LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Wildlife Roadstrike in Victoria

Geelong – Wednesday 20 August 2025

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WITNESS

Jason Cichocki, Founding Member, Surfcoast Wildlife Rescue.

The CHAIR: I declare open the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into Wildlife Roadstrike in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands we are gathered on today, and paying my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings. I also welcome any other members of the public watching via the live broadcast and in the public gallery.

To kick off we will get committee members to introduce themselves to you, starting with Mr McIntosh on the screen.

Tom McINTOSH: Hello there. Welcome. Tom McIntosh, Member for Eastern Victoria.

Gaelle BROAD: Hi. I am Gaelle Broad, Member for Northern Victoria.

The CHAIR: Georgie Purcell, Member for Northern Victoria.

Katherine COPSEY: Katherine Copsey, Member for Southern Metropolitan.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for taking the time to appear before us today.

All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing, and then transcripts will ultimately be made public on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, can you please state your full name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

Jason CICHOCKI: My name is Jason Cichocki. I am the Founding Member and director of Surfcoast Wildlife Rescue.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you. We now welcome your opening comments but ask that they be kept to around 10 to 15 minutes to ensure plenty of time for discussion and questions, and it does not matter if you do not go that long either.

Jason CICHOCKI: No worries. Thank you. As I said, my name is Jason Cichocki, and I am Founding Member and director of Surfcoast Wildlife Rescue, which is a dedicated 24/7 rescue service based in Torquay, Victoria. I have been a dedicated 24/7 rescuer here in the south-west region of Victoria for over 15 years and am licensed to both euthanise and tranquillise animals in need of rescuing.

After many years rescuing in this region, it became quite evident that we had several wildlife road strike hotspots in the region, with one of the worst being Forest Road, Anglesea, which on one side borders the Great Otway National Park, with the other side being predominantly farmland and state forest. We were quite regularly being called out to attend to animals that had been hit on this road, and it was not uncommon to be attending to multiple rescues on this road in one day. About eight years ago, in 2017, we decided to start collecting our own data on the incidence of wildlife road strike in our region by using an app developed for the collection of such data, which, amongst other data, allowed us to log the GPS location of each kangaroo and

wallaby hit. With the help of this app, we found we were attending to upwards of 200 to 250 kangaroos and wallabies per year on this one road alone – Forest Road, Anglesea – as well as many other species such as echidnas, possums and all species of birdlife. This road was without a doubt the worst road for wildlife road strike in the region.

In order to collect as comprehensive data as possible, I personally have been doing four patrols per day of the trial area for eight years now. My patrols are 7 am, 12 pm, 6 pm and 9 pm, when I would regularly come across animals hit and dead, lying in the middle of the road, or in some cases still alive and needing euthanasia. My morning patrol also consisted of removing at least five birds a day off the road that had been squashed by vehicles each and every day. These birds ranged from magpies to ravens, cockatoos, kookaburras, owls and tawny frogmouths. I would also be removing upwards of 10 echidnas per year, as well as numerous ringtail and brushtail possums. These high numbers of wildlife road strike were not only an animal welfare issue but were also a human welfare issue too, as there had been several serious accidents and unfortunately several human lives lost over the years on this road due to the incidents with wildlife.

As one of the main wildlife rescue organisations in this region, we were the ones seeing this issue that many did not even know about. So we decided to try and do something to reduce the number of incidents of wildlife road strike on Forest Road, Anglesea, to not only protect the animals but to protect the community too. So I started to research the options, which is where I came across the technology known as virtual fencing. This technology was being used to prevent road strike of deer, moose and elk in Europe and it seemed to be very effective in reducing road strike there. I found there was a company, Wildlife Safety Solutions, that had brought this technology to Australia in an attempt to try and reduce the number of incidents of wildlife road strike here too. They already had several trials running right across Australia: in Queensland for kangaroos and koalas; in New South Wales for kangaroos and koalas; in Tasmania for kangaroos, wallabies and Tasmanian devils; and we also had a couple in Victoria for kangaroos and wallabies.

In researching the reports on these trials I found there were differing opinions on the efficacy of this technology and found there were just as many saying it did work as were saying it did not. The one thing I noticed in most of the previous trials was that there was very little actual recording of hard data prior to the beginning of the trial. We had already been collecting hard data for four years, so I thought if anyone was able to clearly show the efficacy of virtual fencing it would be us. Due to the 50–50 nature of the reports and opinions I was not really sure how effective virtual fencing would be, but we could not just stand by doing nothing while all these animals and some humans were dying. My thoughts were: if we try it and it does not work, then we would tick this off the list and move on to something else that might. We had to start somewhere.

We put a submission together and spoke to our then local MP Andy Meddick of the Animal Justice Party, who spoke for us in Parliament and successfully lobbied the state government to fund a three-year trial of virtual fencing on Forest Road, Anglesea, Victoria. The virtual fencing was installed on Forest Road on 16 June 2022. This was a 12.8 kilometre section of virtual fencing, which to my knowledge is the largest section of virtual fencing in Australia. After the installation I continued to do my four patrols per day, and it was really interesting to watch the reaction of the animals at night when my headlights would set off the sensors, triggering the light and sound stimuli. I could see the kangaroos and wallabies moving off into the bush well before I was there. As these virtual fencing posts are placed 25 metres apart, my lights were setting off the three or four sensors ahead, which were about 75 to 100 metres away, which was giving the animals ample time to move away well before I even got there. It seemed to be working really well, and only time would tell how well. At the end of the first year of the trial I collated the data, which showed that we had reduced the numbers from 200 to 250 down to 74, only five of which were hit during the time that virtual fencing was active, which is dusk to dawn. This was a 70 per cent reduction of incidents of wildlife road strike in the first year.

What I found most interesting and quite obvious during my nightly patrols in the second year was that the many family mobs that were always feeding roadside at certain spots along Forest Road were just not there anymore. I would still see one or two randomly feeding roadside at night, but it was not the several mobs regularly seen feeding roadside anymore. After collating the data at the end of the second year we had reduced the numbers to 28 hit for the whole year, six of which were hit during the time virtual fencing was active. This was an 89 per cent reduction in the incidence of wildlife road strike. This technology was working really well and saving many lives already. In the third year of the trial what I found most evident was the lack of kangaroos and wallabies feeding roadside at night. I could quite regularly literally drive up and down the trial area at night without even seeing a kangaroo or wallaby. Virtual fencing was far exceeding my expectations. After collating

the data of the third year the numbers were showing 40 hit, eight of which were hit during the time virtual fencing was active. This was an 84 per cent reduction in the incidence of wildlife road strike. After the three-year trial the figures showed an 81 per cent reduction in the incidence of wildlife road strike in the trial area. That is 608 less collisions over the three-year period on this one road alone.

Not only has this technology saved kangaroo, wallaby and potentially human lives, but as I mentioned earlier, this technology has saved many other species' lives too. As mentioned earlier, I used to scrape upwards of five birds a day off the road. If you do the sums, five birds a day, 365 days a year, is 1825 birds hit and killed each year. Over the past three years that would have been 5475 birds hit and killed, a staggering number. Since the installation of virtual fencing over the past three years I have only had to remove 16 birds in total. Yes, that is right, 16 birds in total in three years. That is 5459 bird lives that have been saved by virtual fencing in the last three years. I would like to let that sink in for a minute: 5459 birds not squashed on the road in the past three years. Can you imagine what this has done for the population of the birdlife in the trial area and also the potential for endangered species of birdlife if virtual fencing was installed in their region? Not only has it been saving birds, but each and every year I would be removing at least 10 echidnas off the road squashed as well as multiple numbers of ringtail and brushtail possums. Since the installation of virtual fencing in the past three years I have not had a single echidna or possum hit on Forest Road, so that is at least 30 echidnas and many, many possums still alive today that would not have been if it were not for virtual fencing.

That is from an animal welfare perspective, but there is also the human welfare perspective. Each and every year on Forest Road there would be several serious accidents from people either hitting kangaroos and wallabies or swerving to avoid collision with them and going off-road and hitting trees. These more serious accidents would usually see the occupants taken to hospital. Unfortunately, on a few occasions these accidents have been fatal. In the past three years since the installation of virtual fencing there has not been one serious accident, no-one taken to hospital and no fatal accidents due to an incident involving a kangaroo or a wallaby. This can be verified by both the local branches of Victoria Police and by Ambulance Victoria.

In discussing human welfare in relation to wildlife road strike I would like to mention the human trauma factor, something quite often overlooked. While hitting and fatally injuring an animal does not affect some people adversely, in many cases it does. It can and has had long-term impacts on many people's lives that have unfortunately hit a kangaroo or a wallaby. One particular case that comes to mind from a few years ago that can explain this impact is of a young female P-plater that had only had her licence for three weeks. Unfortunately she hit a mother kangaroo and an at-foot joey, a baby joey, on Forest Road one night, well before the virtual fencing was installed. The poor girl had to sit and watch as the mother kangaroo and the baby rolled around in pain with broken legs in front of her until I arrived to euthanise them both, and although she did not watch as I euthanised, she did hear the gunshots that were required to end their suffering. The poor girl was so traumatised by the whole incident that I had to stay with her until her parents arrived, as she was in no state to drive her car. I bumped into her father a year later and was told that the poor girl was so traumatised that a year later she still had not driven her car since the incident. While this would not affect everyone that hits an animal this way, for this poor girl it did, and I know of many others that have had and still do have long-term impacts from being involved in such an incident.

Also something worthy of noting in regard to the human trauma caused by wildlife road strike is the impact it can have on the emergency services required to attend a serious wildlife road strike incident. While not all of the 608 less collisions in our trial area over the past three years due to the implementation of virtual fencing would have resulted in the attendance of police and ambulance, it is quite likely that many would have. At a time when our emergency services are quite regularly stretched to their limits, to have a technology such as virtual fencing greatly reducing the numbers of incidents requiring their attendance can quite literally be life saving and a welcome positive side effect from the installation of virtual fencing.

We should also take into account the savings of the costs incurred by individuals not having to go into hospital due to a serious wildlife road strike incident, both the costs to them individually and the costs to the government. As we all know, it can cost thousands of dollars per day to have someone in hospital, as well as the potential costs involved of rehabilitation after an injury caused in a serious wildlife road strike incident. After all of this we also need to take into account the savings to the insurance industry by preventing hundreds if not thousands of claims each year from wildlife road strike, which could after many years have the potential to reduce the cost of vehicle insurance.

Also worthy of mentioning about virtual fencing technology is it is very cost effective. It is a relatively low set-up cost and initial investment compared to the many other options available to mitigate wildlife road strike. For example, wildlife overpasses and underpasses can cost tens of millions of dollars and take years to build and only protect the animals and the community over a very short distance. Our trial of virtual fencing has been saving lives and preventing wildlife road strike over a 12.8 kilometre stretch of road for three years for a total investment of $165,000, and it was installed and fully operational in two weeks.

In summary, virtual fencing in our trial at least has proven to be very effective at not only saving lives both animal and human but also having so many positive benefits, preventing human trauma, freeing up emergency services resources as well as saving the government, the private sector and individuals in the community a significant amount of money, which in such a difficult economic climate can only be beneficial to us all – so many positives with absolutely no negatives that I can find. From what I have seen from the results of this trial of virtual fencing, with a relatively low set-up cost and a small investment considering the savings made, in my opinion virtual fencing has the potential to save so many lives, both animal and human, as well as save the government millions of dollars on several levels, and this technology should be implemented in all wildlife road strike hotspots right across Australia.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to what I have had to say. I look forward to potentially working with you all to save more lives in the future.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for that, Jason. We will go to questions, starting with Ms Broad.

Gaelle BROAD: Thank you very much, Jason, for coming this afternoon. It is interesting to hear your comments about virtual fencing, because we have had other witnesses that have given different insights.

Jason CICHOCKI: That is exactly what I found too when I was researching – that it was 50–50 – and that is why I decided to take this on board and trial it myself and see how it went. And although I have heard and seen the reports stating that it has not seemed to have worked in certain trial areas, like I said, it has far exceeded our expectations, and we have saved so many lives. While a lot of the stuff previously has come from larger organisations and bodies, I am the guy that is called out every single day to go out to these wildlife road strike incidents and unfortunately put the animals down. I am the person on the ground dealing with this on a daily basis, and when I say a daily basis, as I explained, I am doing four patrols of this road every day – every single day. So I am the one that is down there seeing this happen, and I can tell you without a doubt that this has made a massive difference to this particular area.

Gaelle BROAD: You have been involved for a number of years. Have you seen an increase? Obviously it got that bad that you felt you needed to look at other things, but what do you see contributing to the increased wildlife road strike? What is actually causing it?

Jason CICHOCKI: I think a lot of factors – but one of the main factors was the increase in the number of people that were living on the coast permanently. In particular in Torquay we are getting a lot of development going on. Every time they put up a new estate with 2500 houses – you can extrapolate that to, say, maybe two to three people per household – we are getting another 5000 to 10,000 people moving into the area. A lot of the people that move into the area, first of all, are not aware that there are such large numbers of wildlife constantly roaming the roads that we travel on every day. So I think it had a lot to do with the population influx and lack of knowledge, which is one thing that we as Surfcoast Wildlife Rescue have worked really hard on – to not only obviously be available to do the wildlife rescue but to advocate and let people know.

As you mentioned just before, we were starting to see large numbers, and there was a year – I think it was 2017, back when we first started collecting the data – when I had a day where I had seven kangaroos hit and killed or hit and needing euthanasia within a 4-hour period on Forest Road. Three of those were mothers that had babies, and two of the babies had to be euthanised. One of the babies did make it and eventually got released. But after having a day like that, a 4-hour period where I had to go and put seven individuals plus a couple of babies down, it was just something where we had to do something about it.

Once again it came back to doing the research. We were finding overpasses, underpasses – yes, they are great, but it is tens of millions of dollars to do that. Not only that, you have got to publicly acquire people's land in some areas, and also it takes so long to build those things. We needed something, and we needed something now. So that is when I decided to take on this project and see if it would make a difference, and like I said, we

decided to do this just to see for ourselves if this worked. And if it did not, great – tick it off the list, move it on and start looking for something else. At least we were starting somewhere. And it has turned out to be much better than we first thought.

Gaelle BROAD: You mentioned earlier the very difficult impact on a new driver. I was talking to an online driver training program, and I said, 'Are kangaroos in there?' But they were like, 'No, because it can traumatise people.' They do a beachball or something coming on. What are your thoughts about driver training? Is there a need for wildlife to be a part of that?

Jason CICHOCKI: I think definitely. One of the big things that I think should be taught to all new drivers is that you need to drive to the conditions. There is nothing there that teaches that just because that sign says 80, you need to drive at 80 kilometres an hour. You do not. Especially at certain times of the day, and in particular with Forest Road, it is right throughout the whole night. It did not matter what time of night you were wanting to travel, prior to virtual fencing you would see mobs of kangaroos all the way down Forest Road. There were certain spots where certain family mobs would sit and eat. You could have 10 to 15 in a particular mob here, and then a couple of kilometres up the road you would have them sitting over here and then over here, all the way down Forest Road. No-one teaches the new drivers that you need to drive to the conditions. If the conditions are that you are driving on a road that you know is heavily populated and there is a good possibility of an animal jumping out in front of you, slow down.

What I quite regularly put out publicly on social media in regard to Forest Road is actually Forest Road used to be and was for generations a 100-kilometre zone. I did the full length of Forest Road at 100 kilometres an hour, I then did it at 80 kilometres an hour and I then did it at 60 kilometres an hour. The difference between 100 kilometres an hour and 60 kilometres an hour is a minute and a half over that whole 12.8 kilometre stretch of road. If you cannot add a minute and a half to your day to not take someone's life, not damage your vehicle, not cause yourself all these costs and potentially lose your job because you cannot get to work to prevent that, then you should not be having a licence. These are the sorts of things that I think need to be taught to the new drivers. The reality is people do not understand that. That is a decent road, 12.8 kilometres. If you slow down to 60 kilometres an hour, because there are a lot of kangaroos and you could potentially hit one, you are only going to add a minute and a half to your day. It is not life changing. It is not like you are going to be late to work or late home for dinner. It is a minute and a half, and you can prevent so much just by doing that. This is something that I think young people need to be taught.

The CHAIR: You have got time for another one.

Gaelle BROAD: That is fine. You can come back to me.

The CHAIR: Okay. Wonderful. We will go to Mr McIntosh.

Tom McINTOSH: Hi. Thanks so much for being here, and thanks for all the work you do. It sounds like you have consistently been committed to the work you do. Thank you. I want to go to the virtual fencing. You just mentioned 12.8 kilometres. How long is the stretch of virtual fencing?

Jason CICHOCKI: That is the whole 12.8 kilometres.

Tom McINTOSH: That is the full 12.8. Great. Thank you.

Jason CICHOCKI: Forest Road goes a little bit further than that. But there was a whole section down the end where in a period of, say, five years I only had two kangaroos hit. I decided to pull it up at the area, because obviously we were lobbying the government, so we were trying to fit it into a frame where everyone was happy and we did not actually need it for that last section. So 12.8 kilometres is the full section of virtual fencing from the Great Ocean Road to a road that is known as Grays Road, which is 12.8 kilometres down the road.

Tom McINTOSH: From a cost perspective, like per kilometre when you did that, in my reading it seems like there are some different technologies about. Can you talk us through the practicalities in terms of setting it up and the way it operates just for a little bit more detail? Is that all right?

Jason CICHOCKI: In that $165,000, we did put in the installation costs, which I think, if I remember rightly, was about $15,000 for them to do that. But the reality is, after seeing them do that and being present

while they were doing it, it is so easy to fit that any local council could quite easily have their staff implement this. You would not have the set-up cost of installation; you could do it yourself. It is so quick. It is exactly as one of those white poles that we see on the side of the road with the reflectors – it is the same as them, a plastic pole. These ones are just dark green, and they have got a spike on the bottom. The company actually supplies you with a tool that helps you knock them into the ground. You place them at 25-metre intervals and just knock them straight into the ground, go through a little set-up. Actually I did bring one in to just to show everybody the unit itself. That is the unit itself. This is fitted on the poles, and this actually faces the bush, not the road. Basically, if you have a look on the sides, we have got two sensors here; they are light sensors. They are set off. They are the sensors that set the unit off when you go driving up and down the road. What is also really good to mention is these things are placed 25 metres apart, but then they stagger them. So you have got you have got one here, one over there, one over there, one over there, one over there, and it goes all the way down the road. The good thing is your headlights do not just set off the side that you are on; your headlights set the other side off as well. As you are driving up and down, any of these sensors pick up a headlight straightaway and the light stimuli and sound stimuli come out.

I went and tested this and found out myself how and why it works. If you were to stand on a road in the middle of the night, you know, 12 o'clock at night, it is really quiet, right? When there are no cars travelling up and down, it is really quiet. If you are an animal and you are sitting beside one of these feeding on the roadside and all of a sudden a car comes down, and this gets set off well before the car comes down, this sound stimuli and light stimuli – it was quite interesting to be standing there and waiting for a car to come. All the sensors start going off and you hear it all, and you can understand why they all move. The easy way to explain how this affects the animals is it is not something that scares them or anything. The easy way to explain it is it is exactly like an alarm clock. Your alarm clock goes off, you roll over. It does not scare you when it goes off in the morning, but it annoys you, so you roll over and you turn it off. Well, the kangaroos and wallabies cannot turn this off. So it annoys them and they go, 'Ugh,' and straightaway they head off into the bush. That was what was really interesting to watch when it was first installed. Driving down the road you could literally see when they would start to head off, and it was at least two, maybe three in front. You could see it, because when you are driving down the road, obviously you cannot hear the sound stimuli, but there are little yellow and blue lights that flash on the side and at the front here as well. You can physically see, when you are driving down, that sensor over there gets set off, the next one gets set off, and it was really interesting to watch the animals. As soon as the sensor starts going off, if they are feeding down like that, all of a sudden they are looking up, they are looking down. The good thing is it makes them look up and look down, and then they see your headlights well before you are there and they are all heading off into the bush.

I cannot say that every kangaroo does exactly that, because there were a lot. Specifically wallabies seemed to be a lot more confident about themselves. The wallabies would sit there and potentially stay there, and if they were feeding, they would stop feeding. But the good thing is once this goes off, they look up and look down and they see your car coming. They have been alerted to your vehicle coming well before you get there. Whereas prior to this, and as probably a lot of you would have had happen, the kangaroos and wallabies will feed roadside. But for whatever reason they get alerted when they first hear your car, which is right when you are there, and that is when they jump out straight in front of you, because they are getting alerted right at that last split second when your car is already there.

And of course 90 per cent of the time they will jump in front of you. So to have this alerting them to a vehicle coming, 75, 100 metres down the road – it was just amazing to watch. And it is the main reason behind why those numbers have dropped dramatically, because this works during dusk to dawn. And in saying that, it was quite surprising to see that even when it was relatively bright, first thing in the morning, the sensors were still getting set off. So it sort of –

Tom McINTOSH: That was going to be my next question, yes, about at what point it triggered as far as the light went.

Jason CICHOCKI: It is really interesting, because it is not just in darkness; in low light it still operates. And then when you get to full daylight, or I would call it, you know – I mean it changes. The time changes in the morning quite regularly based on the time the sun comes up, but when it is full light, that is when these turn off. So the animals that were hit during the day – we were never going to have this system prevent that, because it does not operate during daylight hours. The reason why the numbers have dropped dramatically is because prior to virtual fencing the majority of animals were getting hit at night, and that is because they feed and move

during the night and, you know, specifically full moon. Whenever you have got a bright night due to the moon, the animals are moving right up until 6 and 7 in the morning, moving around and feeding.

So the main reason behind the numbers dropping is because this is alerting all the animals at night, during the darker hours, to a vehicle coming and giving them the opportunity to move off. They do not necessarily automatically move off into the bush, that way; some of them will cross the road, but they are doing that 100 metres in front of you, not when you are right there and they jump in front of your car. So even if they did decide to hop across the road, they were hopping across the road, you know, 75, 100 metres in front of me – which just gives you so much time. Even if you are flying down the road, if you see an animal jumping across the road 75 to 100 metres in front of you, you have got plenty of time to hit the brakes and not have a collision. So you know, it has worked really well.

Tom McINTOSH: I love the fact that you have brought that in. With anything in my electorate I am very practical; I like to get out and see it. I think we can have discussions in the abstract that do not connect with what is going on, so that is great.

Jason CICHOCKI: The other thing to mention is these things are solar-powered. That panel there – that obviously charges up the battery during the day to make sure that this thing is working at night, and we have been told that the batteries last three to five years. I just did a maintenance run probably about three weeks ago, and I had a couple that were not working. I do think it was the battery, but I just replaced the unit itself, and we will probably start replacing the batteries because now it has been three years. So with any ones that are not operating anymore we can replace the batteries. Once again, this is such a simple system to do: you just pull the four screws out there, replace the two batteries, put the screws back in and screw it back onto the post, and that is right for another three to five years. That is what I was talking about: the cost effectiveness of this. You know, there is absolutely no technology at the moment that comes anywhere near the cost effectiveness of a system like this.

Tom McINTOSH: That is really interesting; my next question was going to be about the powering of them. The only other question I was going to ask is about the alignment of the poles. Are they to the current poles or slightly within or slightly without, the lights?

Jason CICHOCKI: They are slightly wider than the standard poles. Obviously we do not want them too close to the road and have people hitting them as they are pulling off the road and things like that. But they are relatively close to – the white poles are put right on the edge of the road. We are probably about that far away from the white poles.

Tom McINTOSH: Yes. Fantastic. That will be interesting to see – I will wrap up, Chair – but I imagine there will be other technological advances that do not require light as our cars get smarter in time, where they can just, you know, speak to each other –

Jason CICHOCKI: This company, Wildlife Safety Solutions, is actually working on that sort of technology as well. This is all they have at the moment, but they do have several other variants coming on the market somewhere in the near future, and they are obviously working towards having a system that works during daytime as well. So there is going to be advancement in technology, and once again, we will just be able to replace the unit itself once it comes in. It will obviously be a cost again, but we have already got the poles. So all we would need to do would be to take this unit off and put the upgraded unit on, and away we go.

Tom McINTOSH: That is brilliant. Thanks so much. It has been great to hear all that and to hear it in a very practical, matter-of-fact way as well. So I will leave my questions there, Chair, as I am out of time.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr McIntosh. We will go to Ms Copsey.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. Thanks so much, Jason, for your presentation today. It is really great to hear about your work, and we appreciate your time. I want to ask about these units – if they have been designed with particular species in mind, to your knowledge.

Jason CICHOCKI: They started off being designed for the larger animals, the deer, moose and elk in, I think if I remember rightly, Sweden and Norway, where they were on the major autobahns and stuff that they have got there – if you can imagine hitting an animal that large. There was a lot more road toll, road death, over

there due to wildlife road strike. It has seemed to have worked really well over there for that as well. So that is where David Everett, is his name, from Wildlife Safety Solutions came in; he was the one that found out about it and decided to bring it to Australia to see if it could work with all the species here. What I already picked up from the previous reports and trial areas is that it did actually work for other species of animals, but – I have flagged this with David as well – nobody had ever done a report on the bird species.

The one issue and problem I have is the fact that when we first started collecting the data we were focusing on macropods, because macropods were the main ones that were hit on that road, but then after doing my four patrols per day, that is when I was noticing how bad it was with the birdlife as well – you know, prior to putting virtual fencing in. It was a sad fact of what I had to do every day, and I literally would leave for work early in the morning to give myself enough time to pull over and pull all these birds off the road. And this can be verified by anybody living on the coast down there that travels that road. Around the inner towns like Moriac and Winchelsea and places like that, a lot of the people from there work on the coast. So this is the main artery for those people to get to the coast to work and back. There are so many people that have contacted me or even pulled over when I have been on the roadside doing my patrols and mentioned to me how on this road there used to be literally carnage driving up and down there. It was horrible. Not only were you seeing the dead and sometimes not dead kangaroos, but so many other animals were squashed on the road every single day. Unfortunately, I was not keeping the data, but I know myself without a doubt it was at least five – a minimum of five, sometimes more – birds per day getting squashed on this road. That is why it was just so eye-opening to me.

I very rarely have to pull birds off the road now, which was something that I was doing every single day. I literally cannot tell you the last time I had to go down Forest Road in the middle of the night and euthanise a kangaroo. I cannot remember. It was probably about six months ago. The night-time euthanasia was something that was not every day, but it was at least multiple times per week that I was having to go at 10 o'clock, 12 o'clock and 2 o'clock and euthanise kangaroos. I just do not do that anymore. It has just been amazing to watch this happen. As much as from my perspective I was doing this for the animal's welfare, it also made life a lot better for me. It is quite traumatising having to point a gun at a kangaroo and pull the trigger, especially when you are doing this because you love the animals.

Katherine COPSEY: Smarter, not harder. Did you try anything before the virtual fencing devices? Had you tried anything else, or is this the first kind of technology intervention you have come up with?

Jason CICHOCKI: No, this was the first thing. When I did the research there were a lot of things out there, but once again, it came back to something that we could implement as quickly as possible and something that we could in some ways afford, because at the start, I thought I was going to have to do this myself financially. But obviously once I did the sums and everything, I thought, 'Well, this will send me broke if I have to do it myself.' Thankfully at the time Andy Meddick lived in Torquay and not only was he an MP, but he was a member of our wildlife rescue group and he had done many rescues, so he understood what I was trying to do from a wildlife rescue perspective as well, because he has literally been out on rescues with me before and had to help me deal with the kangaroos and everything, so it was really good to have him at the time be able to speak in Parliament passionately based on his experience. It was something that we were able to do – get virtual fencing up and operating really quickly compared to all the other options. That is why we went down that path, and because it has worked so well, I have not had to look at another option, so it has just been great.

Katherine COPSEY: Great, and you touched on this a little bit in your opening statement and in response to some questions, but just going a bit further to prevention and not seeing animals forced out of existing habitat and into areas where they might be at more risk, what would you like to see the government take into account when it comes to wildlife in their planning and development decisions?

Jason CICHOCKI: I think a lot of it needs to come down to just the speed zones. If you have got a wildlife hotspot and something that is identified as a wildlife hotspot, you need to reduce those speeds significantly. Once again, it does not add much to your day to travel through a wildlife hotspot at 20 kilometres less than you normally would. I mean, if you do that there is a much better chance that you are not going to hit an animal, or in some cases, even if you were to have a collision with an animal at those sorts of speeds quite regularly kangaroos in particular, and wallabies, they can bounce off the side of the car and although they may be bruised and a bit sore and everything like that, they do not get the fatal injuries that you would see if somebody hits them doing 80 kilometres an hour. So I think speed reduction would be a big thing in known wildlife hotspots.

That would be something. The other side of that is to not only reduce the speed, but then we need to work with the local authorities to enforce that speed and police it. That is what we found with Forest Road. I work really closely with Victoria Police, based on the fact that – the easy way to explain it is my number is on the Victoria Police database as 'Kangaroo Jase'. So any time anyone in this region, any police officer in this region, has an issue with a kangaroo, or a kangaroo gets called in to the police 000 and then it goes to the specific police station, all of these police stations have got my number, and I get called first and I go and deal with it. So from that perspective, it is something that we need the police to be able to do: enforce these speed zones. If you are going to put a speed zone in, just putting up a sign means nothing if nobody is going to police it.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Ms Copsey. I will finish off. It is really great to hear your evidence today. I worked for Andy, and I remember when that trial got up and we were really hopeful that it would do good things for wildlife. And then obviously we have heard conflicting evidence about the success of virtual fencing, and it sounds promising in your instance. Obviously you have spoken with conviction that it has worked, but do you have any understanding why it has worked for you in the Surf Coast but has not in other areas?

Jason CICHOCKI: I cannot speak for what other people have done in their trials because I was obviously not a part of that, but as I touched on in there, I think that there was not a lot of hard data prior to the installation of virtual fencing. I think a lot of those other trials were known wildlife hotspots, but people were not actually collating and collecting the data. So for us that was a key factor in why the state government was willing to give us the funding for this trial. We did have comprehensive hard data prior to that, but even in discussions there were several trial areas where I wanted to get virtual fencing up and operating.

One in particular – some people might know it or not – there is a section that is well known as the 'mad mile' between Torquay and Anglesea, and it is where the chocolate factory is. They call it a mad mile for a reason – people go stupidly fast down there, and it is dead straight. I did want to put virtual fencing there, but when I did get Wildlife Safety Solutions to come out and investigate the areas that I was talking about, the guy – it was not David, it was one of his employees – clearly stated to me that that section was not suitable for virtual fencing. He pointed out that there were several factors there, but a lot of it had to do with the type of road barriers that they had up and down the side of the road. He said, 'The virtual fencing just won't operate properly. You'll get a lot of areas and patches where it just won't work based on the fact that the light is not going to hit the sensors properly.' He clearly said to me, 'Don't bother putting virtual fencing there.' But then when he saw Forest Road he said that this is the absolute perfect spot for virtual fencing based on the fact that there were no roadside barriers anywhere down there. You have got the Otways on one side, and most of it is actually state forest on the other side, but then you have got the patches of the farmland as well. So there was really nothing that was going to stand in the way of these sensors operating properly, and that is what he said: 'This is the perfect spot for virtual fencing.' And as it is turned out, it has worked really well.

The CHAIR: Great. That is really good. I am going to take a turn away from virtual fencing. I know that it is largely what you came to talk about today, but you are obviously a rescuer operating on your own, I presume largely self-funded. And as a volunteer you spoke about going out three times a day just to check roads. Can you talk about the sustainability of you being able to do that?

Jason CICHOCKI: Surfcoast Wildlife Rescue basically started from me. About 15 years ago I was present for a kangaroo at Bells Beach that had a broken leg. It took us over 3 hours to find anybody to come out. The person that came out had to come all the way from Leopold, and he was a 70-plus-year-old fella who was up for a double lung replacement because he was a chain-smoker and everything. He turned up eventually and started the rescue, and he ended up having an asthma attack. While the person I was with at the time rescued him, I jumped in and finished the rescue under his guidance. He then, when he came out of hospital, contacted me and said, 'I've never seen anybody do that,' because it was quite a large kangaroo. I had never done it before, but the poor animal needed help, so I had to do what I had to do. That is where Surfcoast Wildlife Rescue started.

That was 15 years ago. I specifically started doing this because there was no-one on the Surf Coast that was doing this. What I mean by that is a dedicated 24/7 service – there was nobody doing that. Even back then, Wildlife Vic was not a 24/7 service; they were not able to do that at night. I think it was as of 8 o'clock or 9 o'clock, somewhere thereabouts, if you contacted Wildlife Vic, it would just go into a database and

somebody would deal with it in the morning, which meant the poor animals were staying there all night and either dying slowly or still alive at 9 or 10 in the morning when rescuers were contacted. There was not a 24/7 service. Rather than jump up and down and complain about that, I thought I would lead by example. So that is where I put my number out there, right across all social media and everything, letting everybody know. It did not take long before my number was in the majority of people's phones, and it started to get ridiculously busy. I would do a lot more wildlife rescue than I would fixing cars, which is what my business is. So it got to a point where we had to work on recruiting ourselves, and after 15 years we now have a team of about 140 rescuers based on the Surf Coast. We have actually got a couple of little pockets of rescuers in other areas now. We helped another group in Bannockburn start to set up, and now they have got their own little Bannockburn Wildlife Rescue.

The CHAIR: I was just saying we should have got them along today as well.

Jason CICHOCKI: Yes. You know Angela – she contacted me, and I had to put down a kangaroo in front of her, and it was there that she said, 'You know what, I can do this.' And I said, 'Yes, you can.' I helped her out and gave her a little bit of training, made her come out to several rescues, and then before I knew it, bang, she was off and starting Bannockburn Wildlife Rescue. She has done a great job doing that. We have also got a little pocket in Lorne. We have got about four or five rescuers in Lorne now that cover the Lorne region, and we work closely. They are under our banner, Surfcoast Wildlife Rescue, but what they will do because Lorne is such a distance away, our team work together and we will get somebody from Torquay to go and meet one of the Lorne crew. They will pick up an animal, transport it to Aireys Inlet, our team will pick it up in Aireys Inlet and then drive into Geelong or the Torquay vets or whatever. So we work really well as a team. And like I said, we are about 140-strong now, and it started with me shrugging my shoulders going, 'This is terrible. With millions of people living here on the Surf Coast, no-one wants to help animals?' So it started there, and now we are a really strong team. We cover a fair part of the south-west of Victoria, all the way from the You Yangs down to Apollo Bay. We go out towards the Portarlington region. We go out towards Meredith and places like that. It has grown really well, and it has been great to watch the members of the public take this on. And I just said to them, 'You don't really need to be anybody specially trained or anything to actually start doing wildlife rescue. What you need to be is somebody who's compassionate and wants to help, and then as a team we will help you to be able to help the animals.' Most of our new rescuers, due to the way that we have got it set up on Facebook and everything, will jump in and go to a couple of rescues with an experienced rescuer just to get hands-on experience. They keep doing that until they are comfortable enough to do it themselves, so it has been good.

The CHAIR: And just lastly, obviously that is a pretty enormous effort, starting from one person up to I think you said 140. Is there a need for you to receive that funding in order to –

Jason CICHOCKI: Well, I am not someone who is going to put my hand up for funding, based on the fact that I am doing this because I want the animals to have the respect that they deserve. In regard to that, I think as Lisa mentioned, we class ourselves as the 000 for wildlife in our region. Unfortunately, due to many reasons, quite regularly Wildlife Victoria are not able to facilitate rescues in our region – lack of rescuers, or whatever it is – but that is where we have put up our hand and we let the public know that my phone is on me 24/7. If you call me at 2 0'clock in the morning I am going to answer the phone and I am going to come out, and if it is not me it is one of my team. We will respond, and we will respond in an appropriate manner, just as you would if it was a 000 call. We are a dedicated team, and we just want to see the animals get the help that they deserve. I have done this off my own back and I fund it through my business. We get small donations from the public here and there and everything, but yes, it is not something that – I mean, funding would be great, but it is not why I am doing it. I am more about concentrating on just making sure that the animals get the respect they deserve.

The CHAIR: That is a great note to finish it on, I think. That is all we have time for today. Thank you so much for coming along.

Jason CICHOCKI: Thank you all for listening to what I have had to say.

The CHAIR: It is really great to hear about your work. That concludes the public hearing.

Committee adjourned.