

**Submission
No 351**

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

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SUBMISSION TO NSW PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO KANGAROOS IN NSW

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I have spent my working life primarily as a teacher of biology and other sciences at the secondary and upper-secondary levels. I have also had a keen interest in Australian history. Relevant to this also, I was a Menzies-era national serviceman rated as a second-class shot (one of only four in my company) and have used Lee-Enfield .303s, Bren guns and Owen guns on firing ranges. So I am no novice when it comes to the use of firearms. I have also as a licensed hunter shot vermin species (foxes and rabbits mainly; never kangaroos or other macropods) on our cattle property in NW NSW.

My principal concerns are as follows:

1. The wildlife laws of NSW are neither publicly obeyed nor enforced. Protected species regarded by landholders as pests, including emus, grey and red kangaroos and wallabies, are culled by a number of those landholders without regard to anything beyond considerations such as protection of pastures, fences and crops from emus and macropods, and to a lesser extent, from wombats. Though I and my partners have stopped cropping our land, we can understand this attitude.
2. Emus, whose egg clutches and nests when found by pastoralists are routinely smashed, are also fast disappearing in places where they were common before cropping began.
3. National and state parks are commonly regarded as giving support and refuge to the above species, from which they can emerge periodically to ravage farms. I have encountered people who on occasion take the law into their own hands on this issue, and go armed into the parks on search and destroy missions. I have also encountered the odd park ranger who has a mob of his own cattle happily grazing in the land subject to his protection as a ranger.
4. I happen to spend a lot of time in the ACT, and am familiar with its recurring kangaroo culls and the political issues around them, and am concerned by the long term implications and effects of present hunting and culling practices.
5. In NSW in my experience, dead kangaroos are commonly left to rot where they fall and become food for carrion-eaters like crows and magpies. In the context of the cull, this as far as I am concerned is as it should be.
6. In the ACT, commercial shooters are possibly still able to sell kangaroo carcasses into the pet meat trade. Either way the shooter will incline to target animals *seen as the biggest pest, or the biggest lump of saleable meat*. The shooter has a built-in incentive to target the biggest and the best, and the 'fittest' in the Darwinian sense..
7. My principal concern over this is regarding the slow genetic drift that is inevitably taking place in the targeted species. It can be likened to the 'long thaw' that the whole planet is presently going through thanks to climate change.
8. I have written an article entitled *Guns Genes and Time* for my weblog on this matter, which can be found at <https://noahsarc.wordpress.com/2014/12/26/guns-genes-and-time/>
9. Wild carnivores hunting kangaroos include dingoes, and packs of domestic dogs gone feral. Before the arrival in Australia of the ancestral Aborigines (perhaps as far back as 110,000 years BP) kangaroos had abundant natural predators. As well as thylacines (otherwise known as 'Tasmanian tigers' and 'Tasmanian wolves') there was also (*Megalanina prisca*, the largest terrestrial lizard known. It was a giant goanna or monitor lizard up to 5 metres long, and would probably have regarded a komodo dragon or modern saltwater crocodile as a tasty mid-morning snack. See

<https://australian.museum/learn/australia-over-time/extinct-animals/megalania-prisca/>).

10. Predation by the above wild carnivores as well as that carried out by Aboriginal hunters up to 1788 would have selected **out** the weakest and slowest individuals among the kangaroo and other hunted species, and would have selected **in** the fittest in all respects.
11. However, gun hunting inevitably changes all of that. Using a rifle of whatever power fitted with a telescopic sight, a human hunter of otherwise average ability can assume for himself the ecological role of the most powerful carnivore around. He can select the biggest and fleetest of the target species with no difference in effort on his part from that required for smallest and slowest. In other words, he does the very opposite from the normal culling practices of normal animal husbandry, scientific stock breeding and for that matter, aboriginal hunting with spears and hunting boomerangs. Whether he realises it or not, his role in our part of the biosphere is as a selection agent.
12. The late zoologist Professor Jock Marshall of Monash University (see <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/marshall-alan-john-jock-11060>) was an ardent conservationist. He wrote once in a newspaper article I saw that he did not mind seeing the skittled roadkill bodies of Australian wild animals as he was driving around in the Australian countryside, because that meant that they were around. But one sees less and less of such today, particularly since the *de facto* reality of open slather on wildlife was introduced by the present and previous NSW governments in an example of bipartisanship 'on the quiet.' The odd lawyer may testify otherwise, but one **never** encounters in the media these days stories of farmers, graziers and others being prosecuted for illegal killing of wildlife of any kind. **The wildlife protection laws in NSW are a total dead letter, and result in no prosecutions for offenders.**
13. The above leads me to conclude that the familiar grey and red kangaroos and other macropods of Australia are presently on the same slow and steady course towards extinction previously followed by the thylacine. Future generations may learn on the evening TV news that there have been a number of interesting but as-yet-unconfirmed reports of sightings of the Eastern grey kangaroo, "thought to be extinct up till now, just like its cousin the red Kangaroo. .." The same news crops up periodically regarding the thylacine, but with decreasing frequency these days. In any case, any thylacine survivors would probably have a genetic base so narrow that even if a few were to be found, it would be too late anyway to save the species, which would likely proceed on a slow decline into what Shakespeare called "death's dateless night."

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NSW AND ACT GOVERNMENTS

1. **Remember: extinction is forever.** Or as the American singer Joni Mitchell put it: "you don't know what you've got till it's gone."
2. **Start enforcing the existing wildlife preservation laws.** Wildlife protection and preservation has very wide popular support. John Howard provided a text-book example for the whole world on how a politician can use a noisy crowd of opponents to his or her own political advantage when he went out publicly campaigning for his gun laws, while conspicuously wearing a highly newsworthy flak jacket under his coat. The members of the gun lobby he stood before howled for his blood, and he did nothing to quieten them down. It was the national TV coverage, including them at their blood-curdling wildest and noisiest, that he was interested in. The more rabid they got, the better he appeared to like it, which only drove them wilder. The gun lobby has since worked hard to weaken those laws introduced by Howard, and with some success, but Howard arguably saved many Australian lives in the process, and deserves to be remembered for it. **Well publicised prosecutions of a few violators of**

the wildlife protection laws could likewise work wonders. (See <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/apr/25/how-australias-global-gold-standard-on-gun-control-is-being-eroded>)

3. **Where scientifically sound reasons exist for culling** wild populations of macropods, particularly in situations where their natural predators such as dingoes have been hunted out, **use bounties to licensed hunters and such to encourage them to select out the weediest and least robust individuals**, and not the ‘fittest’ in the Darwinian sense.
4. **Do not allow culled wildlife to be on sold into the pet meat, animal skin or other markets.** That creates an incentive to cull the biggest and best. Rather, require that the animals so culled be allowed to become part of the natural food chains and pyramids. This is in the light of point 2 above.
5. **Use existing agencies like the police** to monitor road kills: a very good real-time indicator of what is happening in wildlife populations. Have findings assessed independently to avoid confirmation bias either way. This is particularly important, as directly or indirectly, far too many vested interests favour total extermination of kangaroos and other macropods. They also favour keeping the voting populace at large as ignorant and unaware as possible as to what is really going on in the bush.
6. **Use the education system to raise awareness of the above issues in the next generation.** I would suggest consideration of a series of government literary awards for the best art, essays, YouTube documentaries and such from the nation’s youth, and at many levels: from kindergarten onwards.
7. **The alternative for Australian governments is to join the likes of the Roman Emperor Nero in his particular corridor of fame,** as an archetype and by-word for dithering as disaster descends.