

Submission
No 379

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

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2021 NSW Macropod Inquiry Submission – Meaghan Hughes.

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 am exceptionally concerned about the obvious significant reduction in various macropod populations in NSW, and in particular the role that the ongoing commercial slaughter trade, land development and intolerance from the agricultural sector has played in this outcome. In the absence of an Independent Office of Animal Welfare the process of legislating, researching (ie. underlying population research supporting slaughter quotas) regulation of the slaughter is effectively a closed loop between the agribusiness/development/commercial pet food/products trade lobby groups and the NSW Govt.

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.

Again I'm exceptionally concerned that without an Independent body with significant discretionary powers at the table in the formation and ongoing revision of the Govt regulation process, the powerful commercial slaughter industry and agribusiness lobbys (along with so called 'academic consultants' who financially benefit from the research/audit process and are therefore highly partisan), will ensure that audit statistics support the ongoing trade activity, for the commercial benefit of those industries.

A poignant case in point: I'm aware that the commercial harvest was suspended in Cobar in 2019 and 2020 due to critical minimum densities generally considered at risk of extinction. Yet in 2020 red kangaroo numbers somehow allegedly increased by 184%. This biologically impossible population increase allowed the NSW Office of Environment & Heritage to resume the harvest of red kangaroos with a 17,422 quota.

Furthermore in 2020, grey kangaroo numbers allegedly increased by 504% - again an absurd biologically impossible increase, which allowed the NSW Office of Environment & Heritage to resume the harvest of grey kangaroos with a 4,421 quota.

Something clearly stinks here.

I'm also particularly concerned about the persistent media campaign (driven by both industry and Govt) of baseless propaganda regarding kangaroos not only being in 'plague proportions' but also being pests, despite their unique adaptation and well documented benefit to this environment over millions of years.

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.

There is an overwhelming abundance of well documented survival and welfare threats to macropods in NSW. Their numbers have clearly been significantly impacted by bushfire events, drought, poor water management, agricultural exclusion fences, habitat loss through agribusiness, mining and increasing greenfield urban development. Obviously the latter also carries significant additional impacts to macropod survival through road accidents.

This is incredibly sad and distressing to myself, but as I directly observe, also to a growing cohort of the voting electorate in this state.

d) Current government policies and programs for kangaroo management, including:

(i) the method used for setting quotas for kangaroo culling,

As previously mentioned I'm highly concerned that, at best, the methodology used for arriving at set quotas for kangaroo culling is significantly influenced by commercial, agribusiness and land development lobby groups (I say this as a land developer). There simply is not an independent hand involved in any stage in the quota setting process.

(ii) the management of licences to cull kangaroos,

I understand from reports that it is ridiculously easy to obtain a permit to control wildlife in NSW, in that during Covid in particular landowners can simply call the department and answer a few rudimentary qns or email their request through, and obtain a licence to harm macropods on their property without any meaningful checks.

In cases of culling of landlocked kangaroos there must be appropriate opportunity and support for macropod experts to translocate the mob according to best practice methods. It is very easy to get permission to harm kangaroos and extremely difficult to get permission to help them. This has been abundantly obvious in the case of a number of NSW mobs landlocked by urban development. This is the attitude toward kangaroos, simply cull the inconvenient wildlife and don't entertain any other options that demonstrates their lives have value. This is an out-dated attitude to wildlife which I find both inexplicable and appalling in equal measure. All Govt regulatory policy around wildlife protection and management MUST reflect their inherent value and right to survive in their (unadulterated!) habitat.

(iii) temporary drought relief policies and programs.

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.

As a general yet critical point, I find the current regulatory Code of Practice for commercial macropod slaughter (which again I note Govt rely heavily on the services of highly partisan bodies such as AgriFutures, in its ongoing review/revision of the Code) to be an absolute national disgrace.

In particular I find the methodology formally recommended by Govt in the Code for slaughtering at foot and pouch joeys to be unbelievably heinous. It causes me great distress and consternation to know that babies are being 'euthanased' in such a hair raising, horrifically cruel manner such as blunt force trauma to the head. In what universe would a 21st century govt recommend bashing a baby animal against a bulbar as part of its formally sanctioned protocol for "humane euthanasia".

It's abundantly clear that the Govt's evolving Code of Practice is solely focussed upon how to make it simpler/easier for shooters to carry out their harvest activity.

The Code clearly reflects a callous disregard for the sensitive and loving bonds between mother and baby, and importantly has certainly damaged Australia's reputation among its contemporary first world nations, such as the US (where of course we are seeing a Congressional Bill to ban the importation of all macropod products), Europe and the UK. We have quite rightly earned a very poor reputation regarding our national custodianship of native wildlife – given the macropod commercial industry constitutes the largest terrestrial slaughter of wildlife on the planet!

I'm 50 yrs old and have always been very proud to be Australian.... until now. I'm utterly ashamed to be a member of the voting public with an incumbent NSW Government that is actively encouraging this horrendous treatment of our wildlife and its young.

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.

Given the necessarily covert manner in which the commercial macropod slaughter process occurs (under the cover of darkness in remote regions), it is clearly impossible to regulate period, let alone regulate to any meaningful or effective degree.

I also understand the regulatory body regularly provides written confirmation that they experience significant challenges in sending compliance officers into the field to inspect slaughter activity, due to the high incidence of intimidation, abuse and even physical aggression/assault by shooters.

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.

Clearly this is yet another indicator that the evolving regulations around macropod slaughter are being heavily influenced by industry lobby groups; in this case, to streamline and expedite the harvest/slaughter activity.

This is no time to be removing any of the already woefully deficient compliance encumbrances around commercial macropod slaughter! Apart from the compelling animal welfare considerations, the inherent biohazard exposures in commercial macropod slaughter, and carcass transport/storage/processing for human consumption in particular, constitute a significant health risk.

The CDC estimates that 75% of new and emerging diseases are zoonotic, including our current Covid 19 pandemic, so trading in bushmeat at this or any future time seems irresponsible in the extreme.

(h) Current and alternative measures to provide an incentive for and accelerate public and private conservation of kangaroos and other macropods.

Macropods, kangaroos in particular, constitute our national icon - our totem animal. They feature heavily in our national identity, appearing on our coat of arms and they are even the highly recognisable logo of our national airline! I'm simply incredulous as to how our nation has devolved to the point where our legislative decision makers have been able to get away with such a total dereliction of duty to our wildlife.

At the heart of the current macropod survival/welfare crisis is the fact that responsible management policy is in the hands of a regulatory closed-loop, between commercial slaughter/agribusiness and land development lobbyists and the NSW Govt.

This will not improve unless there is an Independent Office of Animal Welfare with significant discretionary powers heavily involved in this process.

This is essential in order to ensure that macropods are protected in all levels of legislation, regulations and policy. That is, we need to ensure:

- Macropods and their habitat are protected on public land.
- Provision for a vast macropod national park can be made.
- Kangaroo corridors through the landscape along known migratory paths are protected.
- Intelligent and adequate investment is made in regional tourism to view kangaroos in their native habitat; (NB: Tourism surveys indicate that kangaroos are the 3rd most frequently reported attraction that international visitor wish to see. Australia simply isn't capitalising on the tourist value of seeing Kangaroos in their natural habitat).