

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Wildlife Roadstrike in Victoria

Melbourne – Monday 1 September 2025

MEMBERS

Georgie Purcell – Chair
Richard Welch – Deputy Chair
John Berger
Katherine Copsey
Moira Deeming

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Gaelle Broad
Georgie Crozier
David Davis
David Ettershank

Michael Galea
Renee Heath
Sarah Mansfield
Rachel Payne

WITNESS (*via videoconference*)

James Todd, Chief Biodiversity Officer, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

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 pay 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 or in the public gallery.

To kick off, we will just have committee members introduce themselves to you, starting with Mrs Deeming on the screen, if she is there. Might not be. I will go to Gaelle.

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

Katherine COPSEY: Katherine Copsey, Member for Southern Metropolitan Region.

The CHAIR: Georgie Purcell, Member for Northern Victoria.

Richard WELCH: Richard Welch, Member for North-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

The CHAIR: Great.

James TODD: Thank you.

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. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

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

James TODD: James Todd, Chief Biodiversity Officer and Director of Arthur Rylah Institute in the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you so much for that. 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.

James TODD: Great. Well, thank you for inviting me, and I would like to begin by also acknowledging the traditional owners of the land that I am coming from, the people of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung, and pay my respects to elders past and present.

I will read out a short statement. It will not take 15 minutes, it might take 5 minutes, and then we are happy to open it up. My name is James Todd. I am Chief Biodiversity Officer and Director of Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research, representing the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, otherwise known as DEECA. DEECA brings together Victoria's energy, environment, water, agriculture, forestry, resources, climate action and emergency management functions into a single department to support growth and thriving, productive and sustainable communities, environments and industries across Victoria.

Wildlife strike is a complex issue that sits at the intersection of road safety, land use, land-use planning and community concern for animal welfare. In some cases it may also have species conservation implications. The Department of Transport and Planning is the lead agency for road safety in Victoria; however, responsibility for responding to issues associated with wildlife road strike is shared between a number of different Victorian government agencies and local government. Of course community members, wildlife rescuers, rehabilitators and vets also play an important role in responding directly to wildlife impacted on our roads.

DEECA is responsible for setting statewide policy for the conservation, management and sustainable use of wildlife through the administration of the *Wildlife Act 1975* and the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*. Through the Conservation Regulator, DEECA also carries out regulatory and compliance functions relating to wildlife. DEECA recognises that wildlife road strike is a distressing issue for many Victorians, evoking strong concern for both human safety and the welfare of individual animals. While the end welfare of individual animals is a matter of genuine public concern, DEECA's policy mandate does not extend to the direct care of or outcomes for individual wildlife affected by accidental road trauma, including injury or death. There are, however, circumstances where DEECA may take a lead or coordinating role in wildlife welfare. In the context of a declared emergency, DEECA may assume a coordination or support role in relation to wildlife welfare as part of a broader emergency management response. Additionally, DEECA may provide support in specific place-based situations where community or stakeholder partners are addressing localised wildlife welfare concerns, particularly where these intersect with broader conservation or land management objectives.

While DEECA's legislative and policy mandate does not extend to the direct care of individual animals involved in road strike or road safety mitigations and enforcement, the Department remains committed to supporting evidence-based approaches that contribute to biodiversity conservation and functioning ecosystems. DEECA acknowledges the strong public sentiment surrounding wildlife road strike and recognises the important roles played by local government, community organisations and other state agencies. Through collaboration, informed planning and targeted research, there is an opportunity to reduce the incidence of wildlife vehicle collisions and improve outcomes for both people and wildlife in Victoria. DEECA stands ready to contribute its expertise in wildlife ecology and species conservation to support cross-sector efforts that address this issue in a coordinated, strategic and compassionate manner. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you so much for that. We will move to questions, and I will start with Ms Copsey.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. Thanks so much for joining us today. One of the things that we have heard repeatedly – especially today, actually – is just the difficulty of coming at this problem when we have such fragmented and diverse sources of data around the actual scale and locations of the problem. There has been discussion around a central database, and I am wondering if you could share your reflections on the usefulness of that and where you think it might sit, were that to be a recommendation of the inquiry.

James TODD: One of the critical elements to coming up with effective mitigation strategies, plans and approaches for wildlife road strike is, first of all, understanding where the hotspots are and what bespoke methods might be best used in particular circumstances. As you pointed out, there are a range of agencies that are variously collecting data on wildlife road strike across Victoria; in fact the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas, which I am responsible for, does collect that sort of data, but it is ad hoc, and it is really dependent on what users want to add into that system. But equally Wildlife Victoria, local government and road authorities would all be collecting similar data to some extent, and I think there would be some benefit in ensuring that we have got a common database from which we are operating to then look at the problem more specifically and what some of those mitigation actions might be.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. And I wonder if you can share with me – you have got information, broadly speaking, about wildlife populations in Victoria and biodiversity. I wanted to understand how much currently DEECA is communicating with the department of planning around avoiding this problem as early as we can. So in the design of human occupation of land in Victoria, at what point is wildlife population data being considered in our planning scheme?

James TODD: We would work with the Department of Transport and Planning and we work with local government authorities to input into local planning initiatives where there are potentially wildlife interactions and/or potential conflicts. For example, around Melbourne we work through various local government

authorities and the Victorian Planning Authority to plan for developments that aim to avoid, for example, landlocking kangaroos, and hopefully those developments take place in a way that allows those animals to move on to where they have got available habitat and they are not going to come into conflict with humans.

Katherine COPSEY: And how would you say we are doing on that as a state at the moment with some of the examples we have seen recently?

James TODD: Well, we know there are highlighted cases where there have been landlocked kangaroos within urban Melbourne, for example. But in other cases, in the outer suburbs and the like, to the north and to the west, there is work going on that is trying to avoid those situations going forward. I guess time will tell as to how successful we are at those.

Katherine COPSEY: Yes. Thank you. This morning we heard from just one local government representative, but I am sure it is a common concern for residents and for developers – frankly, nobody wants to be ending up in this situation. The request from Hume this morning was around a more coordinated approach to kangaroo management. DEECA, I understand, has produced the kangaroo management guidelines. Where is that work up to?

James TODD: Yes. We have variously developed guidelines for developing kangaroo management plans for urban areas. My understanding is that those guidelines are available to be applied by local government authorities and developers. I am not exactly sure where they are up to in terms of rollout, but I understand that we are working with local government authorities and developers on implementing those plans where there is an opportunity to do so.

Katherine COPSEY: Great. Thank you. One of the requests from Hume which is already working in concert – obviously this is one of those issues like water management and so on, which does not have any respect for local government boundaries. One of the requests that Hume had today was for DEECA to take an active role in setting up kangaroo management networks, so more of a coordinated approach, for example, involving a number of LGAs. And I presume some of the responding agencies and local rescues could have really useful information to feed into that too. Is that work that you would be interested and willing to explore further?

James TODD: I am always happy to explore opportunities to do things better, then obviously subject to resourcing and competing priorities.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you very much. Just one of the things that we have heard repeatedly in this inquiry so far as well is just the amount of impact that we are seeing from urban encroachment but also drought and climactic factors in reducing habitat and therefore increasing conflict between wildlife, and in particular we have heard a lot about kangaroos. Can you comment on some of those pressures that wildlife are facing?

James TODD: Yes. So as the population grows and with urban developments required to house that population as well as the infrastructure that goes with it, we are pushing further into wildlife habitat, and it is likely that that creates increased risk of conflict between traffic and wildlife. That is an ongoing issue. The issue of drought and impacts on wildlife – I mean, obviously for species like kangaroos their populations can fluctuate subject to the environmental conditions, and that can be both spatial and temporal in terms of how those populations fluctuate. So it is a complex issue in that respect, but the statewide kangaroo population surveys that have been conducted by my institute over the last several years have shown that kangaroo populations more broadly have increased correlated to La Niña events of increased rainfall and have stabilised over the last few years. Obviously there are drought effects going on in parts of the state at present, which also create issues where particularly animals like kangaroos might come into road verges, which often have green pick associated with them, where food supply might be more limiting in the general landscape.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Great. Thanks, Ms Copsey. We will go to Ms Broad.

Gaelle BROAD: Thank you very much for your attendance this afternoon. I am just interested in your thoughts on the population of kangaroos generally – that seems to be the most predominant issue as we hear

about wildlife road strike. Can you give us a bit of a summary of the aerial surveys that you do and how reliable they are? I have read that there are about 2.4 million kangaroos or something. Can you speak to that?

James TODD: Yes. DEECA funds aerial surveys of kangaroos through the Arthur Rylah Institute, which I am Director of. Those aerial surveys have typically taken place every couple of years. As I just mentioned, going back a while – to 2018, for example – those populations have increased somewhat from about 1.4 million in 2018 for statewide populations to approximately 2.4 million or 2.3 million over the last few years across 2022 and 24. The next aerial survey and population estimate is due in 2026; the surveys take place in September and October. My team of scientists continues to develop methods that are attempting to improve the accuracy of those estimates and reduce some of the uncertainties, and we have recently published a method in *Wildlife Research* on the methods that we applied when estimating the populations in 2024.

Gaelle BROAD: Okay. That is a significant jump; you are saying about a million extra from 2018 to the most recent survey last year.

James TODD: Yes, something like that. I think the numbers back in 2018, coming off perhaps an extended drought period, were estimated to be around 1.4 million, and then, as I said, up around 2.4 million to 2.3 million over the last few years, where they have remained reasonably steady.

Gaelle BROAD: So the breeding conditions of kangaroos – from what I have read, it is a very quick cycle. Are you able to describe how quickly they can breed?

James TODD: I am not a subject matter expert in kangaroo ecology, but being a herbivore, they are responsive to changes in the environment, and particularly changes in rainfall. When the conditions are good for kangaroos, as in there has been lots of rainfall and there is lots of grass growth and lots of, obviously, food, then they are able to reproduce quite quickly. At other times they basically turn off their reproductive cues, if you like. In lower rainfall times they can actually reduce their reproductive rate to ensure that they are not overpopulating, to some extent, albeit we know that that still happens.

Gaelle BROAD: Okay. Do you think that the flood conditions and the extra water we saw in 2022 has contributed to a higher population, potentially?

James TODD: All I can say is that based on the data that we have had over the last, whatever it has been, seven or eight years, as I mentioned, there has been an estimated increase in the statewide population size of kangaroos in Victoria. That has somewhat stabilised over the last few years, based on the most recent surveys and estimates. I guess we will find out from the next survey in 2026 whether there has been any change in that statewide population from more recent drought impacts and other impacts that might be happening.

Gaelle BROAD: I have heard from a professional shooter that talked about the different types of programs that are intended to manage kangaroos – there is the drop program and then the harvesting program where tags are required. But my understanding is that there was a significant number – over 19,000 – of tags which were never used, and I just wanted to understand your insights into that. They feel that there are a lot of people that are part-time shooters, so they will just leave a tag in their glove box, go and do their other job. They do not necessarily need to use them, whereas a professional shooter would rely on using them. In New South Wales I think they have tags where you need to purchase them. Their thought was that would help make sure that tags are used effectively. But do you have any comments on Victoria and how you manage that system and how it may compare to a state like New South Wales?

James TODD: I cannot comment directly. I know that the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, DJSIR, are responsible for the kangaroo harvest program, and they use the Game Management Authority around enforcement and compliance. DJSIR issue the tags, as I understand it, to registered shooters, and then the GMA run the compliance enforcement around that. I am not aware of the issues that you are referring to there.

Gaelle BROAD: Okay. Another issue that was pointed out to me is that professional shooters – this is over in the western part of the state – have been limited to western greys, not eastern greys. Do you have any insights into that? They found that quite extraordinary because the issue is more with eastern greys and certainly not the western greys.

James TODD: I know that through the program and through my team – my science team – we make recommendations on what is considered a sustainable take for kangaroos in Victoria, and that covers both eastern grey and western grey kangaroos. There are quotas that apply to both those species in Victoria.

Gaelle BROAD: So are professional shooters being restricted from the eastern greys currently?

James TODD: I cannot comment on the specificity of your question. All I can say is that there are quotas that apply to both species, and that is appropriate. If you are trying to manage sustainable populations, you need to be managing those at the species level.

Gaelle BROAD: Okay. We heard from witnesses earlier that were focused on wildlife rescue concerns that the department administers that side as well as management programs. Do you have any thoughts on how that works in practice?

James TODD: Obviously there are different parts of the department here. But in terms of setting the quotas for the kangaroo harvest management plan, that is through DEECA policy and that considers both the take through or the quotas through the kangaroo harvest program itself but also what is typical in terms of lethal control through the authority-to-control wildlife system. That system is administered by the Conservation Regulator, and then separate to that, of course, the conservation regulator also issues licences and permits for wildlife carers to ensure that they are meeting the best standards.

Gaelle BROAD: Okay. Have I got time for another?

The CHAIR: One more.

Gaelle BROAD: Okay. Thank you. Just my last question, then: what impact does overpopulation have on the health of kangaroos?

James TODD: Well, in extreme cases where there is a population of kangaroos and they are limited in terms of food and water, it leads to the death of some of those animals.

Gaelle BROAD: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mrs Broad. I will pick up from there. I wanted to talk to you about the surveys that you have been speaking about in your responses. Could you tell us a little bit about how you conduct these surveys and if any of them involve individual counts of kangaroos across areas of Victoria?

James TODD: They are aerial surveys which are done via transects across parts of Victoria. Not all parts of Victoria can be surveyed – for example, in heavily wooded forested areas it is not possible to observe kangaroos from the air. So it is mostly around more open areas of Victoria – lowland, kind of lightly wooded areas, if you like. There is a method where there are observers within the aircraft and they apply distances from the aircraft to where they can view and they count the number of kangaroos within particular transects. Then that information is used, coupled together with a range of spatial environmental variables, to take that raw data and then model it out across other parts of the state.

The CHAIR: So just to clarify, the policy decision-making in this area is often on extrapolation and not actually sighted kangaroos?

James TODD: Well, as is common in all scientific methods, you need to apply a sampling approach because you cannot get absolute numbers; you will never be able to do that. So the methods that are applied by my team use peer-reviewed processes and methods which are well recognised across the world as best practice for these sorts of approaches for a range of different species, kangaroos being one of those. But yes, there is always going to be the case where you need to take raw data and then extrapolate that out to across different parts of the landscape because you cannot sample everywhere.

The CHAIR: So there is no guarantee that there are kangaroos in the areas that this is being considered for?

Richard WELCH: What is the margin of error?

James TODD: Sorry, is that two questions?

The CHAIR: If you heard Mr Welch's, yes, feel free to answer both.

James TODD: The results are reported with uncertainty, so there are upper and lower limits to the estimates. That is based on the level of sampling that can be done and there are observer errors that need to be accounted for and the like, so there are upper and lower limits. And, yes, you cannot guarantee exactly that there are going to be kangaroos in areas that are modelled, but also we know that they are a mobile species, so it is extrapolating across those landscapes.

The CHAIR: The reason for my questioning is because there are a number of experts who believe that ARI's data is severely overinflated and does not factor in things like what we are examining here – the impacts on populations from road strike, drought and other conditions and commercial shooting programs. So what I am keen to know is whether there are any individual counts taken in any areas. Obviously you have said that they cannot be counted from the sky in certain areas of Victoria, but have there been any extensive individual counts of kangaroos to compare to the extrapolated data that is used to make these decisions?

James TODD: Thanks for the question. I guess my answer to that, Georgie, would be that if, in line with typical scientific methods, ARI has published its methodology for estimating kangaroos in Victoria –

The CHAIR: Yes, I understand that part.

James TODD: If there are others who have concerns about that methodology, then they are very welcome to critique that and produce their own methods for what they consider to be better, which need to go through a peer-review process. I mean, that is the nature of science – you are you are dealing with uncertainty and you have not got complete data, so you need to make the best of what you can do with the available data you have within the bounds of uncertainty.

The CHAIR: And my question about individual counts?

James TODD: Sorry, I did not quite fully understand it.

The CHAIR: Has the department undertaken any individual counts of kangaroos or any species? I know that people in the wombat sector have been asking for an individual count as well.

James TODD: If your question is 'Have we counted every kangaroo in Victoria?' – no, we have not.

The CHAIR: That is obviously not possible. But for example – I know this is not what the inquiry is looking into – we have the eastern Australian waterbird survey, which is counting individual birds, and then we have the Arthur Rylah survey, and they often land in very different places because the methodology is different. So my question is: have there been any individual counts, even in certain areas of Victoria? I did not say all of Victoria, I said certain areas of Victoria.

James TODD: I will have to take that on notice. I mean, I know that we have done ground counts in parts of the state, particularly where the western grey kangaroo and the eastern grey kangaroo overlap, because it is important to differentiate between those species. But even observation from the ground is imperfect.

The CHAIR: Yes. Mrs Broad touched on this, but there have been some concerns raised from those within the rescue sector about the fact that DEECA obviously has the responsibility of overseeing the welfare of wildlife on one hand and then oversees permits to authorise the shooting on the other. There have been some suggestions that this should be taken away from the department or perhaps given to another department to remove any perceived or actual conflict of interest. Has that ever been explored, and could you also outline to us what the department is doing to support rescuers on the ground?

James TODD: Just so I am clear about the question, the question is about the issue of separating the powers of the conservation regulator from those where they are licensing carers, for example, versus the decisions around lethal control of kangaroos and separating those?

The CHAIR: Yes. Has that ever been explored as an option? For example, some rescuers believe that one of the responsibilities would be better placed in another department.

James TODD: I am not aware of that having been considered, but I am happy to take it on notice.

The CHAIR: Yes. That would be great. Could you outline for us what the department is doing to support the on-the-ground responders?

James TODD: Through the state government, the department supports the wildlife rehabilitator sector through annual wildlife rehabilitator grants. I think there has been about \$3.6 million handed out to that sector since 2008. In addition to that, more recently about \$6.6 million has been invested in key organisations, such as for the Wildlife Victoria hotline and Vets for Compassion, to support their work. More recently the government has also committed \$4.7 million to the development of a new wildlife hospital in Victoria to be run by Zoos Vic. Those are the kinds of quantum, and obviously the results of that are a bit different each year depending on who receives that funding.

The CHAIR: I obviously appreciate any support given to the sector, but when those numbers are put up against the comparison to what is invested in things like recreational programs, hunting and lethal control, they are not even comparable. I guess my question is: has there been any exploring or investigation by the department of long-term sustainable funding that would help reduce the very clear burnout we have heard about throughout this process? We actually had rescuers talk about the wildlife rehabilitator grants before who said they help them rehabilitate two joeys, which of course is helpful, but it is barely making a dent on their workload. Has the department looked into any more sustainable reimbursement models that could help to ensure that these people who are responding can continue to do that work?

James TODD: I would have to take that one on notice. I am not aware.

The CHAIR: That would be great. Thank you. That is about my time. I will hand over to Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Chair. Thank you. Just a general question first of all is: what day-to-day interest does DEECA take in road strike? Where does it fit in your operating model?

James TODD: As I said in my opening comments, we do not have a direct responsibility for animals individually impacted by road strike, but we can be part of approaches as to how we might mitigate that, particularly in some cases where we may be a public land manager. Obviously we have a close working relationship with other departments and with local governments, so certainly we lean into those issues, but we do not have direct accountability for many of the road strike matters that you are dealing with.

Richard WELCH: Okay, but it is part of the intellectual life of DEECA that you think about these things – that you try to grapple with these issues where relevant for you?

James TODD: As a general rule, if we can assist in coming up with strategies and plans that reduce wildlife trauma and also trauma and risks to humans as well, then yes, that would absolutely be part of our portfolio of interests.

Richard WELCH: We have heard evidence about particularly roadsides and the maintenance along roadsides. The amount of vegetation up to the road edges is a dual problem: (a) it is feed, so it attracts animals to the road edges; and also it is obviously an obstruction to visibility for drivers from a distance. Does DEECA have any view on that and the roadside maintenance element of it?

James TODD: We do not have any direct responsibility for roadside maintenance of course, but there are rules and regulations with respect to ensuring that roadsides can be maintained for safe travel essentially, and some of that relates to being able to maintain those areas to be free of native vegetation, for example, as part of the road manager's responsibilities.

Richard WELCH: Do you make recommendations then? There is a very strong correlation because that is where the roads are and that is where they are getting hit, so are you making recommendations to the various bodies about that?

James TODD: No, we do not make recommendations. What we manage are the regulations. For example, a local government, if it is the road authority, can maintain their roads to the extent that they need to for safe travel and the like within the regulatory framework that applies to, for example, the native vegetation clearing controls. There is lots of scope under those regulations to ensure that councils and other road managers can meet their obligations to road safety while also complying with the regulations.

Richard WELCH: We heard from one councillor from Hume council today that, for example, they are mowing and clearing roadsides up to 12 times a year, whereas other state bodies are only doing it maybe three times a year. Therefore there is quite a mismatch. Are you aware of a reduction in roadside maintenance from some bodies?

James TODD: I am not, sorry. I am not close to those details. But obviously we know that local government authorities have different capacities and revenue, and obviously the ability to spend ratepayers' money on activities is different across local government areas as well.

Richard WELCH: But do you think that would be pertinent to the issue?

James TODD: Sorry? The question being –

Richard WELCH: The degree to which roadside vegetation is maintained would be pertinent to meeting those regulations that you provide?

James TODD: I am not sure I quite follow the question, but I will answer it as best I can. The regulations that I am referring to, the native vegetation –

Richard WELCH: I will clarify the question for you then. If roadside maintenance on state roads has gone from six times or eight times a year to three, would that not have a material effect on their ability to meet your regulations?

James TODD: No, no. The regulations are about their ability to remove native vegetation, not the extent to which they are not removing it, if that makes sense, so we do not. The regulations that are governed by DEECA, or the policy, are not relating to road safety; they are relating to the ability of a land manager to comply with the native vegetation removal regulations.

Richard WELCH: Thank you. That is helpful. I will just flip the question around the other way then. Do your regulations hinder the state departments from making it safer? Is there any obstacle, or is it a barrier to good roadside maintenance?

James TODD: I do not believe so.

Richard WELCH: Just back on the aerial surveys, how much do they cost?

James TODD: That is a very good question. I would have to take that one on notice, I am sorry.

Richard WELCH: Yes. I would be very interested to hear it. The other part of that would be: you have confidence intervals in the data.

James TODD: Yes.

Richard WELCH: What would it cost to reduce those confidence intervals?

James TODD: Yes. Okay. I am happy to provide answers to both those questions on notice.

Richard WELCH: It is probably the single most contentious issue: do we really know how many kangaroos there are? If we could just remove all the emotion out of it and come down to a figure that everyone is willing to buy into, it might be worth the price of it.

The CHAIR: I agree.

James TODD: You can always obviously increase the precision of the estimates with more investment, there is no doubt about that.

Richard WELCH: Yes, I would just like to know how much it is going to cost us.

James TODD: It is a bit of a 'piece of string', but yes, I get it.

Richard WELCH: Yes. Understood. How would you describe DEECA's relationship with the rescue community?

James TODD: Well, I am not sure I can represent DEECA's relationship with the rescue community.

Richard WELCH: How do you feel it is going?

James TODD: Like most relationships, I am sure it is variable.

Richard WELCH: Do you think the current volunteer model that we have got now is sustainable?

James TODD: In what sense?

Richard WELCH: That we are going to have enough rescuers doing enough work to take the workload that they are currently undertaking.

James TODD: I cannot comment on that because I really do not know what –

Richard WELCH: No, you must have a professional interest in that. DEECA must have a professional interest in whether it is a sustainable model or not, because it is part of your actual process.

James TODD: Yes. What I am saying, though, is that I do not have any of the data in front of me to know what a sustainable model looks like or what the current model is delivering against that.

Richard WELCH: DEECA does not know?

James TODD: I do not know. You are asking me, and I do not know.

Richard WELCH: Can you take it on notice?

James TODD: Sure. I do not know whether we can get you an answer, but I will take it on notice.

Richard WELCH: Are you saying DEECA does not have a view on what a sustainable wildlife rescue model is?

James TODD: No, I am not saying that. I just do not –

Richard WELCH: Well, that is my question.

James TODD: Yes. Well, I cannot answer it now. I am happy to take it on notice.

Richard WELCH: Okay. That is an odd answer. You would agree on the importance of data to us. Without data we cannot really, scientifically, deploy resources to address the issues.

James TODD: Yes.

Richard WELCH: Why isn't there already a central database?

James TODD: I would be asking that question of the Department of Transport and Planning, because they are the authority that are responsible for roads and health and safety issues.

Richard WELCH: But in your wildlife role, surely you have a vested interest in that data.

James TODD: I would concur with you that collecting data is of absolute importance. I would also, as per my opening statements, say that currently there are a range of organisations that collect data probably in a fairly disparate way and that data is not necessarily available to either inform management decisions or indeed available to use potentially in further research and trials to test methods and mitigation actions.

Richard WELCH: So does DEECA not have a role, then, in addressing that? What role do you see DEECA having?

James TODD: No. As I said at the start, we do not have a policy role relating to wildlife road trauma, road strike, but we are certainly very happy to participate in an approach where we try and collect that data to make it as useful as possible.

Richard WELCH: Right. But you are effectively saying that wildlife, which is your purview – if they get on a road, they are no longer your purview.

James TODD: We are responsible for wildlife policy as it sits under the *Wildlife Act* –

Richard WELCH: But not if they are on the road.

James TODD: Individual wildlife are the responsibility of landowners. So where it is on private land – and obviously there are public land managers – it is their responsibility to manage that wildlife accordingly, in line with the regulatory environment.

Richard WELCH: Okay. Thank you very much.

James TODD: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Welch. That is all members and their questions, so we might leave it there. Thank you so much, James, for making the time to talk to us. The committee staff will be in contact with you for those questions on notice.

Witness withdrew.