

**Submission
No 330**

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

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Inquiry to look at the health and wellbeing of kangaroos and other macropods in New South Wales.

Introduction and background:

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this very important inquiry.

My name is Kathleen O'Connor. I have lived in the Blue Mountains for most of my 63 years. I travel regularly out west and have a great love and respect for Australia's unique flora and fauna. I have a particular interest in our Macropods as both my adult daughters are trained wildlife rescue volunteers and have cared for orphaned joeys for years.

I work as a children's therapist and so have some expertise in Attachment and Trauma. I mention this because I have become particularly aware of the potential impact of trauma for orphaned joeys.

To keep my submission succinct, I will dot point my concerns, and suggest recommendations.

Concerns

1. Greatly reduced numbers of Eastern Greys, Wallaroos, Red Neck and Swamp wallabies, over the past 30 years. I have noticed in my regular travels from the Blue Mountains out to the Central West how reduced the numbers are of these animals. In the late 70's when I regularly travelled from Bathurst, I would often see many large mobs of eastern Greys. Lately as I travel to visit family, it is a rare occurrence to spot them, and the mobs are smaller.
2. Carnage of dead macropods along the roadside hit by traffic. During the draught in 2019, I counted 50+ dead Macropods on the side of the road between Lithgow and Ulan. These I suspect were a result of desperate mobs looking for food and water. Driving through some small towns like Cullen Bullen, it looked like whole mobs were hit.

This has been doubly disheartening because now I don't see as many dead beside the road which sadly indicates the depleted number alive.

3. Mis information. **There is considerable mis information and public understanding of about the numbers, habits and status of these gentle animals;**

- * The actual numbers of various macropods alive in the wild is misleading – often the numbers are over-estimated and based on very old/outdated ‘statistics’.
- * The knowledge of the breeding habits macropods is often wrong– ie their breeding capacities are said to be like ‘rabbits’ ,however the reality is that one female Eastern Grey will have on an average only one joey survive to adulthood in her life span.
- * Kangaroos and wallabies have been given the status of ‘pests’ or only useful when they have an economic value as a commodity. Their natural unique beauty and presence in our country should hold it’s own value.

There is much we can learn from these unique animals such as;

- their methods of communicating,
- their capacity for caring and nurturing, - even demonstrations of love.
- their attachment systems are very sensitive and similar to human attachment systems.
- their mob cohesion and relationships are intricate with unique methods of communicating and caring for each other. eg; older joeys will take younger ones up to the carer when they need to be pouched.

4. Loss of habitat and freedom to move. With the increased development for housing in the central west over the past 30 years, the natural habitat of the macropods has been reduced and disrupted by

- * fencing
- * roads and traffic
- * larger expansive properties developed into multiple smaller ones.

Many rescues of orphaned joeys and injured macropods are due to being caught on fences or becoming trapped in cattle grates.

5. Who is responsible for safety and care of the dwindling numbers of macropods that don't live in National Parks. Recently there was an article about a person who was trying to relocate a mob of 10 kangaroos from their property as they were going to develop it. They approached National Parks who told them they couldn't remove them and that they should kill them.

Who is responsible for the safety and care of the Australian Wildlife outside National Parks!!

6. Shooters and 'culling' - It should be noted that many joeys who come into the care of wildlife rescuers have been left to die in the pouches of macropods that have been shot and left. On one occasion a person found 2 joeys in pouches of several animals that had been shot and piled up. Although there is guidelines for shooters around what species are permitted to be 'culled', there are too many who shoot first and check later.

It takes one second to kill a macropod. It will take a volunteer wildlife carer 9 months of 24hr, 7 days a week of intensive caring, to raise the orphaned joey to an age it can survive within a new mob.

7. Bushfires . I would be very interested to know what exactly the effects of the last catastrophic widespread bushfires has had on the numbers of Macropods in NSW. Although there were many, many amazing volunteers stepping up for long term and quite traumatising care of the animals, I was gravely concerned about the uncoordinated and often too late effort to rescue injured macropods during the fires. Bushfires are a re-occurring event in Australia and a coordinated wildlife rescue plan should be in place and at the ready.

8. Lack of Support for the unpaid committed volunteer carers. In NSW WIRES is the wildlife rescue service that responds to calls from the public. These people are on the front line. They are provided with some initial training and each carer usually ends up specialising in a particular area. My daughter in Rockley NSW has been caring for Macropods for a few years now. She observes how each one is unique and has it's own personality. She has noticed their reducing numbers and sees every joey's survival as crucial.

Although carers develop their own unique knowledge with their experience, there is so much that is not known about caring for these orphaned joeys. The effects of Trauma and attachment disruption play a big part into whether they live or die. Being close to a heartbeat, immediate response to their crying - yes they cry for their

Mums – particular warmth and pouching, close proximity to mob members even if they are other joeys, timing in and coming out of the pouch, method and care in toileting, getting fluids and formulas to meet individual needs – This is quite a commitment. And often heartbreaking even after months of care. To manage this 24 hr care these volunteers need not only recognition, but solid support and evidence-based knowledge from both professional research and traditional wisdom.

Most carers would say all they want is to be not needed anymore because the mobs are safe not because there are no more left.

9. Lack of safe release properties. After months of raising and caring for joey's one of the biggest problems is the lack of safe release properties for these new little mobs to be released into. There can be quite a bottle neck amongst carers where they can't take any new joeys until the older ones have a safe place to go.

There is very few places for safe soft release of recovered joeys in the central west.

Recommendations.

1. Investment in ongoing research into

A) monitoring numbers / populations of kangaroos and wallabies Blue Mountains and Central Western NSW to clearer inform decision making around culling, and safety

B) monitoring habitat retention and impact of land clearing and development to inform decisions on potential safe zones for native wildlife outside National Parks

C) who is responsible for the care and safety of Native Wildlife including kangaroos and wallabies in the Blue Mountains and Central West and how well are they doing this. (And who is watching who shoots what)

D) the attachment and mob habits of macropods and the effects of trauma and attachment disruption on orphaned joeys to inform evidence based best practice in the caring for them.

2. Commitment to reducing declining numbers of Macropods.

A) re assessing culling and commercial shooting numbers.

B) habitat safety – ensure sensitive habitats are secured for ongoing habitation.

C) Wildlife Safety Zones – These would be areas of like Green Zones that are set up in wildlife sensitive areas outside National Parks in semi urban/rural areas. There would be Signs and education around the Zones indication that all care needs to be afforded to local Wildlife – ie Reduction of speed during dawn and dusk (sort of like school zones), signs with number to call for injured or threatened wildlife regularly posted with in zones, Specialised Rangers to enforce and monitor care and protection of wildlife in these zones.

D) Driver Education – Learner Drivers include driving safely in country areas, dawn and dusk reduced speed, what to do if you hit an animal.

3. Public Education

A) Advertising on Media and in schools on 'Looking after our Wildlife' – factual information and promoting uniqueness and how people can help. ie putting WIRES number in your phone.

B) Education on what to do if you hit an animal ie safe stopping, who to call, how to check a pouch for a joey.

C) Documentaries on the facts not the fiction about Macropods

4. Support for Volunteer Carers to increase survival rate of injured macropods and orphaned joeys.

A). 24hr on call professional wildlife specialist veterinary support

B) resources and supplies provided

C) ongoing training opportunities and info share networks

D) sustainable and coordinated intake and release support programs.

E) Guaranteed safe soft release properties.

F) some reimbursement of ongoing costs – travel, laundry, amenities.

G) Opportunity for priority access to relevant University courses after 2 years volunteering with Wildlife Rescue Organisation. Eg WIRES

H) Volunteers working 24 hr x 7 days per week with 7 plus animals after 6 months recognised as equal to 40 hrs per week volunteer work with Centrelink enabling them

exemption from job seeking obligations. They are not getting paid but they are working longer hours than most who are in paid jobs. They are often using their own resources and trying to keep financially viable through part time work.

5. Bushfire, Flood and Draught Wildlife Rescue Plan. In the past we have relied on the resilience of the bush to redress the impact on our flora and fauna. This is no longer the case.

A) Set up localised bodies of trained volunteers and professionals (National park rangers and vets) to be ready. This could be done like the neighbourhood community fire units with regular practice training and rescue kits.

B) Formulate a body of relevant organisations and volunteers to devise a coordinated rescue plan at the ready whenever there is a natural disaster due to climate change. ie the who, when, what and where details of rescuing wildlife before, during and after an event.

I am aware that many of my suggestions would require considerable resources, however the hap hazard financial responses (though often well meaning) to recent disasters, has left much for some and nothing for many and with limited effect in saving wildlife victims. It will take substantial resources, but I feel a better informed and planned approach to caring and saving our wildlife will be far more economically viable and environmentally responsible.

Thank you for your time to consider my submission.

Kindly,

Kathleen O'Connor