

# Submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Wildlife Roadstrikes

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From: The Wildlings Woodend Wildlife Shelter

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Submitted by: Melanie Fraser / Karl Dawson, Co-founders

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to make a submission to this critical inquiry.

As long-term wildlife rescuers and carers based in the Macedon Ranges, we're on the frontlines of the roadstrike crisis every day. What we see is heartbreaking – native animals injured, orphaned, and killed on our roads, often within metres of each other. And yet, the official response is largely silence.

## The Problem

The current legislative and regulatory framework is grossly inadequate. Wildlife is not prioritised in road planning or traffic management, and enforcement of existing protections is minimal to non-existent. This has led to a crisis where countless thousands of animals are struck each year – many fatally, many others left suffering for hours or days. Kangaroos, koalas, wombats, echidnas, wallabies, birds and more are victims of preventable trauma.

Our shelter alone has responded to hundreds of wildlife roadstrikes in recent years, and that's just a fraction of what goes unreported. Currently, there is no centralised, enforceable, or accessible mechanism to record wildlife collisions in Victoria. This gap in data collection severely limits the government's ability to identify hotspots, assess patterns, or evaluate the effectiveness of mitigation strategies.

## The Problem – Expanded

Another major contributor to the high rate of wildlife road trauma is the lack of wildlife corridors and connected habitat across Victoria. As land is cleared for housing, agriculture, and infrastructure, animals are increasingly forced to cross roads to access food, water, shelter, or mates. These roads often bisect what were once safe, continuous habitats. Without dedicated fauna crossings or functional green corridors, wildlife is left to navigate dangerous human-built environments — and many don't survive.

Roads become lethal barriers, not just physical divides. Animals become trapped in habitat fragments, and those that attempt to cross risk injury or death. This is a daily reality in regional areas like the Macedon Ranges, where expanding development has made koalas, kangaroos, wombats, echidnas and other species more vulnerable than ever.

## The Human Toll

The emotional toll on wildlife rescuers, carers, and members of the public who encounter injured or dying animals on our roads is profound. For many of us, our days begin and end with the heartbreaking task of euthanising broken, suffering wildlife. Over time, this relentless exposure to trauma has led to burnout—even among the most experienced and long-standing carers. Without adequate support or systemic change, many rescuers are now struggling with the effects of chronic stress and PTSD.

To address the growing emotional and ethical burden placed on rescuers, we introduced the use of captive bolt devices within the wildlife sector a decade ago, accompanied by specialised training. This has provided rescuers with a humane, immediate method of roadside euthanasia—particularly critical in situations where veterinary access is not available and the alternative is prolonged suffering.

But even with these tools, the reality remains confronting. Rescuers are burning out. Many of us work around the clock, while also running wildlife shelters—juggling physical exhaustion, emotional trauma, and significant financial strain. At times, it feels like operating in a pressure cooker with no relief valve.

Perhaps the most devastating part of it all is the apathy: the silence that surrounds the thousands of lifeless native animals strewn across our roads. Their suffering is not just unseen—it's ignored.

## The Situation on the Ground

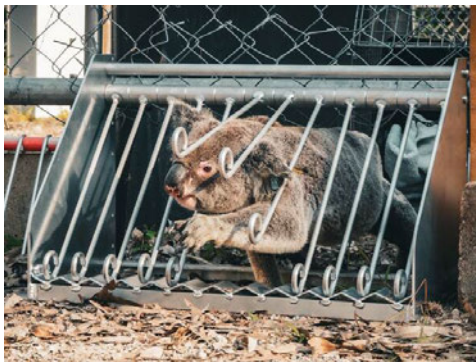
- We routinely respond to wildlife left suffering or dead by the roadside — kangaroos, wombats, koalas, wallabies, echidnas, birds, etc. Many are hit during the night and lay undiscovered until daylight.
- In numerous cases, joeys are still alive inside the pouches of dead mothers, left vulnerable for hours.
- We have observed a noticeable increase in roadstrikes involving koalas over the past 18 months — prompting us to take direct action. Despite not being a government body, we paid out of pocket to install “SLOW DOWN” and “KOALA HOTSPOT” signage in an attempt to save lives.
- Members of the public we meet during rescues are usually unaware that we get no funding to do this. We use our own cars, we pay our own fuel, all adding to the wear and tear of our vehicles; and we do this voluntarily in an effort to help wildlife.

## Infrastructure Is Failing Our Wildlife

- Metal roadside barriers, intended to improve human road safety, have become death tunnels for wombats, kangaroos, echidnas and wallabies. Once these animals enter, they're trapped and funneled directly into the path of traffic.
- These barriers are rarely, if ever, designed with fauna in mind – no escape hatches, no underpasses, no motion sensors, no exit ramps. Just a cold, hard corridor to nowhere.
- This creates a significant human safety issue for those of us left responding to wildlife, with no place to safely pull over and no option but to walk along the road to reach the animal; often in 80 or 100km/h zones and often at night. This is an issue that could be mitigated through the implementation of escape routes for the animals through the barriers.

## A Glaring Lack of Innovation

- In our entire Shire, there are zero trials or installations of modern wildlife detection technologies. No thermal cameras. No motion-activated signage. No speed-activated warning systems.
- Despite repeated public pleas – including to local council – not a single digital response has been tested or implemented in areas we know are high-risk.
- There's an incredible initiative from the NSW Government to help protect koalas from roadstrike, seen below. Please note the text and image belongs to them:  
(<https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/about-us/sustainability/news-publications/fauna-escape-hatch-%E2%80%93-an-innovative-solution-for-koala>)



*"Introducing the Fauna Escape Hatch, which prevents collisions with koalas by giving them a safe exit off the highway if they enter the corridor accidentally. The first hatches in NSW have been installed along the Hume Highway, with 8 near Wilton, at Nepean Bridge and Moolgun Creek Bridge. They're designed in line with a koala's natural instinct to push under barriers rather than climb over them, and enhance road safety for both animals and drivers."*

## **Our Call for Action**

We urge the Committee to consider the following recommendations:

1. Mandate the inclusion of wildlife-safe design in all road infrastructure upgrades, including underpasses, escape ramps, and modified barriers.
2. Fund and trial wildlife detection technologies across high-risk corridors in regional Victoria, including the Macedon Ranges.
3. Establish a statewide reporting system where roadkill data is transparently collected and publicly available to inform planning.
4. Improve mobile connectivity in wildlife hotspot zones to support faster rescues, public reporting, and access to emergency support.
5. Fund and trial AI integrated cameras that detect the presence of animals on the road and temporarily adjust digital speed signs and/or trigger other driver warning lights until the detection is cleared; particularly where barriers provide no exit for wildlife.
6. Fund and trial interactive digital signage that displays the number of animals hit in the area, and estimated figures for the total cost of repairs and the hours of down-time as a result.
7. Implement centralised collection and reporting of road strike incidents.

## **Case Studies and Wildlife Stories**

It was incredibly difficult to choose just seven cases from the thousands we've attended over the years. The eight stories below are shared in honour of all the others we couldn't include – each one just as heartbreaking, just as important.

We truly hope you'll take a moment to read their stories. Each represents not only the trauma these animals endured, but the urgent need for change we're fighting for.

### **The First Photo – A Tragedy That Still Haunts Melanie**

This image was taken just seconds before I euthanised her.



She was still alive. Still breathing. Her tongue all but severed, her jaw shattered, her suffering immeasurable. I took the photo to document her condition — and then I made the unbearable decision to end her life. At the time she was possibly the first koala in Victoria to be euthanised via captive bolt by a wildlife rescuer. Since then, I'm almost ashamed to say I cannot recall how many koalas I've euthanised.

The trauma I felt doing that is something that lives on. I'll never forget her, and I promised to fight harder for koalas from that day forward.

She died because no one stopped. Because there were no signs. Because there was no strategy in place to protect her or others like her. This is how the story begins for too many Victorian wildlife carers. It doesn't begin in policy documents — it begins here, on the side of a road, with a living being broken by inaction and speed.

### **Joey Rescue – A Moment of Compassion**

The first image shows a mother kangaroo, killed on a regional roadside. The driver didn't stop. Dozens more swerved past her without checking for life.

The second image captures a moment of compassion — one man stopped, noticed her pouch move, and found a joey still alive. Frightened and cold, he was gently removed and was able to be rehabilitated at a wildlife shelter.





This joey survived because someone chose to act. Most don't get that chance.

This story highlights the need for mandatory driver response laws, routine carcass removal, and a cultural shift that values every life.

### **Knox and Monny – Survivors of Road Trauma**

These photos show two koalas: Knox, a male struck by a car in Romsey, and Monny, a female hit in Monegetta. Both were lucky to survive.



Knox sustained facial injuries but was treated, rehabilitated, and released. Monny also recovered with care and now lives freely again in the bush.

The difference between life and death often comes down to timely reporting and

intervention. We urgently need more public education, visible signage, and awareness of who to call when wildlife is found injured.

### **Caldy and the Unnamed Female – Calder Freeway**

These images tell two very different stories — both from the Calder Freeway, a known koala hotspot.



Caldys was found alive. Police assisted with traffic, and we rescued him. After a short time in care and fence repairs, he was released.

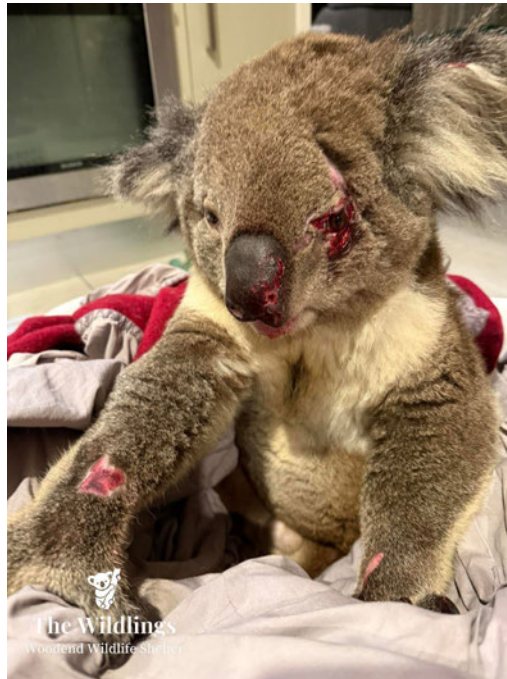
In contrast, a female koala was found dead on the same freeway. No one reported her. Like so many, she died in silence.



This illustrates the stark impact that awareness, intervention, and infrastructure make — and the consequences when they're absent.

### Walking Wounded – A Midnight Rescue

This koala was hit by a car and left alive but suffering. He waited over an hour for help.



I collected him, brought him home, assessed him, and then had to euthanise him — my third koala euthanised that week. This was at midnight. I had to be up at 4:30am for work. I barely slept.

I carry this trauma every day. This is what caring for wildlife really looks like. It's not glory — it's heartbreak.

### Technology in Action – KoaLocator

As a proactive response to this crisis, we created a free mobile app called KoaLocator. It allows the public to record koala sightings and road deaths in real time, contributing to hotspot mapping.

(Apple App store: <https://apps.apple.com/au/app/koalocator/id6743669411> The website for the initiative is located here: <https://koalocator.com.au/> ).

We urge the Committee to consider adopting and supporting existing technologies that can be rapidly integrated into Victoria's wildlife protection framework. With government backing, KoaLocator could be adapted for broader Victorian use — either as a dedicated app or by integrating its function into VicRoads and DELWP systems. It provides a ready-made, community-friendly, data-driven solution — and it's available now.



## Expanded Recommendations

In addition to our earlier recommendations, we call on the Committee to:

1. Fund wildlife corridor mapping and prioritise reconnection of fragmented habitats using land easements, overpasses, or reforestation incentives.
2. Retrofit existing roads with underpasses in areas of repeated roadkill, paired with fencing to guide animals to these crossings.
3. Trial mobile thermal cameras or KoaLocator-style mobile apps to log strike data and validate investment locations.
4. Partner with regional councils, wildlife shelters, and universities to identify high-risk zones for innovation trials.
5. Require environmental impact reviews of new roads to include fauna movement modelling, not just vegetation clearing metrics.

## Final Thoughts

Innovation doesn't always mean expensive or complicated. Sometimes, it means paying attention, learning from others, and doing the basics well. Victoria has a chance to lead — or continue to fall behind while our unique wildlife disappears, one strike at a time.

We urge the Committee to apply these recommendations at a state level. The technology is here. The models have been tested. Victoria is behind — and animals are dying needlessly because of it.

This crisis is preventable. We cannot continue watching animals die simply because nothing was done – because a sign wasn't installed, a trial wasn't approved, or a digital solution was “too hard.”

We're not asking for miracles. We're asking for action.

Sincerely,

Melanie Fraser and Karl Dawson

The Wildlings Woodend Wildlife Shelter