

Submission
No 340

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

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially
Confidential

INQUIRY INTO THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF KNAGAROOS AND OTHER MACROPODS IN NSW:

Background:

Whilst my husband and I have been residents of Canberra since 1995, we have also been the custodian of 90 acres in Runnyford, NSW, which we have dedicated to wildlife and nature for the past 13 years. Prior to my husband's and my move to Canberra, I lived in NSW most of my life since 1971.

To ensure there are no conflict of interest, I am writing this submission based upon my personal experiences as a landowner (custodian), animal activist, former wildlife carer and current animal activist.

Prior to the Black Summer bushfires in 2019, my husband and I travelled via vehicle regularly between the two properties. This involves approx. 290km round trip every other weekend.

I would also like to state that wildlife, like all animals, have no concept of human based boundaries. The close proximity and the fact that NSW engulfs the Capital Territory should be highly considered. The observations of these transient marsupials which Canberran experience should therefore be given equal weighting into any findings and recommendations. That is, I strongly believe my experience of Canberran macropods is relevant to the issues surrounding the health and wellbeing of macropods in NSW.

1 (a): historical and long-term health and wellbeing indicators of kangaroos, and other macropods, at the local, bioregional and state levels, including the risk of localised extinction in New South Wales

Prior to the fires and the COVID restrictions, we had a local mob of eastern grey kangaroos approx. ten to fifteen regularly visit/traverse our property. We could only count them in the early mornings prior to venturing outside ourselves, as the noise of our movements quickly stirred and scared them off. The amount of droppings were also proof of their numbers and their migration strategy as I believe by the amount of droppings when the young adults would venture further away and not return. Wallaby sightings were not a common as they are much more timid and tend to travel alone. I know there was at least four male swamp wallabies that traversed the property – I never saw a pouch or at foot joey wallaby. Since the bushfires, whilst I have not been down there as often, I haven't seen any kangaroos, but there must be couple due to the small amounts of droppings. Of course, these may be wallabies as I am not a scat expert. They may also be visiting from the neighbouring property (over 1km away), as there is a kangaroo rehabilitation centre. It's been over a year and I strongly believe all the wild kangaroos that where semi-resident are gone forever. I hope to get more vegetation to attract the wild macropods back, but need the soil to heal first.

Every year since 2010 I have noticed an average fresh road kills including 5-7 kangaroos and at least 1-2 wallabies and 5-6 wombats on the trips down to the coast. In late 2015 on a drive from Canberra to Batemans Bay I counted two fresh kills kangaroo kills, 1 wallaby and four wombats, but was shocked at the large number of decaying carcasses on the road. I made a mental note to start counting the roadkill even through sometimes we didn't go down for a month.

In May 2019, on the way back to Canberra after my father's funeral I was mortified to count 32 kangaroos, 11 wallabies and 37 wombats died on the side of the road with less than a handful of extremely decayed bodies. The numbers horrified me, as in the three (3) I had not travel due to my father illness. The fresh roadkill was so high, that I have never forgotten. It was by far the largest fresh kills I have counted.

Due to stressful memories of losing everything we cared for at our Runnyford property to the bushfires, I have only ventured back a handful of times since 2020. One trip in May 2020 I witness zero (0) road kills of any animals. This was the first time since 2000 that I had witness no deaths on the side of the road not even decayed bodies. Of course this may also be due to the lack of vehicles in general due to COVID lock down. In June, July and August were similar although I only went down twice during the three months – not even a carcass. It wasn't until Christmas 2020 that I counted 1 kangaroo and 2 wallabies, no wombats. Jan-Mar 2021 a total of 1 kangaroo decayed body, but 2 wallabies, 1 wombat and 1 possum, which where recent.

I become an on-call wildlife rescuer prior to the bushfires (May 2019) and have not stopped since. Whilst not directly in NSW, I have witnessed a 90% drop in kangaroo road kills in the Canberra region. Prior to the bushfires, in early 2019, I was called to pouch check a road kill every 8 days. That approximately 35 kangaroos in 10mths. On three (3) occasions, in May-June, I removed three at different times of the day, but always on the same side of the road. Heading north from Kambah to just past Bruce in Canberra. All were males, except one which was a double fatality of mother with joey approx. 8mths old. No pouch joeys were rescued, actually not one kangaroo survived. That was right up until COVID lock down on 23 March 2020. Since May 2020 to date, I have only witness/checked three (3), two young males (less than <40kg) and one larger male (>50kg).

1 (b): the accuracy with which kangaroo, and other macropod, numbers are calculated when determining population size, and the means by which the health and wellbeing of populations is assessed

Please refer to my notes from 1(a) above for numbers and personal data.

1(c): threats to kangaroo, and other macropod, habitat, including the impact of:
(i) climate change, drought and diversion and depletion of surface water sources,
(ii) bushfires,

(iii) land clearing for agriculture, mining and urban development,
(iv) the growing prevalence of exclusion fencing which restricts and disrupts the movement of kangaroos,

In late 2016, a neighbour decided to clear approximately six (6) metres (3metre either side of our adjoining boundaries) to make room for a fence (without our permission) and a driveway. The habitat destruction alone was immense with some 80+ year old native trees being felled. Many of the local mob where displaced and migrated approx. 5km-10Km away. Only 10 of the original mob returned slowly approx. 6-10mths later.

The new fence also means that macropod can no longer move as freely throughout the area. This new fence and driveway (approx. 1.2km long), had previously been eroded making it easy passage in the many years previously. We had purchased the land in Feb 2008 and the fence back then was already missing in several areas, with decayed posts tilted to 45 degree or already lying flat on the ground. The majority of the mob (approx. 30) never returned. Another neighbour (7km away) was happy to see her mob expand dramatically during this same period.

On each trip prior to the land clearing, we would see at least 2-3 swamp wallabies along the narrow strip of road 1.5km from the main turn off to our driveway turn off. After the land clearing, we have only ever seen the one and these sightings have now totally disappeared.

Prior to the land clearing, on at least one of the three (3) nights we stayed at Runnyford, I would hear at lot of hops and being a light sleeper, I would get up in the early hours (2-3am) to witness the silhouettes and shadows made by the moon light of the local mod slowly grazing close to and around our house. The wallabies would move faster through the scrub land and the distinct single thumping would indicate a lone animal. After the land clearing it was extremely rare to hear any night or dawn migration sound from any macropods.

In late 2019, before the bushfires, the greater Canberra community (including surrounding areas) join forces to provide water for our wildlife. The drought saw many animals venture closer to residential areas in search for water both in Canberra, Yass, Goulburn and Queanbeyan. By October 2019 the four major dams supplying the ACT, including Googong Dam based in NSW but managed by ACT, had reached their lowest capacity since 1997 and fallen below 54 per cent. All our wildlife were suffering and conservative estimate suggested that more than **1 billion native animals had perished**. This was a few months before the NYE 2019 bushfires. Only the lucky animals that were more mobile like macropods could reach human-made water stations. PVC pipes had never ever been in so much demand. I witnessed kangaroos along our street in Curtin (ACT)for the first time since the 2003 bushfires. Our dam in Runnyford(NSW) has the capacity of approximate 3ML. This was down to 33%. I am confident there is some correlation between the large number of road kill and the drought which forced so many animals to look for water, risking their lives by crossing borders and roads to reach dams, creeks and human made watering stations.

The recent bushfire destroyed 90% of the 90 acres property which we created (NSW) as a nature corridors for wildlife. Along with flora, various reptiles, nesting bird, possums, I discovered three macropods – carcasses in the 50 acres we have explored. I have not had the courage or strength, to date, to explore the remaining 40acre. The natural habitat including the 100% destruction to the five acres of she-oak (Casuarinas) which Kangaroos and wallabies feed off and our native ant mounds have also been totally destroyed. Again these sources of food are critical to the diet of macropods, and from which kangaroos obtain much needed minerals and protein. For this reason I believe we have not had kangaroos return to our property. Since the bushfires it has been deafeningly quiet. So much so, the stress of the knowledge these animals are still not returning, has made it impossible for me to sleep over.

I am not confident when the land will heal sufficiently to support any number of macropods. We will have to continue to supplement their diet by manually bringing in process pellets and cuttings from properties which were not so damaged by the fires. As kangaroos are unique in their ability to control their breeding during time of stress (drought, lack of food, etc.), I also believe this is having a huge impact on the low numbers we are seeing both in Canberra and more specifically in Runnyford.

In October 2020 the West Basin development project commenced near Curtin (ACT). Whilst I know this is not near the NSW boarder, I would like to submit that the local mob which fluctuated between 25-40 strong, have all disappeared. The noise from heavy machinery will continue for an additional 12mths and these kangaroos have all been displaced. The domino impact of mobs moving into neighbouring territory, caused by loud noises from heavy machinery, as well known, has a large impact on stress of macropods resulting in myopathy. It is unknown how many perish, but I can confirm that there has been zero (0) sighting of any kangaroos on the adjoining horse paddocks and fields to date.

1 (d): current government policies and programs for kangaroo management, including:
(i) the method used for setting quotas for kangaroo culling,
(ii) the management of licences to cull kangaroos,
(iii) temporary drought relief policies and programs.

My experience in NSW on policies and programs for kangaroo management is indirect and through wildlife carers I know personally.

Carers are confessing constantly of the stress they experience knowing that their direct neighbours have no regard for the animals in care or those rehabilitated and released. The request from carers for transferring joeys to other carers who can commence the soft release process as their own homes are unsafe for the orphaned joeys to be released, is growing in demand. Those that live next door to shooters who report have late 'Shooting parties', live in constant fear of being shot from stray bullets, as shooters come within metres of their homes. This has escalated in the recent years with the NSW Government relaxing regulations on kangaroo shooting on private property. These lax regulations do

not require any skills in marksmanship or monitoring of rifle caliber. In a country that is suppose to have the most stringent gun laws, this falls nothing short of hypocrisy. **There is also no monitoring of the disposal of carcasses with numerous photos freely available from neighbouring residence posting on social media, including severed heads, paws, tails and intestines left fully exposed. This is extremely distressing for anyone who feel even the slightest compassion towards kangaroos, and will definitely have an impact on both the mental health and potential suicide rates of wildlife carer and animal activists alike.**

During last years ACT Cull I patrolled the road surrounding the reserve that were earmarked for shooting. I was out every shooting night and had to slow traffic down as Kangaroos become disoriented and jumped out onto the main roads (most 80km/hr) in their quests to escape the noise, smell, and sight of their family's being shot. This is typical reactions from kangaroos which must also happened on all properties and places where shooting them is allowed. Of course, the real number of fatalities, from those I could not protect from traffic or crashing into trees, fences and myopathy will never be known.

It is also worth noting that Canberran kangaroos, being a manageable sized area to study and mimic the behaviours of their NSW cousins, tend to be mostly medium size males and females. In the six weeks I monitored the nightly shootings, I only managed to sight one (1) large buck around 70kg. He was approx. 5'10" but in full flight over 6'5". I followed him slowly several metres behind as he headed to the NSW boarder only 5km away. He attempted to return to protect his mob that were being shoot in the reserve, but stopped several metres away in a field to observed and wait. The policy in the ACT is to shoot the males first – obviously the slower females and young are easier targets – not one other member from his mob appeared and after the shooting stopped for over an hour he remained still, just over 2km from where he jumped the reserve fence not moving, just staring into the dark reserve.

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

If an independent enquiry is agreed, it would be critical to contact the kangaroo carers around the ACT/NSW boarder to identify, how many joey's during the ACT cull are handed over. If numbers go up during this period, it would show a direct correlation of mortality rates of joeys and the unrecorded deaths of orphaned young. Of course most are never found and die a slow and pain way, mostly starving or of hyperthermia.

1 (h): current and alternative measures to provide an incentive for and accelerate public and private conservation of kangaroos and other macropods.

It is impossible to ignore the evidence the impact of:

- the drought leading up to 2019 bushfires

- the NYE 2019 bushfires;
- the February 2020 torrential rains;
- the millions of hectares in habitat loss; and
- the constant strain development;

had had and continues to have on the lives of our wildlife, particularly on kangaroos.

The governments of NSW and ACT must, due to the proximity of the borders, work in unison to understand and identify an accurate demographic of the macropod that traverse its borders.

Landowner and farmer must be provided incentives to move away from non-economical and climate damaging out dated and under resourced methods. They should be assisted in embracing technology and alternate farming techniques so they can transition towards more sustainable land management practices.

By rejuvenating large parcels of arid and non-viable properties and regenerating and restoring the land to its former health, it would encourage kangaroos to reside peacefully and self-managed their population as they have done for a millennium before European settlement. Thereby avoiding the need for shooters, and for humans to obtain firearms and bullet which is both negative on their mental health and the mental health of the community directly around them.

This of course would require the removal of all segregating equipment including barbed wire and exclusion fencing from private properties and reserve land. During the transition and as an urgent necessity, would be the development of overpass corridors for roads that separate one area of wildlife habitat from another. The drop in vehicle-animal collisions would not only drop the insurance rates allowing more motorist to afford the full comprehensive cover, but would result in direct life saving for both human and animal. The very notion that these nature corridors would save just one life should be argument alone to develop such projects. It would also provide not only numerous jobs, but the work would be evenly distributed to all parts of NSW, helping the economy and neutralising the impact on the environment.

The kangaroo is our national icons with many city residence, who want to experience seeing kangaroos in a natural habitat, could benefit from these 'eco' tours and outdoor activities. These corridors could also extend outdoor activities and contributes to the health of both human and all animals, not just kangaroos. Regional tourist could see the largest benefit with many people already wanting to leave the city on short breaks or buy rural properties for future COVID lock downs.

A kangaroo national park which traverses the entire State, would not only see it obtain worldwide recognition, but would attract the international dollars to obtain the experience, once international boarder are opened.

The benefits are numerous.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in such an enquiry.