

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

**Organisation:** Possumwood Wildlife

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## **Unmasking Australia's dirty little secret: Extreme cruelty in a grotesque practice**

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### **1. Purpose of submission**

This submission addresses parts (a), (c) and (e) of the Terms of Reference. It focuses on the extreme brutality that accompanies the killing of kangaroos as part of the commercial kangaroo killing industry, the approvals given to farmers for kangaroo slaughter, and other gun-holding individuals that see the kangaroo as fair game for killing for entertainment. The difference between this submission and other submissions focusing on cruelty and brutality to kangaroos is that we have the evidence of those animals that were shot but remained alive with horrendous injuries. Over the past 20 years we have witnessed many such cases that have been rescued or brought to us.

The commercial kangaroo killing industry and other Government sanctioned kangaroo killing activities and advocates state repeatedly in defence against accusations of breaches of animal welfare regulations that these animals die an instantaneous and humane death with a single head shot. This is a myth of the most grotesque kind in relation to these gentle animals and a black mark on the nation's reputation and history as a haven for unique wildlife. It is Australia's dirty little secret.

### **2. Our experience**

In the past 20 years as licenced wildlife rescuers and rehabilitators we have attended more than 10,000 rescues, most of which have been kangaroos. More than 5,000 of these animals we have helped through our treatment and recovery centre. We see up to 250 animals a year. We present advanced courses in wildlife rehabilitation for kangaroos. We now are the owners of an NSW Veterinary Board licenced dedicated wildlife veterinary charity hospital. We understand this may now be the only such registered facility in NSW.

While most of these animal injuries have resulted from motor vehicle collision, wire fence entanglement, and dog attack; a considerable number have resulted from gunshot wounds or from the sound of gunshots or been orphaned from mothers that have been killed or severely injured by gunshot. The injuries are usually horrendous. The orphaned joeys are often hypothermic, starving and have myopathy due to the loss of their mother. Those joeys that are pouch-bound can also suffer from urine burns to their eyes or maggot infestation because their injured mothers are unable to clean their pouches. We believe over the years we have witnessed firsthand more

than 50 such cases where the kangaroo has been brought to us alive with dreadful injuries or been orphaned following shooting. We have followed the commercial shooters and witnessed firsthand the results of their deeds in the dead of night.

### **3. The emotional lives of kangaroos**

There is now significant evidence that kangaroos, like other animals, lead emotional lives and that stress is a condition that can kill them. Up to this point our research into the emotional lives of kangaroos has resulted from behavioural observation as well as serum cortisol. We have published research in this area including about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in kangaroos, including from incredibly young ages. To suggest that a squirming unfurred joey being ripped from its mother's pouch by an indiscriminate shooter feels no distress is just another myth perpetuated by a barbaric kangaroo killing industry. Environmental stressors such as being orphaned, being chased, being caught, being injured, being shot at, etc can lead to a lingering and painful death. These are the cases you never hear about and are not counted in Government statistics.

In pathbreaking work our current research focusses on quantifying kangaroo emotion and stress using wireless technology and matching observed behaviour against critical survival factors in real time. We can quantify heart and respiration rate, core body temperature and oxygen saturation and correlate these against other variables such as serum cortisol and other biochemical results. This research has not been done on wild animals before. The results to date suggest a particularly fragile species being threatened in the face of human induced environmental stressors.

### **4. The evidence**

A few case examples are shown of the more than 50 injured and orphaned kangaroos that have come to us because of shooting due to the commercial killing industry or Government sanctioned approvals to farmers and other 'illegal' entertainment seeking individuals. Such cases do not make it to the statistics collected by Government officials or into the media as the images are considered too horrendous for human exposure. These days however the brutality to kangaroos and other wildlife do appear on social media so that a wider audience can better understand the cruelty of these Government sanctioned activities.

#### **4.1 *Face blown off but still alive***

We have seen firsthand numerous cases where a large kangaroo has been shot through the face but managed to escape and remain alive. We have been called to rescue some of these, others have been brought to our treatment centre for euthanasia (see image).

#### **4.2 *Multiple body shots***

Often, we see wildlife brought to us alive with body gunshot wounds, not head shots. We have also seen those animals in the field that have escaped and later been

found dead with multiple wounds or in their incapacitated state attacked by predators (see image).

#### 4.3. *Escape the shooting to be caught in fences and injured on the roads.*

Kangaroos are a mob animal and, in the chaos created by kangaroo shooting activity, flee only to become entangled in fences or run on to the roads to be subsequently injured by motor vehicles. We see many such cases requiring considerable veterinary and rehabilitation intervention to save their lives. We rescue and successfully treat hundreds of fence injured kangaroos each year with many resulting from the chaos resulting from gunshot activity

#### 4.4 *The suffering dependent*

We are often told that dependent kangaroo joeys are humanely and instantly killed using a blunt instrument or decapitated. This is far from the truth. Injured mothers fleeing a shooting situation are unable to clean their in-pouch joeys resulting in urine burns and ulcers to the joey's eyes, infections, dehydration and being eaten alive by maggot infestation. In some cases, shooters, having killed a female kangaroo, will hand over the in-pouch joey to wives and girlfriends to raise illegally and without experience creating more distress to the animal. At-foot dependent joeys fleeing a shooting situation suffer the stress of being orphaned and left without protection and proper nutrition.

#### 4.5 *The uncontrolled mob*

Usually, the largest males are targeted by the commercial killing industry as shooters are paid according to the weight of the animal. Kangaroos are a mob animal with a group structure and organisation rules. The largest males control the social structures. They enforce appropriate social behaviour and protect joeys and protect females from being pursued by juvenile males. Each dominant male killed causes a loss of the best male genes in the population, so gradually the quality of the gene pool is being eroded.

### 5. The implications

#### 5.1 *cultural.*

An intergenerational culture of brutality, disregard and disrespect towards the kangaroo, and other wildlife species, has grown up in this country because of the actions of the commercial kangaroo killing industry and other Government sanctioned killing programs. The kangaroo is now seen as 'fair game' by so-called hunters and those with a psychological tendency towards inflicting hurt and destruction without showing any empathy towards their victims. To enable injury of the kind we often see, in our view, has given permission for the worst kind of cruelty to proliferate.

#### 5.2 *Societal*

Increasingly, through social media and the work of activists and organisations like the Animal Justice Party, society at large is becoming aware of the wider brutality of Government sanctioned shooting of kangaroos. Its not a clean industry. Its darker

secrets are being exposed . It has become an embarrassment to the nation that is now harder to explain away with the usual mythical refrain about humane killing and over abundant species. Its time has passed.

Peace abiding residents have their lifestyle impacted by the actions of kangaroo killers shooting over their properties, shining spotlights through their windows and awakening to find body parts in their vicinity.

### 5.3 *Economic*

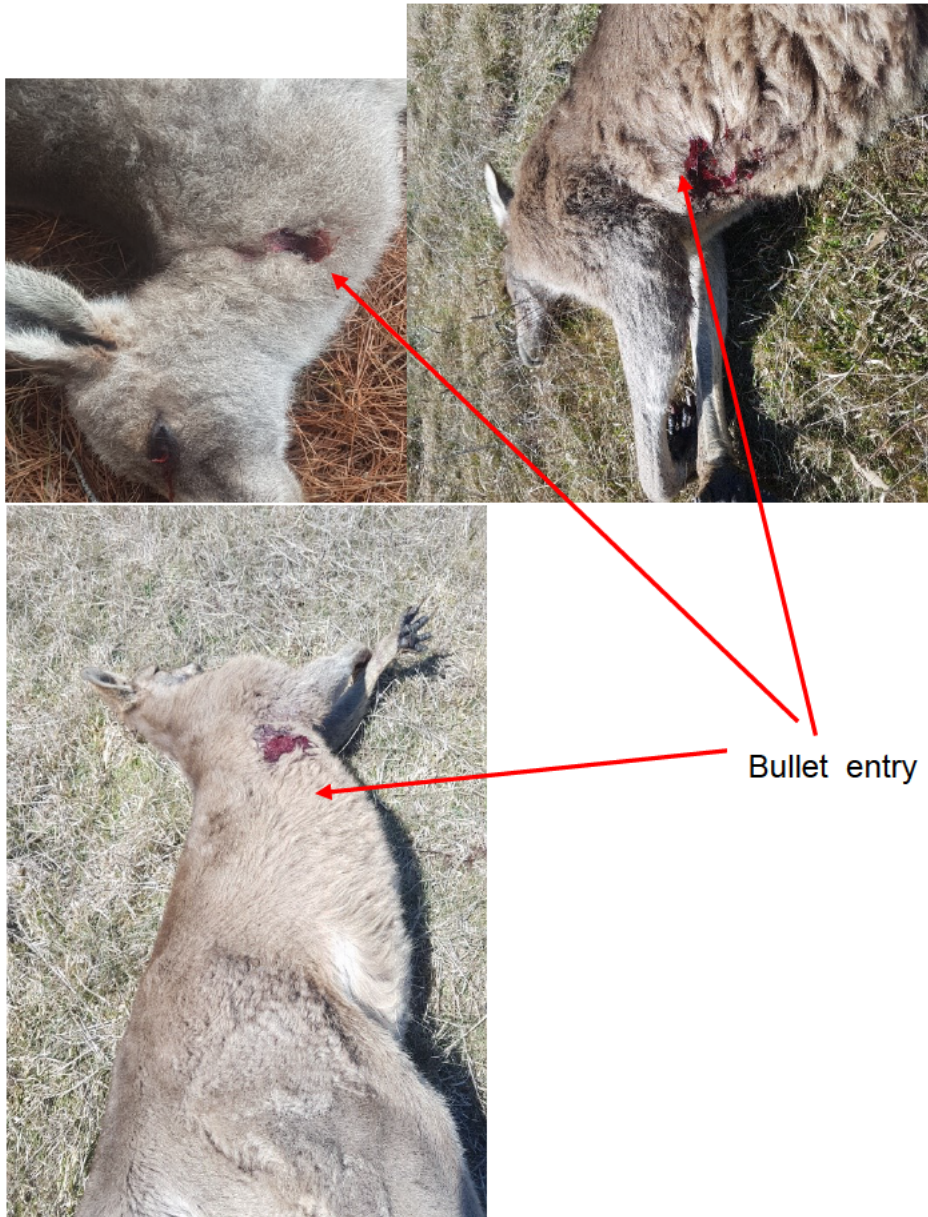
The economic return to the nation of the commercial kangaroo killing industry and the protestation of a minority of vocal farmers is miniscule compared to the loss to the international tourist industry. Wildlife tourism in this country rates in the top three attractions. Now however, we often hear tourists say they came to see our wildlife and all they saw was roadkill or kangaroos in zoos and reserves. .

## 6. **Conclusion**

Government sanctioned killing of kangaroos has generated a cruel industry that has many downstream cultural, social, and economic impacts that do not make it into the statistics collected by officials or the traditional media. The financial return from this industry is minor and is outweighed many times over by the wider damage it causes to the nation in a global sense. The industry of killing kangaroos makes no sense whatsoever. Through social media, Australia's 'dirty little secret' is no longer a secret, but rather a dark stain for all to see and pass judgement upon.

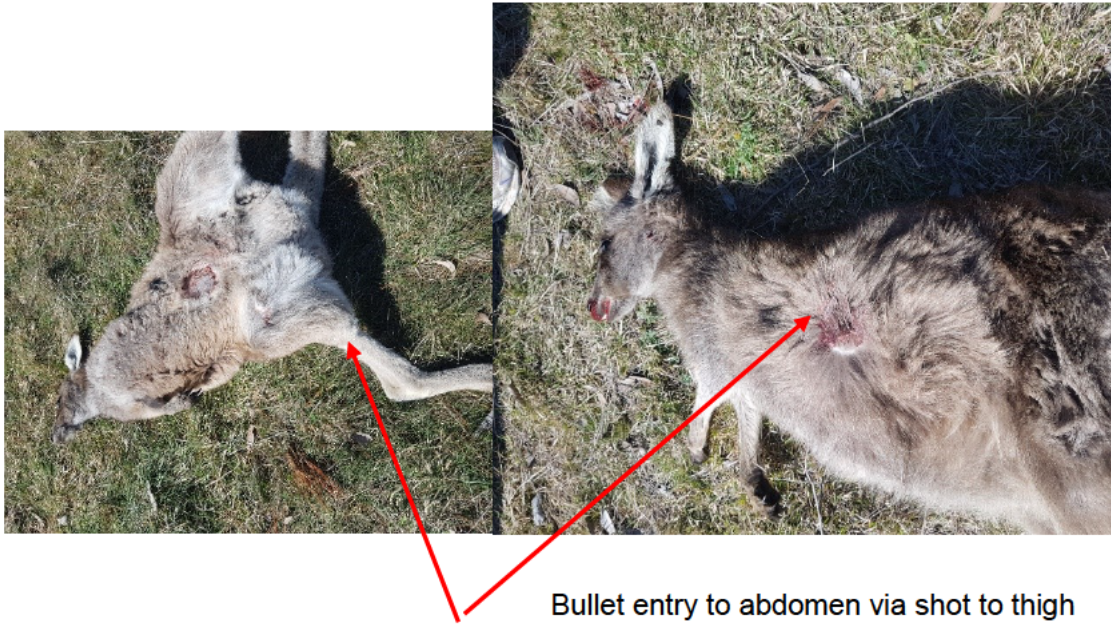
**7. Attachments: Kangaroo cruelty from shooting – up close (animals alive at time of photo)**

**7.1**





## 7.2



Bullet entry to abdomen via shot to thigh

## 7.3



Shot to tail, immobilised and then run over.

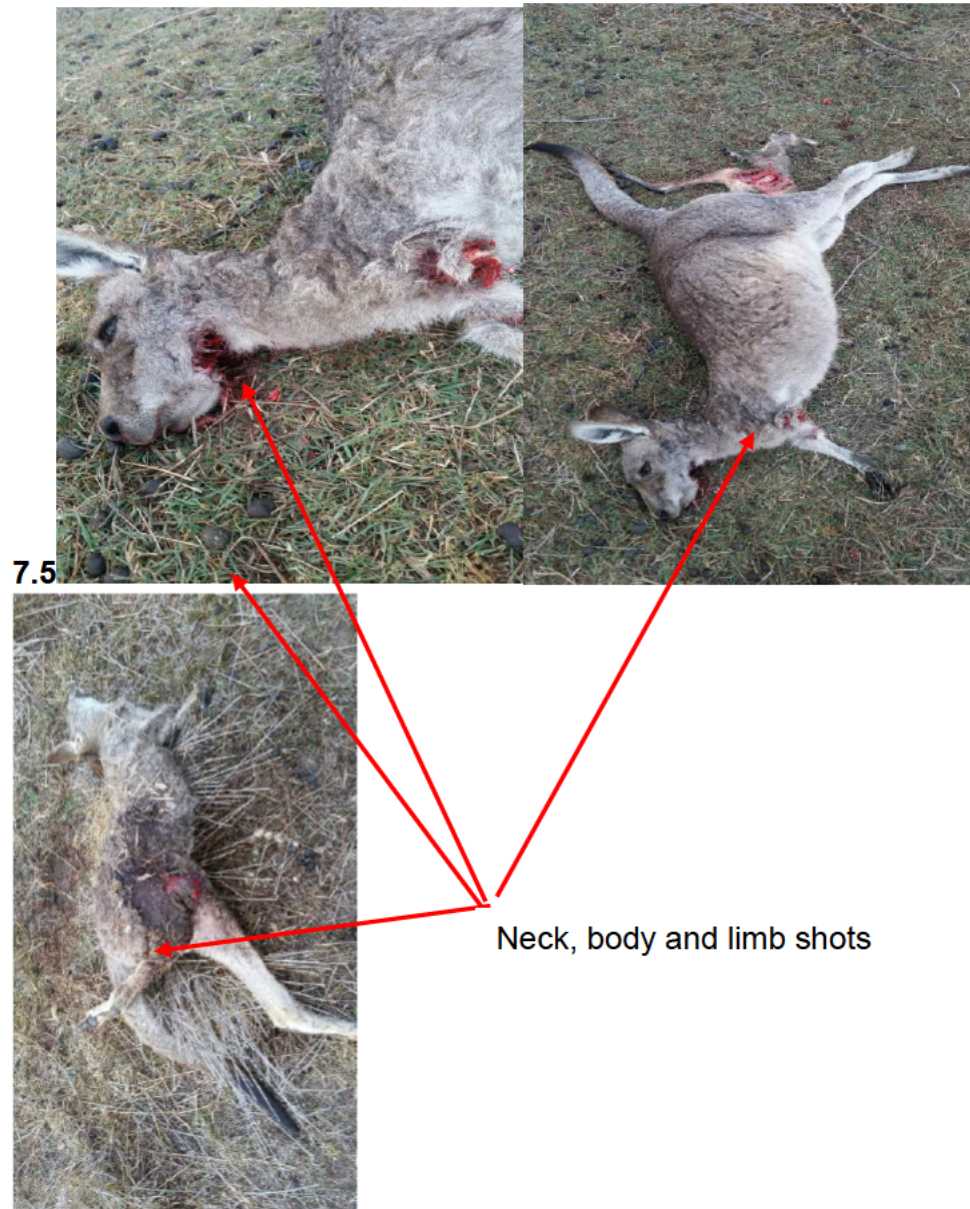
7.4



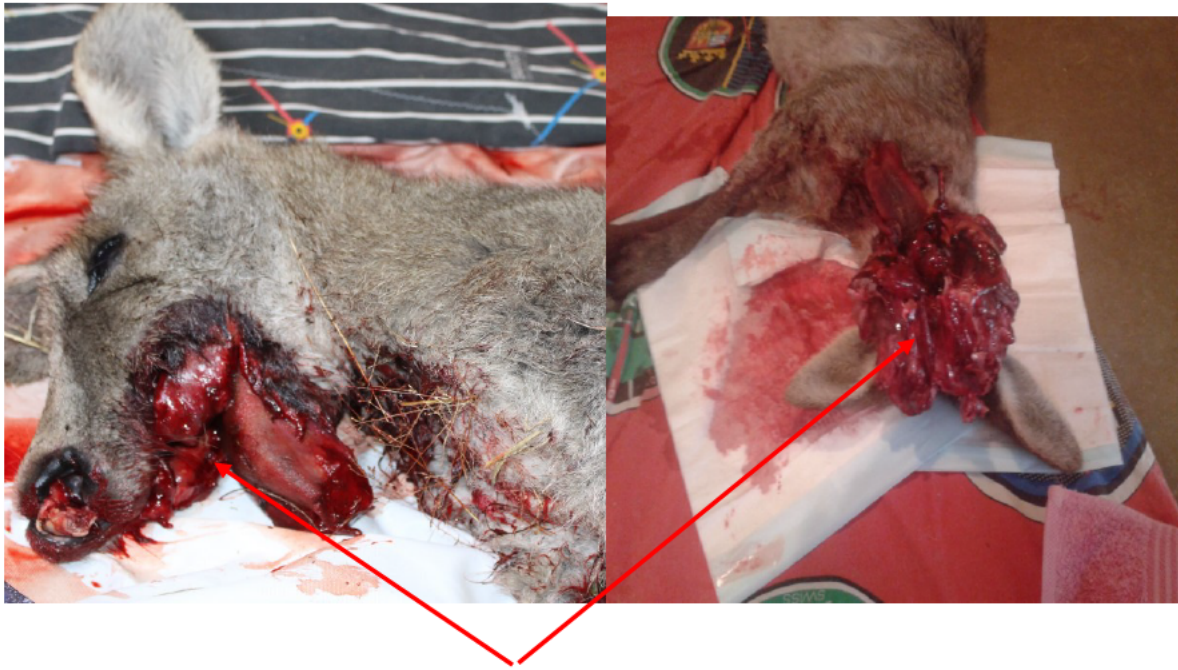
Shot by arrows

7.5





## 7.6



Shot to mouth

## 7.7



Joey left in pouch to die