

Submission
No 380

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

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially
Confidential

Submission to Legislative Council NSW

Inquiry to look at the Health and wellbeing of kangaroos and macropods in NSW

Dear members of this inquiry,

Thank you for the privilege to have my say on this matter.

I am a resident of far west NSW. I have travelled regularly between Broken Hill, Menindee, and Wentworth during the past 32 years, and randomly through other western NSW roads. I currently live in Broken Hill.

I'd like to comment on the following terms of reference:

1 c) Threats to kangaroo and other macropod, habitat.....Exclusion fencing

Kangaroos have biomechanics that enable them to travel many 100's of kilometres as they migrate towards water and feed during drought. I expect some of the roos that were culled in the Forbes area 2 years ago could well have migrated from our far west regions, 100's of km away. Much of the rain out this way is patchy, here and there, which attracts kangaroos and emus particularly in dry / drought times. To access this water and fodder, they must be on the right side of any exclusion fencing.

I first noticed exclusion fencing when the Sunraysia district grape growers changed from dried fruit to wine grapes, (late 80's to mid 90's). The chicken wire used on the drying racks was recycled onto fences along the Wentworth to Pooncarrie rd, tall and impenetrable. A few km expanded into scores of km, without a break, literally making an exclusion fence between the road and the Darling River. This made me feel very uneasy, knowing if a threat to life were present, from fire, there could be no escape through these fences. Not for kangaroos, not for people. Animals looking for water have been denied at the fence line.

Since then, ring lock / exclusion fencing slowly grew around properties farming goats, with a massive expansion during recent years. The Darling River, (the Baaka) was a border between properties. Government departments, such as Water NSW, has encouraged farmers to fence off the Darling river, I know downstream from Menindee, to "reduce bank erosion from stock", and more recently to mark the boundary during the recent water mismanagement debacle of the Darling River and Menindee Lakes, when there has been little to no water in the river for hundreds of km.

Graziers will often say "there heaps of roos in our place, and plenty of land without exclusion fencing", however if you ask the kangaroo shooters, they probably have a better idea of the situation, knowing the habits and wanderings of the roos firsthand.

There is no stipulation that ringlock or exclusion fencing cannot be used.

There is no stipulation that graziers must keep water up to troughs that have no stock in the paddocks.

There is no stipulation that adjoining farms cannot also use exclusion fencing.

There is no stipulation that exclusion fencing cannot be used for the entire roadway between Wentworth, to Menindee, to Broken Hill, to Wilcannia to Bourke, to Qld and beyond.

Although most farmers are good hearted people, and care for both their wildlife and stock, some landowners have no interest in keeping sustainable levels of kangaroos on their properties.

One drought can bring to the brink, all “pest” species including kangaroos and emus from a paddock, if no fodder and no water, due to exclusion fencing. Although kangaroos can sometimes dig under fences, this can be limited by both fencing strategies and Roos weakened by starvation and lack of water. Exclusion fencing is even worse for emus, who don’t appear to dig or crawl under.

Although we only see a small percentage of fencing from the roadsides, I share the painful memories with other travellers of these roads, of bearing witness to mobs of kangaroos and emus trying to migrate through the fencing they used to be able to squeeze through, being trapped along exclusion fencing, smelling water or fodder on the other side of the fences, possibly 100’s of km away.

Simply put, they die.

Simply put, there is no requirement for sustainability in the current rules.

Simply put, I have seen local grown men and women brought to anger or tears due to their witnessing this cruel mismanagement of our native wildlife due to these exclusion fences.

Proposals:

Ensure exclusion fencing is not continual through properties.

Ensure exclusion fencing does not fence off all water supplies to kangaroos and emus.

During dry times when farms are de-stocked, make breaks in exclusion fencing to enable migrations to occur, such as both leaving gates open, and every few km having single stranded wire to enable mobs to move through.

Assess each line of continual exclusion fencing now, and make decisions to make breaks using single wire fencing of 100 metres fit for purpose of enabling kangaroos and emus to slip between the wires, each few km.

Make allowances to finance farmers during drought if sufficient water is available on their properties, that some recompense is provided to pay for monitoring and filling troughs for wildlife when paddocks have been de-stocked. (This is not to provide thousands of kangaroos and emus sustenance, but a baseline of numbers during drought).

Climate Change:

We are living it, exacerbated by mismanagement of our water sources and clearing land to the east closer to our mountain ranges.

Science begins with observation, then a hypothesis, and seeing if that hypothesis is reproducible. Traditional owners and old family farmers have noticed the relationship between clearing land in the eastern regions closer to the Great dividing range, and less rain events out this way.

As climate change is expected to make more droughts, and more severe hail storms out this far west way, the ability for our large species to be able to travel for both shelter, fodder and water is more important now than it ever has been, if we intend to maintain sustainable populations.

This means exclusion fencing will have even greater impact.

Protecting caves, trees, and hills from being flattened by land clearing, mining, and laser management for broad acre farming just makes sense. These provide refuge for not only kangaroos and emus, but also stock and people. There is no shopping mall car park we can hide in, nor a shed or carport on these outback roads. Hailstones appear to be much bigger than we have seen before. Large hail stones have killed stock and kangaroos out this way. I have seen graziers mental health severely impacted by watching and hearing their stock be swept away by floods, (in this far west district).

1(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.

Non-commercial killing of kangaroos was necessary during the last drought, as thousands migrated south, east, or to the few fortunate outback properties that received a rain event. Their numbers were not sustainable in these circumstances. I have heard of pallets of bullets being delivered and used on some properties. One would hope this practice has already ended, as rain events have become more widespread, and the populations can disperse.

During the last drought a family member was invited to go killing kangaroos on a property to the east to eliminate kangaroos. The young workers on that farm were not trained shooters. The carcasses were not used. This is against our upbringing: killing kangaroos for human consumption, or dog food, is acceptable, privately or commercially. Not to just kill and not use. That is totally unacceptable for kangaroo management in general, however may be necessary under certain circumstances. National Parks should be involved in these decisions.

Kangaroos once had predators, both humans and dingoes, which would have had some effect on their numbers. Our current day predators are kangaroo shooters. Where and whenever possible, kangaroo management should be controlled by registered roo shooters, selling their produce. This way it is in their best interests to maintain a healthy population of kangaroos, to ensure their jobs into the future. They are good shots, they maintain healthy numbers of macropods, and could be employed during droughts by the govt to move their business temporarily to regions suffering unsustainable proportions from migrations. This may reduce the necessity for the removal of requirement of drop tags.

1h) current and alternative measures to provide an incentive for and accelerate public and private conservation of kangaroos and other macropods.

Food for thought:

I have seen documentaries of small animals taking refuge in wombat and rabbit warrens during fire.

What could it look like if we make refuges from waste materials, so some of the wildlife can use it in times of excess heat, bushfire, and hailstorms?

What would it look like if there were breaks in exclusion fencing that is already up, so wildlife could navigate in advance from bushfire?

What would it look like if our high ground, refuge from flood, was not surrounded by exclusion fencing?

What would it look like if our mining pursuits left high ground for refuges, not just flattened or lower ground?

What would it look like if our priorities for water management were reversed, and the Water Act priorities were acted upon, so healthy rivers could supply downstream obligations such as cultural flows, environmental health, townships, and riparian dwellers and graziers, before diversions for irrigation licence allowances were granted. Yes, this would include water for kangaroos downstream rather than watching the poor things suffer with blue green algae contaminated water, followed by no water at all.

What would it look like if the question “Is this sustainable?” were addressed before decisions on fencing, kangaroo culling, flattening high ground and caves, and clearing land were made?

I suppose we will never know, as the people who make decisions and lobby our government very confidently may be the same consortiums that made the decisions that dried the Darling River and the Menindee Lakes. The rest of us watch the changes with dismay, as we age, acknowledging the kangaroos, emus and billions of fish that silently lost their lives out of sight as 1,000 km of Darling River and the Menindee Lakes were put into drought 3 years earlier than necessary, because it is more lucrative for some to divert water upstream for low security cropping, (cotton etc), than to allow the downstream rivers health. %

I thank you for the opportunity to have my say.

Yours sincerely,