

I live in regional Victoria and volunteer with Wildlife Rescue Information Network (WRIN). The wildlife carnage on our roads is distressing. Last Friday driving from Axedale to Bendigo along the McIvor Highway I counted eleven recently killed kangaroos on the side of the road. Whilst the City of Greater Bendigo (COGB) removes dead animals regularly nonetheless this week I counted another three newly killed kangaroos.

Your committee would certainly be aware of Wildlife Victoria (WV)'s research into the wildlife road toll and their recommendations. Underlining some of their findings, it is estimated that ten million native animals die on Australian roads each year and whilst most wildlife road deaths are not reported between 2022 and 2023 there was an increase of 24% reported wildlife deaths to WV. The greatest number of phone calls since the establishment of WV in 1989 (130,000) were in 2023, an increase of 50% from 2022. These statistics point to a significant and increasing problem that we are facing.

Whilst WRIN is a much smaller organisation, most kangaroo, wallaby and wombat joey rescues are the result of their mother being killed by cars. Moreover, 50 % of birds requiring care have also been hit by cars. There are seven wildlife shelter operations in the region but only four wildlife carers who look after the young joeys as well as other birds, reptiles, and animals. Caring for these animals is extraordinarily time consuming and emotionally demanding; very much like caring for a human baby. All carers volunteer and this work dominates their days and nights.

On behalf of WRIN, I recently met with a member of the biodiversity team from the COGB to discuss the problem of the wildlife road toll and how we may be able to work together to reduce this problem. I would like to share some of our suggestions.

- Community Education

Federal, State, and Local governments ideally should work together and with wildlife organizations to educate the community about our unique wildlife and wildlife road safety. Wildlife road safety education is already being done by some insurance companies (Youi and AAMI) however, government could have a larger community reach at a low cost by utilising existing government communication avenues.

An annual 'Victorian Wildlife Awareness month' could take place annually. Schools and community groups could incorporate wildlife awareness activities into this annual event.

Sustainability or environmental celebrations could include a wildlife awareness component.

- Speed reduction.

Research suggests that reducing speed limits would significantly improve outcomes for people and wildlife. Furthermore, speed reduction has a minor impact on travel times (WV 'Wildlife Road Toll Reduction Toolkit P11'). Speed reduction should be a requirement in heavily forested areas.

- Signage

Variable Message Signage has been effective in increasing driver awareness

- Wildlife movement solutions

In southern Queensland and throughout New South Wales on their freeways there are extensive fauna exclusion fences, land-bridge overpasses, and rope bridges. Surely if other states in Australia and other countries have tried and implemented these successfully then it should be something that Victoria could investigate.

- Preservation of wildlife habitat and creating wildlife corridors

In approving further developments consideration of the preservation of wildlife habitat is important as is creating wildlife corridors so the animals and birds can safely move across the landscape. 'Broader ecological and environmental assessments must be considered by local and state government, when it comes to wildlife protection and land development' (Ibid p17).

We are very appreciative that you are undertaking this investigation and look forward to your findings and recommendations.