

Submission
No 372

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

Name: Name suppressed
Date Received: 26 April 2021

Partially
Confidential

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

Response to Terms of Reference

- 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*

I have owned a non-farming property in NSW for 10 years. The property is a “Land for Wildlife” designated area, is 325 ha in size and is over 50% natural dry sclerophyll forest with some cleared areas that support native grasslands. The property is surrounded by cattle and sheep farming land. In the time that I have been here I have witnessed a significant decline in macropod numbers. When I first arrived here, macropod sightings were common and included numerous wallaroos, swamp wallabies, red-necked wallabies and eastern grey kangaroos. In the last ten years the number of individuals seen regularly has dropped significantly – by as much as 50%, possibly more. If this rate of decline continues, localised extinction is a real threat in this area.

- 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*

According to the “Design and analysis of helicopter surveys of the kangaroo populations of the Northern Tablelands kangaroo management zones, 2019”(Cairns, Bearup & Lollback, 2020), the densities of eastern grey kangaroos was estimated to be 26.4 km², and 7.4 km² for wallaroos, in the management zone I reside in. This would equate to approximately 90 eastern grey kangaroos and 21 wallaroos on my property of 325 ha. This would appear to be an inaccurate representation (higher numbers than observed), particularly in regard to eastern grey kangaroos. Although I am not an expert in this area, I think that helicopter surveying of animal numbers seems unlikely to be a reliable method and I would suggest that this method is chosen more for cost effectiveness than data reliability.

- 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*

My region was severely impacted by the recent drought, and lack of food and water was a significant risk to the local macropod population. Of our 11 dams, only two had a small amount of water left in them at the end of the drought. If it had continued much longer, the impact would have been devastating to local wildlife. Whilst we were lucky enough to escape without a severe bushfire, it was very touch and go, and would have been a major fire if one had started. I suspect these sorts of conditions will become more common due to climate change. At the moment, the land surrounding my property is still carrying some native vegetation, but there are more instances of small tree clearing noticeable, and I am concerned that landholders are gradually removing the remaining trees to increase their carrying capacity. I have had interactions with two neighbouring landholders with regards to exclusion fencing. Both landholders attempted to get my husband and I to agree to contributing costs to what they referred to as a "dog fence". I did not know at the time that landholders were attempting to implement an exclusion fence, and, even though I would not support either, I was disappointed that the full extent of their plans was not made clear to me. As I have dedicated my property to wildlife, any type of exclusion fencing would be detrimental to my efforts. However, it seems that agricultural pursuits are always given priority over other pursuits. This is also noticeable in the use of 1080 poison. My neighbours continually helicopter drop 1080 baits around our boundaries which kills anything that eats it, including native animals, but they are allowed to do this and directly impact my conservation efforts. I would also like to add an observation from my Mother's home in a small north coastal NSW town. When she first moved there, there was a large open paddock behind her house that was home to a good number of macropods. As the years have passed, this paddock has been developed and the area for the macropods is nearly gone. Where do these animals go from here? The highways are nearby, and their habitat is being destroyed. It is not hard to predict what will happen. And this is happening all over NSW.

- 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*

Whilst I am not across these government policies, I would like to point out that shooters currently do not have to advise neighbours of their planned shooting activities. We often have neighbours shooting at all hours of the day and night and we are never advised. This can be quite concerning for me, not only for safety reasons, but listening to them shooting all night and imagining the horror, pain and fear the animals are experiencing, is emotionally very difficult. I have instances where I have been out on my property horse riding and will come across some kangaroos who obviously hop away from me, only to then hear gunshots and see the poor kangaroos scattering. I feel personally responsible for this as I disturbed them, but also very angry that I can't go for a ride on a Sunday morning without being indirectly responsible for the death of the very animals I am trying to protect.

- 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*

Current government policies allowing the bludgeoning of in pouch joeys is abhorrent. Also, shooting animals from a distance to kill with one shot, is a highly skilled undertaking. There are no tests to determine whether licenced shooters have the necessary skills to kill "humanely". Shooters should be required to take shooting tests regularly to ensure they are skilled enough to shoot to kill instantly. We have tests for driving cars where the intention is not to kill another living being, but anyone can get a gun licence. This is not a game, (nor a sport, but I fear it is treated as such) and licences should be treated with the seriousness they require.

- f) *regulatory and compliance mechanisms to ensure that commercial and non-commercial killing of kangaroos and other macropods is undertaken according to the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 and other relevant regulations and codes*

My concern in this respect is that the shooters may not be only targeting the species they are licenced for. How do you ensure they are not targeting any and all macropods? Do they pass a test where they must identify different macropods? Are they aware of any sensitivities/threatened species in the area in which they are shooting? In order to ensure compliance to the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016, shooters would need to report and prove they are doing the right thing. As well as having to pass a shooting test and a knowledge test to receive their licence, they should be required to report on numbers and species shot. But even then, you cannot stop them shooting a non-target animal and not reporting it. Which is why shooting as a management method is not going to provide for regulatory and compliance needs, and leaves our native wildlife open to significant harm, both at the individual level and the species level. If we want to have some wildlife left for the future, we should be providing grants and support to protect habitat.

- g) *the impact of commercial and non-commercial killing of kangaroos and other macropods, including the difficulty of establishing numbers killed by landholders since the removal of the requirement for drop tags*

As stated above, how do you ensure shooters are not targeting any and all macropods? Do they pass a test where they have to identify different macropods? Are they aware of and sensitive to the local distribution of macropods? They should be required to report on numbers and species shot, but even then, you cannot stop them shooting a non-target animal and not reporting it. Which is why shooting as a management method is not going to provide for regulatory and compliance needs, and leaves our native wildlife open to significant harm, both at the individual level and the species level.

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

My suggestion for the management of kangaroos and other macropods, as well as for our native wildlife in general, is to provide funding for conserving native habitat as a matter of urgency. Farmers are often struggling to break even, let alone make a profit, so in order for them to be interested in conserving wildlife, it would need to be economically viable for them to do so. We should stop funding practices that kill wildlife and destroy habitat and start funding practices that preserve habitat. Funding for the creation of wildlife corridors, or even better, funding to preserve what is already existing and prevent it from being destroyed. The government should be rewarding agriculturalists for keeping habitat intact and working with the environment rather than providing incentives to kill wildlife and clear habitat.