful again.

Prior to the bushfire, joeys came here from all sorts of places on the South Coast. There are 5 orphaned joeys in care as I write this and all of them come from car accidents only and ONLY from the small pockets of areas that were NOT impacted by the bushfire. I believe that's a strong indicator of the survival rate of kangaroos from bushfire.

There are only a handful of properties throughout the Mogo State Forest, which allow kangaroos to graze. At one such property, some 5km east of here, the owner was forced to shoot 3 adult kangaroos after the fire, due to the injuries they were inflicting on themselves, as they continually crashed into fences. This occurred days after the bushfire, presumably due to the trauma sustained during the event.

Several of the most traumatic experiences post fire for me personally, included:

Marcus Fillinger is a highly qualified darter, who is authorised to tranquilise a wild animal. He attended the property in early January 2020 to dart Honey, a kangaroo raised here but now too wild to capture for vet treatment. Marcus spent many hours driving here and searching the property for survivors requiring assistance. On his way home, he



encountered several utes full of shot kangaroos just days after the bushfire. Apparently, the shooters found the kangaroos were much easier to find in the fire impacted landscape.

Also in early January, finding Clover's de-pouched joey deceased. She was approximately 3-months old, but Clover was unable to care for her after the fire and was forced to de-pouch her to improve her own chance of survival.

In June 2020 I received a text from a friend "12 souls lost tonight". It referred to the 12 kangaroos shot at a reserve in Canberra as part of the annual cull. It cut me to the bone. Kangaroo orphans require round-the-clock care and are very sensitive and fragile with changes to the environment, which can lead to death, so we only raise what we can handle. That same year, I worked 365 days a year raising 11 orphans. Can you imagine the trauma of learning that the equivalent of your entire year's work, is lost in just one night? That's what it felt like to me.

In June 2020 I drove from Runnyford near Batemans Bay to Sydney, via the Mogo State Forest and Princes Highway, returning 2 days later. I saw NO kangaroos alive or dead in that time. This included driving at dusk and night.

In September 2020 I drove from Runnyford near Batemans Bay to Sydney, via the Mogo State Forest and Princes Highway, returning 1 day later. I saw NO kangaroos alive and saw ONE deceased kangaroo in that time, which included driving at dusk.

In September 2020 I drove from Runnyford near Batemans Bay to Canberra, via the Mogo State Forest and Kings Highway. I saw NO kangaroos alive or dead that day, which included returning at dusk.

One of our firm supporters and donors, _____, began following Wild 2 Free on Facebook to aid her pained heart. She told us on several occasions, that she needed Wild 2 Free to exist, so she could watch healthy happy kangaroos to make her feel better. She relocated _____ to find nature and instead, is faced with the sound of gunfire as kangaroos are shot on the property next door to her. In response to a complaint she made regarding this trauma, a shot dead kangaroo was left impaled on her fence.

We are aware of another rescuer, Emma, who boldly asked a commercial shooter to pull over so they could check the pouches of the killed females. EIGHT ALIVE JOEYS were pulled out and rescued. EIGHT joeys that were still alive.

Wild 2 Free is located on the South Coast for two primary reasons. A) it is not in a commercial shooting zone and B) it's the nature coast.... Right? Or is it?

What is the point of having a Code of Conduct in place for shooting kangaroos, when there is constant and clear evidence that the Code is violated? No one is onsite regulating the code. Complaints about the Code not being complied with, fall on deaf ears. A letter was reportedly sent to one offender from National Parks and Wildlife, but the lack of tagging and kangaroos shot but not killed continued.

Given we deliberately operate in a non-commercial killing part of NSW, why are we dealing with such a large proportion of orphaned joeys from shooting?



We have to deal with these traumatised joeys and can testify that some have never recovered properly from the incident.

How many kangaroos escape to die painful deaths in the bush?

How many kangaroos die from myopathy due to the stress of being chased by utes with bright headlights?

How many tiny joeys are left to die inside their dead mother's pouches?

How many, die on fences trying to flee?

How many dead joeys are not counted?

How many are killed on farms with and without licenses?

How many of these kangaroos are counted in the annual culling?

How many kangaroos are truly killed from this slaughter?

90 years ago, Australians slaughtered the koala to export its fur and now the government is pouring millions into saving them. Kangaroo slaughter is a false economy that will surely lead to a similar cost in the years to come.

We believe people need to become educated about the benefits of kangaroos to the environment.

We believe farmers need to become educated about how much a kangaroo positively impacts their land (particularly in comparison to non-native animals)

We believe the government should be investing money into wildlife care and rehabilitation, to enable carers to afford to provide this vital community service.

We believe the government should invest in regional tourism so visitors can see kangaroos in their natural environment.... If there's enough kangaroos left to enable this.

We believe it's time to stop the slaughter and begin the celebration of kangaroos as our national icon, as depicted on our national Coat of Arms. Ask an American if they would be interested in eating a bald eagle burger and the look on their mortified faces would say it all.

We believe that Australians and the rest of the world would be shocked if they understood that kangaroos are not farmed, but are instead shot in the wild while living their natural life... in darkness and fear.

Australia's dirty little secret.

'Rae Harvey
Co-Founder, Wild 2 Free



VIDEO SUBMISSIONS

Several videos are attached, which demonstrate the different personalities, needs and wants of kangaroos.

Video 1 – Marilen and fence-hanger orphan Angel. This young German girl came to volunteer for 6 weeks. She stayed 7 months, because she fell in love with the kangaroos. In particular, a kangaroo called Angel, who she shared a unique close bond with. The video shows her napping with the kangaroo. Angel didn't care much for the other joeys in care, but she came alive when Marilen was around. Marilen returned to Germany just before her Visa expired and is currently in the Netherlands studying for a wildlife degree. Her specialist animal? The kangaroo of course. Angel disappeared several weeks before the bushfire and hasn't been seen since.

Video 2 – Marilen and shooting orphan Venus AKA “Kissy Face”. Venus was obsessed with kissing. She wasn't fussy about who she kissed, so long as someone agreed to it. She eventually stopped, preferring to groom her friends and eat their ticks. How generous of her!

Video 3 – Road accident orphan Heidi was such an emotional joey. She needed gentle face pats daily and would gently suckle when she got them. She was 'soft-released' onto the property in September 2019 and was still returning to the house to eat every night. She disappeared with her BFF Melvin on the night of the bushfire and hasn't been seen again. Presumed deceased.

Video 4 – Bushfire orphan Koa was a single joey in care. No others came in from the fire, so Koa was raised without a mob of buddies, but was taught how to spar and build his kicking skills. Now two years old, Koa is living wild on the property, returning to a surviving cabin most nights for some extra feed. He likes to stand in the food trough and suck his toe.