

Submission
No 399

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

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

Introduction

The massacre of Kangaroos in Australia is the largest commercial slaughter of land based wildlife on planet Earth. They have virtually no protections under the law, with tens of thousands of joeys being violently beaten to death or decapitated after hearing the terrifying noises of gunshots in the dead of night and often watching their parents die a slow and painful death and shattering family groups for life. This is barbaric to be treating our iconic wildlife who is represented on our coat of arms, proudly revered in tourism advertising and on our national airline and synonymous with Australian culture and heritage yet treated with utter disdain and depravity and totally devoid of compassion and empathy for these gentle, harmless and much loved unique sentient beings.

The cruelty of the kangaroo killing industry is a national disgrace. One look at the movie “Kangaroo a Love Hate Story” is enough to send shivers up your spine and want to act to help get the protection for Kangaroos that they so desperately need and deserve. For wildlife volunteers this goes to another level knowing the suffering and pain that kangaroos and other macropods and their joeys endure, how families are shattered and knowing just how many accumulated and ongoing threats there are with the real risk of myopathy setting in and even with a successful release that the odds of survival are slim with a killing industry out there ready to take them out at any moment. Then on top of that there are the farmers waging a war against them and the exclusion fencing not to mention roads, drought and other climate challenges. Wildlife carers and organisations in this country are totally undervalued and underappreciated and they need to be listened to when it comes to our diminishing wildlife as do indigenous Australians. Anyone making a decision on the future of kangaroos and macropods needs to step into the shoes of a wildlife carer and see for themselves the trauma, stress, anxiety and deep pain being caused to their psyche and emotional wellbeing.

1.a) Health and wellbeing indicators of kangaroos

Due to employment I travelled extensively from Sydney and throughout NSW in my early years where I would often see mobs of kangaroos in rural areas. Now 40 years later living in a rural community and when I travel on rural roads throughout NSW the only kangaroos I usually come into contact with are dead ones on the side of the road or that need to be moved and very rarely the odd solitary macropod that is alive. The only other macropods I see are the poor injured and wounded ones , mostly joeys whose mum has been killed and they have been taken into care with wildlife carers. Sadly many of these do not survive. And for the ones that do survive they are released to a very uncertain future.

Every single one of these kangaroos and macropods are valuable in their own right and should be protected from harm. This came home to me very succinctly when I came across a dead wallaby in the middle of a road one morning. When I stopped to check for life I found a dead female but when I reached inside her pouch a little finger grasped mine so tightly that it wouldn't let go. I managed to pick up the dead mother with joey in pouch, put her in my car and drive to the closest vet half an hour away. The whole time this little joey would not let go of my finger. This boy was just viable and after being in care for 8 months was finally released thanks to the dedication of volunteer wildlife

carers This joey had been in his dead mothers pouch for a few hours in the middle of a busy road, can you imagine the despair and how frightening this would have been, yet he still had the strong will to live. Who are we to deny them that right? The irony of this is that the Government support those who want to kill these precious souls instead of the volunteers who save their lives.

1. b) Accuracy of numbers calculated

The accuracy of kangaroo numbers calculated is highly questionable as the counting methodology is ad hoc and subject to many variables. Aerial surveys are problematic as they don't necessarily give a true picture of wildlife numbers. There are more than 1700 threatened species and ecological communities in Australia and very little is being done too late to address these pending extinctions. Australia is gaining a reputation for its lack of action on species extinction, environmental protection and action on climate change.

We are known to be the country with the largest mammal extinctions, despite relatively recent European settlement, we do not need to be adding to that sorry statistic. And what an international embarrassment it would be for either of the animals on our national coat of arms to go extinct. And with the myth being perpetuated that kangaroos are in plague proportions that could well be the case.

1.c) Threats to habitat

The soft feet of kangaroos and other macropods cause less damage to our soils than the hard-hooved introduced species such as cattle and sheep. Their excrement is less polluting and they do not require the intensive amounts of water that the introduced species use. They do not expel methane into the air contributing to climate change or require deforestation to produce their food. Their fertility is also in tune with their environment. They are compatible and historically have sustained our environment unlike the introduced species including us humans who just keep on unsustainably taking from and manipulating the environment for our own personal gains and often greed.. The poor kangaroos are just adapting to a changed environment where their habitat has either been destroyed or removed by clearing for agriculture, urban growth or mining and other extractive industries. Then the landscape and their corridors are criss- crossed with roads, highways and barbed wire fencing and exacerbated even more with cluster fencing. This in turn forces them onto roads and highways where they are killed and away from safe access to food and water and also disrupting their family groups. We need to be protecting their habitat instead of relentlessly removing and destroying it.

Billions of animals were incinerated in the flames of the Black Summer bushfires where our forests burned like never before. Wildlife carers scrambled to rescue just a fraction of the burnt bodies and in many cases like here in northern NSW we were not even able to access the firegrounds to look for or help any of the survivors or even to relieve them of their excruciating pain. We the NSW public looked on in horror at the images that were captured by the media but most animals perished without us being able to witness their horrors, and just quietly disappeared from our landscape, many being incinerated. I as a NSW resident was equally horrified that the NSW Government did not take action to protect the animals

that managed to survive these horrific fires. Whilst there were food drops for one species of wallaby the rest seemed to be left for dead with no access to food and water to survive. But worse was still to come with the commercial kangaroo killing industry allowed to continue slaughtering the poor kangaroos that survived the infernos. This alone was a despicable travesty of justice. Additionally there was the rapid expansion of the release of the toxic poison 1080 throughout the landscape killing even more of the wildlife survivors in the most gruesome way and poisoning their environment as well.

The Black Summer Fires, the preceding drought and recent floods in NSW are just the beginning of the climate crisis here and the habitat of all our wildlife is at threat from the harmful effects of the climate crisis. The animal agriculture industry is not only responsible for taking away swathes of kangaroo habitat but is also a major contributor to the climate crisis as is the coal mining industry. Other extractive industries and in particular coal seam gas mining and water extraction is not only destroying habitat but altering aquifer levels and underground water sources. Then there is the redistribution of water again for human greed. The extensive use of barbed wire is incredibly cruel to our wildlife and to macropods. I will never forget the photograph of a young joey trying to escape the Black Summer Fires who was tragically burnt to death trapped behind a barbed wire fence. Or the many kangaroos who get caught up in barbed wire fencing and die a slow and horrible death.

Exclusion and cluster fencing which is often used to mitigate economic impacts on farms is particularly cruel and harmful to macropods. One Cluster fencing project in western NSW involved up to 26 landholders and more than half a million dollars in Government funding and involved half a million acres, fundamentally changing the landscape by destroying it and all the natural ecosystems within it along with the wildlife dependent on it for survival. This is blatant ecocide and killing of our wildlife, funded by Government and should be prohibited.

1.d) Current Government Policies and programs for Kangaroo Management

Regarding the non-commercial killing of kangaroos, I have great concern about the ease of issuing licences to harm native fauna in NSW. These are mostly issued to private landholders to harm and kill kangaroos and shooters do not even have to pass a competency test. Kangaroos hold great cultural significance for indigenous Australians and particularly for those who have kangaroos as their totem animal where they protect those animals. The commercial harvest is particularly offensive to these people who are actively engaged in protecting their totem animal. Yet despite their considerable knowledge of kangaroos and other macropods and their habitat indigenous people have been excluded from policies on kangaroo management.

1.e) Current Government Policies regarding “in pouch” and “at foot” joeys

It is known that kangaroos die of myopathy from stress yet the Government continues to support an industry of ongoing killing in the dark and quiet of the night by shattering kangaroo families being blasted away with bullets. Baby joeys get terrified by the noise and get to witness their own mothers gruesome death. But because this slaughter happens at night it invariably means inaccurate shots and bullets often miss the head and get other parts of the body causing trauma and a prolonged and painful death. A study showed that 16% of those culled were not shot in the head. It was found that joeys who become separated from their

mother experience severe mental and physical suffering, and were found to make regular and prolonged vocalisations after their mother was shot. 99% of those orphaned would later die from stress, starvation, dehydration or predation.

The Code of Practice allows for the poor joeys that are orphaned by this killing industry and able to be located by the shooters to be either decapitated or killed by blunt force trauma. Many pouch-young either flee the scene or are not found. Pouch young are usually clubbed in the head by a steel or iron bar, very similar to how baby Canadian Harp seals are killed. Young at-foot joeys are killed by being picked up by their hind legs and having their little bodies hurled against a tree, rock or truck. Do we really want people capable of doing this to babies, walking around and in our society and contributing to violence in our society?

Are we as a society so bereft of compassion that we can turn a blind eye to doing this to another sentient being, and to babies and one that is our iconic and much revered wildlife.

1.f) Regulatory and compliance mechanisms

There are many weaknesses in the regulatory framework which is complex and inadequate and favours commercial interests over welfare of animals. Monitoring in the field and enforcement of the Code of Practice is almost non-existent as the killing occurs at night in remote areas. The fact that a charitable organisation is the enforcement agency for animal protection laws is extremely flawed. Penalties issued are rare and minimal. Legislation to protect companion animals is weak but legislation to protect wild animals is almost non-existent. There are welfare concerns in the commercial killing industry because of the lack of monitoring and compliance. Whilst the Code of Practice stipulates an instantaneous death by a headshot this is often not the case. There have been many instances of landholders finding groups of kangaroo heads without bullet holes and or injured and dying kangaroos being found.

Animal welfare in the non-commercial killing of kangaroos is exacerbated as shooters are not required to pass a competency test. In 2018 the NSW Government made changes due to the drought including the removal of drop-tags, shooters not being listed on the license at the time of application and carcasses being able to be removed for personal use.

The concerns re health and sanitary conditions of where the dead bodies of these kangaroos is stored is well known and an issue for human health.

1.g) The impact of commercial and non-commercial killing of kangaroos

The World Health Organization, World Organization for Animal Health, and United Nations Environment Programme have urged governments around the world to urgently suspend the trade in live caught wild mammals in order to reduce the risk of zoonotic disease like Covid-19. Yet in Australia, we continue to kill kangaroos every single night, with violence and with virtually no oversight. In an industry where the slain kangaroos hang in the back of open trucks for many hours with flies and other insects in abundance until they can get to the very basic and unhygienic chiller boxes kept in remote rural areas the risk of contagion and disease is rife.

There is also a mystery illness of an unknown cause that's been sweeping through mobs of kangaroos since the 1990s. And we don't even know the repercussions of this or if this could be a zoonotic disease capable of being transferred to humans.

The commercial and non-commercial killing of kangaroos apart from being incredibly cruel to the kangaroos is altering family structures and is changing our landscape and depleting one of our treasured wildlife icons. It is also encouraging a gun culture of killing which only leads to a more violent society including more animal cruelty, domestic violence and other serious crimes along with a lack of respect for life.

1.h) Current and alternative measures to provide incentives for conservation

Current measures to provide incentives for conservation seem to target farmers and industry, or involve offsetting environmental harm for developers rather than landholders with a genuine and active interest in conservation. It also targets areas where there is more economical value. Strong and lasting incentives need to be given to landholders to commit to ongoing protection and enhancement of habitat with covenants in perpetuity. Regular payments as an alternate income stream and to get professional help with weeds and maintenance is urgently required and on a much larger scale than is currently offered by the Biodiversity Conservation Trust. As a private landholder on a large acreage with kilometres of riparian zone to manage it is totally beyond the means of one individual to maintain the biodiversity on a property without help and especially if adjoining landholders are only interested in personal wealth and contribute to the environmental destruction and degradation. There should also be Government assistance to help landholders to remove barbed wire fencing and cluster fencing. The only fencing that should be erected is wildlife friendly fencing.

In conclusion

The NSW Government cannot just let the massacre of our iconic kangaroos continue until there are none left and like our iconic koalas both will end up only being able to be seen confined in unnatural zoos due to the lack of action and protection by Government. For us to be on this path in 2021 and with so many other ongoing threats to our wildlife is outrageous. We need to change the mindset of Government and place a ban on industries that exploit, extract and deplete our natural world and instead start to honour, respect and revere our precious wildlife and our natural ecosystems which actually provide us with the oxygen we breathe and the water we drink to sustain life itself.

Please as a concerned wildlife volunteer and proud Australian I beg you to seek protection for kangaroos and other macropods in NSW and instead of supporting a cruel, barbaric and also unsanitary killing industry proudly promote their tourism value to our economy and to the fabric of what it is to be Australian.

Susie Header