

**Submission
No 350**

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

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Kangaroo Inquiry April 2021

Kangaroo – Inquiry into the health and wellbeing of kangaroos and other macropods in New South Wales

Dear committee,

The ongoing commercial slaughter of our national native animal, our beautiful kangaroo, an Australian icon, is a disgrace. Kangaroos have lived at peace in Australia with the Indigenous community for thousands and thousands of years. They are on our dollar coin. In fact back in 1938 the reverse design of the Australian penny was changed to feature a kangaroo. The kangaroo is even the symbol of our national airline Qantas, and is also the logo of the 'Australian Made' tag for items made in Australia. And yet kangaroos are being slaughtered and the NSW Government is allowing this to happen. How can the NSW Government allow one of our most loved native animal, recognised and loved globally, to be slaughtered? Especially when they use the kangaroo symbol for profit. It's a national disgrace.

The commercial kangaroo industry hides the truth of what really happens to these beautiful kangaroos. What they don't tell the public is that adult kangaroos are shot and beheaded in the middle of the night, as their joeys are bludgeoned to death or decapitated beside them, while the adult kangaroos are strung up on utes to be driven for hours on end, transported in the open air, gathering dust and flies, then stored in chillers and may not be transported to processors for up to 14 days after being shot.

To know that kangaroos are the victims of the largest land-based commercial wildlife slaughter in the world is a tragic fact. The fact the commercial slaughter industry is still such a secretive and largely unregulated industry, is unacceptable. It's time the Industry is shown to be what it is – barbaric, cruel, abusive and inhumane. It's time the media and the public stop buying into the lies spread by a desperate industry with no morals.

The culling of kangaroos is inhumane and barbaric, and should be stopped immediately. We don't know how many kangaroos died in the horrific bushfires of 2019/2020 and yet the NSW Government is continuing to slaughter them.

Kangaroos already suffer so much, with numbers declining due to drought caused by climate change, and human activities like land clearing which is increasing while the kangaroo habitat is decreasing.

Here are the main issues in the industry that needs to cease this disgusting practice of commercial slaughter of beloved kangaroos

1) Female kangaroos slaughtered and joeys bludgeoned to death

Despite claims to the contrary by the kangaroo industry that female kangaroos are not targeted, government data obtained from the states reveals that every year hundreds of thousands of female kangaroos continue to be shot by the kangaroo meat and skins industry, resulting in the brutal death and orphaning of hundreds of thousands of pouch and at foot young. The code of practice governing the commercial slaughter of kangaroos has recently been updated and shooters now have full permission to shoot female kangaroos, including those carrying pouch or young at foot. This recent change in the code of practice, and the open season on female

kangaroos and their young, reflects the industry's desperate need to maintain kill rates and maximise profits.

It's one thing to kill adult kangaroos, it's another thing to rip the joeys out of the mother's pouch and bash them to death or decapitate them, while the at-foot dependent joeys are left to die as orphans from starvation, dehydration, stress, predation, or exposure. Hundreds of thousands of joeys are dying this way every year in Australia at the hands of the commercial kangaroo industry, and with the full support of the Australian Federal and State governments. How is this acceptable? Why are there no enforceable codes of conduct for the industry? Why isn't the industry regulated? The industry can keep getting away with these barbaric slaughter practices because they can, because it's acceptable by Agriculture Ministers, by the Industry, and by the farmers.

2) Exclusion Fencing is killing our kangaroos

In official documents, the NSW Government actively encourages landowners to trap, starve, and kill contained kangaroos. They round them up and push them through a one-way gate out on to the road.

Exclusion fencing is tall, strong, and deadly – used to intentionally kill animals like kangaroos. The increase in exclusion fencing for kangaroos is deadly for them. The fences can quite easily go for hundreds of metres, leaving the kangaroos disorientated and sometimes, with no other alternative, but to go back the way they came, forcing them to cross back over the road into the path of an oncoming vehicle or road train traveling at high speeds.

Trapped in a confined area or hanging upside down by their feet, animals caught in exclusion fences or funnelled into contained areas suffer a long, agonising death of exposure, dehydration, starvation, stress, and predation.

The NSW Government also funds the roll out of exclusion fencing, and there's no published data on how much funding has been given out, let alone how many animals are killed because of it.

Exclusion fencing is inhumane, distressing, a disgusting practice by farmers and the industry, and shouldn't be allowed. The fact the Government willfully allows this to happen, willfully allows kangaroos to be rounded up, pushed through a one way gate, to be road kill by fast moving road trains or other vehicles that don't stop if they're unlucky enough to step in their path, are basically condemning them to death by allowing exclusion fencing. This is a disgrace.

3) The Government kangaroo counting method is inaccurate and false

In 2011 when government data was independently reviewed, it was found that kangaroos were in serious long-term decline in New South Wales. Exhaustive scientific evidence was submitted detailing critical errors in government population surveys; flaws in the harvest model; systematic inflation of kangaroo numbers; and over-allocation of quotas. Yet despite that, the Government did nothing about it.

Government population estimates since then show increases that are biologically impossible, ensuring that thousands and thousands of kangaroos continue to be shot from ever-shrinking populations. It's an industrial-scale slaughter of an international icon.

Many people trust almost any fantastic number without much looking around the wildlife-free landscape. The government statistics allow people to be relaxed and comfortable about whatever is meted out about kangaroos.

In policy terms the treatment of ‘common’ species like kangaroos, wallabies, wombats, emus, cockatoos or flying foxes is always framed as one of abundance, as distinct from risk of endangered status — the message is ‘not to worry’. Environmental laws and government policies/budgets for funding research underpin this thinking.

Between June 2018 and the 8 September 2018 permission to kill had gone up 100% to 1,115,422 kangaroos — between commercial and non-commercial permits. In the South East Zone, landholders had more than quadrupled their requests and by September had been granted permission to kill 108,567 kangaroos.

No resources to monitor program

Unfortunately the government had no resources for monitoring any of this, or to check exactly what was being shot and specifically why, or by whom, or whether a landholder or recreational shooter could accomplish a clean head shot. Or what happened to dependent joeys.

The current scientific method of counting kangaroos is flawed, for example NSW is broken up into 15 kangaroo management zones – some zones are only surveyed every 3 years, and when they are surveyed, less than 5% of the zone is surveyed, and it is done via a helicopter, and then the number of kangaroos sighted is multiplied out to cover the entire area. This is a totally inaccurate way to perform any census.

4) Kangaroos are not in plague proportions

If kangaroos are in such plague proportions, why hasn’t any farmer/private land owner come forward to show this is the case on their land? The simple answer is because they can’t. It’s simply not true. As the Australian Wildlife Protection Council Kangaroo Campaign Lead, Mr Chris Lehmann says:

“Talk of plagues should be relegated to COVID-19 and the like. Kangaroo populations have been decimated since European settlement, and the oft-quoted talk of ‘plague numbers’ is a relic colonial era belief entrenched in our culture. We are yet to see kangaroos in numbers that are in large proportion to their environment; and we challenge anyone who claims to have a plague on their hands to prove it or desist from disinformation”, he continued.

Mr. Lehmann said — “The population counts for kangaroos are based on sampling plus dubious adjustment factors — the end result is an exaggerated official population number, which in turn means that very large numbers of kangaroos are currently being killed then causing the populations of these animals to decline rapidly. The population explosions being promoted by governments and others are not occurring. It may be that in this instance kangaroo populations are being displaced by development, mass shooting elsewhere, land clearing or other factors.”

5) Increase in kangaroo kill quotas despite the horror bushfires of 2019/2020

- 3 billion animals died in the Australian bushfires
- We don’t know how many kangaroos died
- 25% of bushland was destroyed in NSW in the fires

And yet the commercial slaughter has continued without a reduction in numbers, in fact the 2020 commercial quotas are higher than 2019 quotas, as follows:

- 2020 kill quota is set at 2,126,176
- 2019 kill quota was 1,838,646

So after the devastating bushfires, the NSW government increased the kill quota by 15%? How is that acceptable? How can the NSW government increase the kill quota despite knowing 3 billion animals died in the bushfires, and 25% of NSW bushland was destroyed?

6) Barbaric, inhumane killing – leaving kangaroos dying a slow, painful death

Kangaroos shot in the field happens at night, in remote locations with only a spotlight from a ute shining into the vegetation from a distance. Evidence gathered shows up to 40% of kangaroos shot do not die quickly, and do not die from a single shot to the head. This means 4 out of 10 kangaroos are only wounded and die a slow painful death.

Kangaroos live in terror every night. Recent research shows that the behaviour of mobs of kangaroos is fundamentally altered due to commercial hunting. They exhibit stress and fear, and joeys in hunted mobs do not engage in play behaviour.

7) Kangaroos are not pests

Kangaroos are uniquely adapted to Australian conditions and have lived here for up to 20 million years – how can a native animal be a pest? Kangaroos are a keystone species, which means their grazing, breeding habits, movement and behaviour have evolved to be perfectly adapted to the Australian environment.

The gentle impression left on the soil by their jumping movements leaves minimal impact as they travel. And because their thick fur traps spores and seeds, which can then be distributed around the landscape as they move, leaving them in ready-made holes created by their paw tracks, they play an important role in maintaining levels of vegetation diversity.

Kangaroos will rarely overgraze in any particular area and leave enough grass over and habitat for other plants and animals. This is possible because they have both upper and lower teeth, allowing them to bite off the tips of grass, rather than rip grass by the roots as cattle do. When kangaroos eat a clump of grass, they will only eat a portion of the grass, leaving some to continue to grow and let photosynthesis do its job and replenish the grass.

There is 30 years of science that show kangaroos DO NOT compete with livestock for food. Cows and other introduced ruminants "rip" the grass out of the ground roots and all, leaving nothing left, removing a layer of topsoil that isn't easily replaced. So who is the more destructive animal to the environment?

Kangaroos have successfully been self-sustaining for millennia.

And Kangaroos only consume 13% of the water that a sheep does.

Kangaroos are slow breeders

Kangaroos are intuitive breeders, which means they are able to recognise when there is an inadequate food source, like in times of drought, and postpone reproduction until adequate sources of green feed are available. This means males do not form sperm and females generally

do not conceive unless feed conditions are ideal. A female can even postpone the development of a foetus until an older joey moves out of the pouch, a process called diapause.

Kangaroos only have one baby joey at a time, and each kangaroo will only have 6 – 7 baby joeys in their entire lifetime (they don't breed like rabbits who have 5 – 6 babies at a time!)

Baby joey mortality is very high, around 50%.

8) Unclean and unhygienic slaughter practices

According to government guidelines, kangaroos can be shot at 5pm, and do not have to be refrigerated until 2 hours after sunrise, so that is 14 hours hanging on the back of an open truck in the hot Australian bush.

They are transported to chillers (refrigerated containers) via open utes on dusty roads.

It's no wonder kangaroo carcasses are riddled with bacteria and prone to disease.

In 2015 independent testing was done that confirmed kangaroo samples were contaminated with E-coli and Salmonella.

The transference of zoonotic diseases to humans is creating a world health crisis.

COVID-19 came from humans consuming wildlife.

9) Indigenous Australians revere the kangaroo

Indigenous Australians have lived in harmony with kangaroos for tens of thousands of years. There's an article from the Australian Wildlife Protection Council written by a first nations person; Ro Godwin, in which she says:

"Ignorance is what the Kangaroo Killing Industry thrives on. It's what the Kangaroo Killing Industry and their affiliates don't tell you that is of greatest concern. As an Indigenous woman, I've been exposing the Kangaroo Killing Industry for decades and I'm always amazed at the spin people blindly believe about kangaroos including that "Indigenous people ate them for thousands of years".

"Kangaroo are a Sacred Totem Animal to many of we Indigenous people. They are a Creator Spirit and The Dreaming of Country and holding Kangaroo as Totem means for many Indigenous people we never ate it, or eat it ... ever."

10) Other factors contributing to the decline of the kangaroo

Despite drought, climate change, and the severe bushfires we had in 2019/2020 where 3 billion animals died, land clearing is continuing at unprecedented rates by the NSW Government. It's out of control. Land is being cleared at the rate of 14 football fields a day in northern NSW.

When we should be planting more trees, protecting what precious forests and vegetation we have left, the NSW Government is allowing farmers to clear more land, allowing logging companies to fell more trees, allowing property developers to clear more land for housing developments. The Agriculture Minister, Adam Marshall misrepresents the truth. How can he say the state's farmers are "the best environmental stewards we have in NSW – their businesses depend on a sustainable environment", when they are one of the worst offenders when it comes to land clearing? You only have to visit their lands and you will barely see a tree anywhere, so

how is that sustainable good practice? Simply it's not. It's more lies and misinformation spread by the Government.

In addition to land clearing, the impact of deforestation, housing development, drought, depletion of water in rivers and dams, and bushfires, are all contributing to the demise of the kangaroo, and yet despite that, the NSW Government is continuing to support the on-going kangaroo slaughter and top up a dying industry.

11) Kangaroos are not in plague proportions

People believe the government, media and industry rhetoric that kangaroos are in plague proportions, and that the commercial kangaroo slaughter is the best managed wildlife 'management' program in the world. Neither of these things are true.

People often quote a figure of 50 million as the number of kangaroos in Australia. There is no factual basis for this. It is already estimated that their current population is only around 11% of what it was at the time of European settlement in NSW.

The NSW Government has had to suspend the commercial slaughter in 4 of the 15 zones in NSW because the kangaroo numbers have dropped so significantly. In addition, the commercial industry in West Australia has been shut down due to no kangaroos. In QLD, several zones have been shut down because they have run out of kangaroos. The government's own data shows that the commercial industry actual 'kill numbers' have been steadily decreasing for the last 11 years.

We know kangaroo numbers are dwindling and we have grave concerns for the future of the species – many wildlife carers and rescuers are reporting local extinctions of Eastern Grey kangaroos for example.

And I know several people who have driven for hours up and down the East Coast of Australia and did not see one single kangaroo. Anywhere!

In conclusion, there is no reason why kangaroos should be slaughtered. To summarise:

- Government and Industry lie about the number of kangaroos that are left to push their own agenda, and the media and the public believe everything they read
- The Government uses out of date, inaccurate, greatly extrapolated counts that are completely out of touch with the reality, all to leave a false sense of security for the public, thinking we have millions of kangaroos left, when the reality is starkly the opposite
- Industry and vested interests peddle the lies that kangaroos are pests which is completely false. They are not pests as they are a keystone species so they work with native flora and fauna, not against it, for example they only eat a portion of the grass, leaving some to continue to grow and let photosynthesis do its job and replenish the grass
- Shooting of the kangaroos is inaccurate and they are often left to suffer, slow, painful deaths because the shooting is left to part-time or weekend shooters with little to no experience because there's no money in it for professional shooters. So you have these inexperienced shooters in the middle of the night, in pitch black conditions with only a spotlight from their ute, from a distance who are expected to get a clean head shot? There is no monitoring of the Industry, which means these shooters aren't held

accountable if they fail to comply with the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 codes and regulations

- There are unhygienic food standards in the transportation practices of kangaroos from shooters who have to travel several hours to get to a refrigeration facility, with carcasses of kangaroos strung up on the back of an open ute in often hot Australian conditions
- Kangaroos are not in plague proportions – where is the proof? Why hasn't any farmer or land owner come forward to prove this is the case? Because it's simply untrue
- In addition to the kangaroo slaughter by the Industry, other significant factors are exacerbating the decline of our beautiful native animal, like severe drought and man-made activities like land clearing by the Agriculture Industry for farming land, logging of our beautiful forests and trees by the forestry corporation, and clearing of land for large property developers to build more housing developments
- If Agriculture Ministers like the Victorian Minister for Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas says, "Cruelty to animals is not tolerated and will not be tolerated," why is there bludgeoning and decapitation of joeys in pouches? Why are many kangaroos left in agony to die a slow, painful death because they're not killed cleanly? Why is it okay to leave at-foot joeys behind to die of either starvation, predation, dehydration or stress or exposure?
- Exclusion fencing is killing our kangaroos. Exclusion fencing is tall, strong, and deadly – used to intentionally kill animals like kangaroos. The increase in exclusion fencing for kangaroos is deadly for them. The fences can quite easily go for hundreds of metres, leaving the kangaroos disorientated and sometimes, with no other alternative, but to go back the way they came, forcing them to cross back over the road into the path of an oncoming vehicle or road train traveling at high speeds. Or they are trapped in a confined area or hanging upside down by their feet, animals caught in exclusion fences or funnelled into contained areas suffer a long, agonising death of exposure, dehydration, starvation, stress, and predation.
- Governments are hypocrites, unethical. They are happy to use the kangaroo logo for tourism and selling Australian products, and yet have no qualms about allowing them to be shot and slaughtered. It's a national disgrace.

Nobody monitors the kangaroo slaughter industry. No shooter is punished for cruelty, and the industry is the epitome of cruel. How is the practice of joeys in pouches of dead mothers being bashed against a towbar, or decapitated, legal? And yet it is completely legal, as it's allowed under the code.

How is at foot joeys left to die from starvation, predation, dehydration, stress or exposure acceptable? It's simply cruelty to animals which the NSW Government clearly condones.

The NSW Government should not be supporting such a cruel industry. Kangaroos should be revered and protected before it's too late, and before it will be another wild-life species relegated to the history books, especially as Australia has one of the highest rates of wild-life extinction in the world.

The kangaroo slaughter industry must be shut down, and stronger protection is required for our beautiful native animal before they disappear for good.

Yours sincerely,

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