

Submission to Inquiry

Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Wildlife Road Strike in Victoria – May 2025

Submitted by Ian Slattery

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission on an issue which is of vital importance to wildlife protection and welfare.

I have been a volunteer wildlife rescuer for over 15 years and specialise in macropod (kangaroos and wallabies) rescue in the Central Victorian region. I hold Category A, B and C firearms licences and I am the only trained and licensed darter in the Mount Alexander Shire. I am a highly skilled and experienced rescuer who has first-hand experience of dealing with complex rescues including wildlife hit by motorists. I therefore consider I am well placed to provide valuable and constructive input to this inquiry.

Road strike is the number one cause of injury to wildlife in this region and accounts for the vast majority of rescues. Aside from the immense suffering to wildlife, it is traumatising to members of the public who are involved and takes an enormous emotional and mental toll on rescuers who have to deal with these incidents. From my experience there is a clear community expectation that Victoria's injured wildlife will be attended to by suitably trained rescuers and that Government should better support this sector.

Road strikes on wildlife are highly preventable as has been clearly demonstrated in other countries and I urge the Committee to give serious consideration to the recommendations outlined in this submission.

Summary

Road strike represents one of the most devastating yet preventable causes of wildlife harm in Victoria. Aside from the immense suffering caused to Victoria's native wildlife it poses a significant risk to human safety, is traumatising to the members of the public who witness it and takes a huge toll on volunteer rescuers who are called upon to deal with the often horrific injuries.

There are ways to significantly reduce and prevent road strikes, many of which have been successfully implemented in other countries and have proven to drastically reduce road strikes on wildlife.

I urge the Committee to recommend the Government implement the following measures as a matter of priority:

1. Trialling technologies and infrastructure such as virtual fencing, dynamic signage and wildlife detection systems.
2. Reducing speed limits in known wildlife corridors and hot spots.
3. Construction of highway and freeway overpasses and underpasses to allow for wildlife to safely traverse these roads.
4. Strengthen legislation to impose strong penalties for drivers not taking action to assist injured wildlife and specify driver obligations relating to road strike.
5. Raise public awareness of wildlife road strike including a public education campaign.
6. Formally and legislatively recognise wildlife rescue as an emergency service.
7. Strengthen legislation to prevent habitat fragmentation and destruction. Strengthen State and local planning schemes to require planning applications to make adequate protection for wildlife habitat and corridors (i.e. for new roads and housing developments).
8. Establish an independent advisory group (which includes experienced wildlife rescuers and carers) to advise government on the development and implementation of the recommendations in this submission.

Submission to the Terms of Reference

The scope, application, and enforcement of relevant legislation and regulatory frameworks, and their ability to monitor wildlife road strike, promote driver education and raise public awareness

Victoria's legislative framework for wildlife protection is outdated and poorly equipped to address the growing issue of road strike. The Wildlife Act 1975 and the Road Safety Act 1986 fail to reflect contemporary conservation priorities, community expectations around wildlife protection or integrate with modern infrastructure planning. Legislation also fails to include enforceable obligations for motorists who strike wildlife and penalties for drivers who hit an animal and do not stop to offer assistance.

Habitat destruction resulting from housing developments and road construction is a major contributing factor in wildlife road strike. Planning schemes lack adequate provisions to protect wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Recommendations:

1. Strengthen legislation to prevent habitat fragmentation and destruction. Strengthen State and local planning schemes to require planning applications to make adequate

protection for wildlife habitat and corridors (e.g. for new roads and housing developments).

2. Amend legislation to establish a legal duty of care requiring motorists to report collisions with wildlife and to stop and offer appropriate assistance.
3. Amend legislation to provide penalties for drivers who hit wildlife and do not stop to offer appropriate assistance.
4. Strengthen penalties for reckless or intentional harm to wildlife under road safety legislation.
5. Incorporate mandatory training modules about wildlife road safety into driver licensing programs.
6. Implement a public education and awareness campaign about wildlife road safety .

The involvement, training and expenditure of paid and volunteer rescue and rehabilitative organisations and individuals in attending to, and managing, road strike incidents

There is a clear community expectation that injured, sick and orphaned wildlife will be rescued and treated. Members of the community who call on our services express their disbelief that volunteer wildlife rescuers receive no government support.

As rescuers we not only provide a rescue service for wildlife but we also provide a public safety service. As an example, it is common for us to be called upon to rescue an injured but still mobile kangaroo on a major country road or freeway. These are high risk rescues with not only the animal's safety at risk but also that of the rescuer and of other passing motorists.

Members of the public who come across injured wildlife are often highly traumatised and distressed. Rescuers are also called upon to console these people and provide them with emotional support.

Recommendations:

7. Formally recognise wildlife rescue as an emergency service (ala SES and CFA) in legislation and provide commensurate funding and powers (e.g. to conduct traffic management where necessary).
8. Implement a reimbursement scheme for rescuers responding to wildlife road strike incidents.

New and emerging technologies and infrastructure used to prevent road strikes

The use of technology to develop solutions to reduce wildlife road strike has been employed extensively overseas with great success and data shows this technology based infrastructure has significantly reduced the number of wildlife killed and injured on roads.

Innovations such as virtual fencing (which has reduced collisions by up to 99% in NSW), Artificial Intelligent based detection systems and wildlife bridges (which have cut wildlife road strike incidents by 80% in Canada) prove the effectiveness of these systems. However, Victoria seriously lags in implementing any of this preventative and vital infrastructure.

Aside from the suffering caused to wildlife, roads strike results in significant costs in vehicle repairs and contributes to higher insurance premiums. Ultimately these costs are worn by consumers and motorists. Engaging with motor vehicle insurance companies to help fund collision deterrent systems will benefit insurers and motorists by reducing road strike incidents and consequently reduce costs.

Recommendations:

9. Pilot virtual fencing in high-risk areas (adopting models from NSW and Tasmania)
10. Trial AI-assisted detection systems to alert drivers of kangaroos, koalas, and wombats in real time
11. Construct road, freeway and highway underpasses and overpasses at locations of known wildlife corridors to enable wildlife to safely cross

The impact of road strike on Victorian motorists, including major trauma incidents and motor vehicle damage

Aside from the immense suffering to wildlife, road strike is extremely traumatising to members of the public who are involved and takes an enormous emotional and mental toll on rescuers who have to deal with these incidents. From my experience there is clear community expectation that Victoria's injured wildlife will be attended to by suitably trained rescuers and hence Government has an obligation to its constituents to support this sector.

As a rescuer I regularly witness first-hand the emotional and mental trauma that members of the public experience when they have either hit an animal or have witnessed such an incident. Rescuers not only have to attend to the injured animal but the members of public involved turn to us to provide them with immediate support and consolation. In that sense we also provide a rescue service to members of the public. Wildlife rescuers' role is three fold – to rescue the animal, ensure the safety of other motorists and provide onsite immediate trauma counselling to those involved.

Recommendations:

12. Install motion-activated warning signs in high-risk areas to alert drivers about nearby wildlife during peak activity times (dawn/dusk).
13. Implement lower speed limits in areas with high rates of animal collisions during high-risk hours.
14. Launch targeted public education campaigns emphasizing safe driving practices tailored to specific risks (e.g. wildlife most active from dusk to dawn, the need to engage peripheral vision to be aware of road side wildlife activity)
15. Partner with local governments to identify high-risk areas for wildlife collisions and implement tailored mitigation strategies such as roadside vegetation management, speed reductions or improved lighting conditions

The impact of wildlife road strike on Victorian motorists extends far beyond vehicle damage. It includes physical injuries, emotional trauma, and financial vulnerability for thousands of drivers each year. By implementing preventative measures like dynamic signage and speed reductions, wildlife crossovers and underpasses, providing equitable access to insurance coverage, and establishing dedicated trauma support services, Victoria can mitigate these impacts while enhancing road safety for both humans and animals. Addressing these issues comprehensively will require collaboration between government agencies, insurers, local councils, wildlife rescuers and carers and mental health organizations.

The impact of development and infrastructure on incidents of wildlife road strike

Habitat destruction resulting from housing developments and road construction is a major contributing factor in wildlife road strike. These developments displace wildlife from their normal habitat and push them into areas that place them at high risk. Planning schemes lack adequate provisions to protect wildlife and wildlife habitat.

If these developments must go ahead then there is a concomitant obligation on Councils and governments to ensure such infrastructure is undertaken in a way which protects wildlife and wildlife habitat. Councils and governments generate significant revenue from these developments in the way of rates and other taxes. Given these developments can negatively impact wildlife habitat and cause wildlife displacement it is only just that a percentage of this revenue be allocated to habitat protection and road strike protection.

Recommendations

16. Strengthen legislation to prevent habitat fragmentation and destruction. Strengthen State and local planning schemes to require planning applications to make adequate protection for wildlife habitat and corridors.

17. Mandate Wildlife Impact Assessments (WIAs) for all major road and infrastructure projects and housing developments, ensuring they include:
 - a) Habitat mapping to identify critical areas for wildlife movement
 - b) Seasonal risk analysis to account for breeding or migratory patterns
 - c) Consultation with ecologists, local rescuers and local communities, and
 - d) Establish enforceable standards for WIAs, including penalties for non-compliance
18. Link development approvals to measurable habitat restoration initiatives near project sites, such as reforestation or wetland rehabilitation.
19. Embed green corridors into state planning schemes to maintain safe migratory routes for wildlife across urban landscapes.
20. Strengthen land clearing regulations to prevent unnecessary destruction of native habitats.
21. That governments and Councils fund habitat protection from revenue derived from all forms of development which has the potential to impact wildlife habitat and wildlife welfare.

International best practice standards to decrease wildlife road strike

The solutions detailed in the previous sections of this submission such as technology based deterrent and warning systems and wildlife overpasses and underpasses all have been implemented in several Australian States and overseas. They have all proven to significantly reduce wildlife road strike.

Data and detailed case studies on all these are readily available.

Current methods of collating data on wildlife road strike and its effectiveness

No substantive comment on this issue.

Any other related matters

A change of attitude from one of viewing wildlife as an interference to one of how humans and wildlife can peacefully co-exist is needed. By fostering empathy for native species through education programs and leveraging cross-sector collaboration frameworks, Victoria can create a more harmonious relationship between humans and wildlife with an emphasis on co-habitation while safeguarding its unique biodiversity against future threats.

Recommendations:

22. Establish an independent advisory group (which includes experienced wildlife rescuers and carers) to advise government on the development and implementation of the recommendations in this submission.

Submitted by Ian Slattery – Senior Wildlife Rescuer

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