

Submission
No 265

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

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Partially
Confidential

My name is _____ and I'm a wildlife carer, specialising in Eastern Grey Kangaroos.

I didn't become connected to kangaroos until I began volunteering at a wildlife shelter in 2013 in Victoria, where I lived at the time. The shelter provided care to all kinds of animals, but it was the quiet, peaceful, soulful and emotional Eastern Grey Kangaroos who stole my heart.

By 2014, I had decided to relocate to NSW to set up a place for kangaroos to be rehabilitated and released. I visited a shelter in Victoria called Little Urchins, to get inspiration and education and was emotionally tortured when I saw a newly arrived rescued joey. Despite my lack of care experience at the time, I could tell this little joey was extremely traumatised. I asked the carer what was wrong with the joey "her mother has just been shot" she replied. Prior to that very moment, I had no idea that kangaroos were just shot for no reason or poor excuses. I can still see her little shocked and distraught face. She will be etched in my mind forever.

Over the next 18-months, I travelled from Tweed Heads, all the way down to Eden in search for a property deemed safe enough to release kangaroos back into the wild.

Countless visits to NSW by either myself or my ex-partner, at a cost of over \$30,000 in flights, hotels and car hire, viewing hundreds of properties. But there was nothing.

The property I was searching for had to have:

- a good balance of pasture and bush
- it should back onto national park or state forest.
- it cannot be close to any farmers.
- it cannot be located on any main roads.
- It needed natural water sources
- It needed a wild population of kangaroos already living on it

It should not have taken endless searching over 18 months, all over NSW to find it, but it did.

In Northern NSW, we simply didn't find any kangaroos

Central (coastal) NSW was too built up

The South Coast, the nature coast, did have kangaroos, so that is where the search began to focus.

So much disappointment. Whether it was the beautiful property near Tathra, which had legally shot dead (and tagged) kangaroos lying all over it or the property near Pambula on which the decaying and illegally shot kangaroos lay, everywhere we went the story was the same.

And then we found it. 850 acres of property at _____ It had not been farmed since the 1980's and had 300 acres of pasture and 550 acres of natural bush, backing onto _____ National Park. It was surrounded by either small 10-acre holdings or

conservation properties with a state forest across the road. Quolls and other threatened species called it home, living in harmony with approximately 300 kangaroos.

We relocated there in June 2016, but a house fire 3 days later meant we had to move again. I still own the property, paying a mortgage on it for years ONLY in order to keep it safe for the wildlife. The property was decimated by bushfire on 31 December 2019. To the best of my knowledge, only 18 kangaroos (all injured), survived. Many were overrun by the fire and perished in flight.

After the 2016 fire, we moved to my second property consisting of 67-acres in State Forest. It was also destroyed by bushfire on 31 December 2019. I lost my home and the rehabilitated and wild kangaroos who lived here peacefully, also lost their home. We lost 2/3 of the kangaroo population and the survivors included 7 with serious burns or trauma (one of which was euthanised). I believe that the others survived due to the tide being in at the mangroves on the western side of the property. Without that water, I don't believe any would have survived.

The attitude towards kangaroos in Australia, I believe, stems from a lack of education and from the belief that they're a 'pest' species. This attitude spills over from commercial killing to plain and simple cruelty. Like Janey. A juvenile wild kangaroo who lived at the NRMA Murrumerang Caravan Park on the South Coast.



This is Janey. I called her that because I wanted her to have a name. I started a local campaign, seeking justice for Janey, who had been cruelly sliced with what is suspected to be a machete. **SHE WAS STILL ALIVE.** The rescuer and I don't know how long Janey lay there alive before she was located and euthanised, her killer was never brought to justice. Until the attitudes toward our national icon improve, cruelty like this will continue.

I live for kangaroos. Following are several excerpts from a Forensic Psychologist; Dr which explain this.

“...devastating bush fires (2019-20), physical exhaustion, and extreme emotional/traumatic stress secondary to loss through disease or injury and/or forced euthanasia of kangaroos and pet cats she had rescued.”

“"Features" of Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder; secondary to the need to euthanise kangaroos and pet cats she had rescued and raised. The formal diagnosis of Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder is applicable when the individual experiences the death or sudden loss by other causes of someone with whom he/she had a (very) close relationship and arising from the loss is suffering from persistent symptoms of unresolved grief; in Ms. Harvey's case the close emotional bond was with her rescued animals.”

I suffer ongoing emotional trauma every time I see a kangaroo suffering whether that be in person or in images. I'm only rebuilding post-fire because I promised the kangaroos that if even one survived, I would start again. Why doesn't my mental health matter?

The injustice and cruelty this iconic animal must endure year after year to sustain a \$200 million dollar industry baffles me. I believe our government is so focussed on appeasing farmers, who have been educated through generations of farming, that kangaroos are pests. I argue that this knowledge was passed down from our early white settlers, who were applying traditional English farming methods in an arid environment not suitable for the occupation. The Aboriginals also farmed the land and co-existed with kangaroos just fine.

I had a conversation with a farmer, who was on my property after the fires. I was telling him how we'd lost so many and he replied “you can come get some of mine, there's a million on my place and they're doing a lot of damage”. I asked, “really? You've got a million?” and he replied, “well, a few thousand”. I asked “what sort of damage are the kangaroos doing?” and his response was “well, it's not really the kangaroos doing the major damage, it's the wild pigs and goats that are the problem” Look how quickly that conversation changed when he was pressed for further details.

How many people travel to Australia to see the wildlife? How many people want to see them in their natural habitat and what is that industry worth to the Australian people by comparison to the commercial kangaroo killing industry?

Why is someone shooting a kangaroo for fun, leaving me with a traumatised joey to raise for the next 12-months?

A farmer shoots a kangaroo which costs him a couple of dollars on his profit and the kangaroo's orphan costs over a thousand dollars to raise to release, and that does not include the hours volunteering to provide that care. How is that fair?

How is killing our native wildlife to feed non-native animals fair?

How is killing our kangaroos to provide leather for soccer shoes in the USA, fair?

Why is it okay that I cry myself to sleep and suffer ill mental health so someone can profit from killing our kangaroos?

Below I have provided links to some of the media coverage from the bushfire crisis here.

ABC: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bU-1aSoSbA>

NBC: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYGL_hK5_NQ

Today show: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRy2Ydlqans>

CBS: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRZPPUESSAw>

I have dedicated my life to the kangaroo. Why? Because this incredibly emotive, sensitive, fragile and extremely misunderstood animal, needs us to speak up on its behalf, before it's too late.

I have provided video examples of several kangaroos and their unique personalities.

1. Grace was a joey who thrived on chest scratches and singing. She had her own song as shown on this video. One day while in the bush with the other joeys, a loud noise caused stress and some joeys hopped long distances and went into hiding. Grace was the final one to be located. In a surprising action, she called out from her hiding place, when she heard me signing her song out loud. I turned to the direction where her cry came from and sang her song again. Another call back. And another. And then I found her hiding in a bush. That's a sentient being right there.
2. Venus, a shooting orphan, was obsessed with kissing her human carers. So much so, she earned the name "Kissy Face". Venus grew out of this after soft-release and found a new hobby – grooming other kangaroos and eating their ticks.
3. Ollie was found alone, dehydrated and in poor condition. Soon after joeys come into care, I like to lie on the grass and in the dirt with them, in an effort to simulate what their mothers do. The dirt (which is the first solid food a joey eats), is important to helping them build their gut flora. It's a very bonding experience as Ollie demonstrates here.
4. Penny is a car accident orphan. She is what's known as a 'high stress' joey. She got stress alopecia from the trauma of losing her mother and coming into care. This stressed nature continued and at 12-months old, led to her dislocating one foot and tearing the ligaments in her other foot during two separate 'stress' related incidents. After 5 further months in care and 7 vet visits just for her feet, Penny was released. During the bushfire, she suffered minor burns and significant emotional trauma.

Having recovered, she is now 100% healthy, has an 'at foot' joey (14 months old) and is now the proud mother of a second joey in her pouch.