

Submission
No 357

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

Name: Ms Heather Barnes

Date Received: 26 April 2021

My name is Heather Barnes and have been a wildlife carer for over ten years with WIRES NSW. I also have an undergraduate degree in science, majoring in biology and geology, and a Masters degree in Environmental Science. I have travelled extensively throughout Australia for many years, working with a research scientist, and observing and photographing wildlife and landscapes.

Terms of Reference

A). Historical and long term health ...

As a traveller throughout Australia, I have noticed an alarming drop in the numbers of macropods, where once there would be mobs now there is nothing. On a recent trip from Sydney to Canberra we saw no kangaroos at all until we arrived at the sanctuary. There were no roadkill either. That is very unusual and this has happened more noticeably in the last decade.

I was a visitor/volunteer at Boolcoomatta, a Bush Heritage owned property in Western NSW. On that property there was significant evidence of illegal shooting including places where kangaroos had obviously been 'dressed', ie tails and paws and heads had been left scattered around. That can only be as a result of illegal shooting for the kangaroo skin and meat industry.

I have also noted a marked lack of large alpha male kangaroos. These individuals create stability within the mobs as they protect their females and younger smaller males are kept in their place, when these males are removed the females are left to be fought over by smaller males. I have observed that females will remove themselves and their joeys from these packs of young males so placing them in positions where a lone individual can be predated upon much more easily. The long term genetic mix is being weakened by removing the large alpha males, as any student of high school biology learns early on.

C) Threats

Global warming has dried out and changed habitats, and flooding and bushfire events are more frequent and severe. That is well documented. I have seen kangaroos bogged in mud after flood, or, during drought, trying to access water from dams which are basically just dwindled to mud. I don't know how prevalent this is, but it is certainly distressing to witness and to rescue. So many others must just die there in agony. I have witnessed kangaroos driven into suburban areas as the only places that have any green feed at all where they are much more likely to be killed by dogs and cars.

I have seen kangaroos hung up on fences numerous times, and even when released from a fence may be so injured they have to be euthanased. Their traditional roaming nature across the landscape to areas of feed, has been stopped by large exclusion fences, and those fences also allow illegal shooters to pick them off because they are trapped.

In many areas that once had endemic macropods, fires have wiped them out totally. As reserves are fragmented and separated by roads, or cleared for agriculture or housing, there is no wildlife corridor for these animals to move in and therefore repopulate. Royal National Park and Kuringai National Park are obvious examples of this.

Bushfires are becoming more severe, and these animals have no where to run. They are trapped by fencing or killed on roads trying to flee. The most heartbreaking thing I have personally witnessed is wildlife carers and vets trying to save injured and distressed kangaroos while at the

same time kangaroo shooters are driving around looking for individuals to pick off. What sort of madness is this?

The massive and unprecedented fires that affected Australia in 2019-2020 killed an estimated xxx. But macropod numbers have not been counted or even estimated for some years. We have no idea how many are left, yet the macropod killing quota was significantly increased in 2021 to well over 2.2 million.

Global warming means habitats are changing, and animals must move with the changing habitat, yet fencing and land clearing is making this impossible. Local extinctions are already happening.

D) Current government policies for kangaroo management...

I have been caretaking on a friend's property in the Capertee valley. The property adjoins a cattle raising holding. On more than one occasion, shooters have been out late at night and shooting along the fence line adjoining their property. Their residence was within 50m of this fence line. We have been terrorised by the noise, bright spotlights in windows, the obvious danger and proximity and the real possibility of being shot either deliberately or accidentally by shooting this close. It is of course totally illegal to shoot so close to a residence and a fence line but complaints to police were ignored and complaints to the neighbours were met with derision and direct threats of personal harm. There is no personal accountability or regulation as far as I could ascertain regarding illegal shooting of this nature.

Afterwards we have also found dead kangaroos having obviously been shot over the property boundary on a number of occasions, so they are also illegally shooting on neighbour's land in a declared reserve with absolute impunity and no consequences.

I have met with ex kangaroo shooters some of whom are now wildlife carers, who are traumatised by their previous job. They stated to me that a clean head shot to an animal bouncing across uneven terrain, from a moving vehicle at night was next to impossible. They have stated to me that calling it humane is, quote, 'an absolute joke'.

AS the chairperson for a branch of WIRES I have had to counsel carers affected by the stress and PTSD caring for young orphaned macropods and knowing they may be killed upon release. We have had young joeys orphaned by shooters and then handed over to be hand raised after they have killed the mother. What a travesty. It takes months, even over a year of hand raising a kangaroo to a size able to be released, but release sites are not safe, and even those are dwindling from exclusion fencing and land clearing. It is my understanding that over 95% of the land area of NSW macropods can be legally shot. They have very few safe places anymore.

H) Current and Alternative measures...

The way Australia treats macropods is schizophrenic. On the one hand they have been murdered and vilified for literally centuries as their beneficial impact on the landscape is ignored and they are treated as an invasive species. The income from the kangaroo killing industry is miniscule in comparison the over \$8 billion annually from the tourist industry. International tourists are appalled when they learn of the treatment of kangaroos here. They want to see wild kangaroos in the environment, not murdered for soccer boots and pet food. The potential for kangaroos as a tourist attraction is huge, just as the wildlife tourism is in African nations, the spectacle of large numbers of native animals roaming free is very significant income generator for countries that can offer it. It is time we left our murdering, backward and inhumane colonial past behind and embraced the reality of the future. That is kangaroos could be a significant to the economy for

passive tourism in the form of a great kangaroo national park, or to have tourism infrastructure so tourists can see kangaroos in their native habitat. Australia and its fauna are unique, co-existence is possible and desirable and should be celebrated.