

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Wildlife Roadstrike in Victoria

Melbourne – Monday 1 September 2025

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WITNESS

Cr Naim Kurt, Deputy Mayor, Hume City Council.

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 live broadcast of these proceedings. I also welcome any other members of the public watching via the live broadcast.

To kick off, we will just get committee members to introduce themselves to you. We will start with Mrs Deeming on the screen. We cannot hear you, Moira. We will start in here, and then we will see if we can sort you out in the meantime.

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

Katherine COPSEY: Katherine Copsey, Member for Southern Metropolitan.

The CHAIR: Georgie Purcell, Member for Northern Victoria.

Richard WELCH: Richard Welch, Member for North Eastern Metro.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for appearing 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, could you please state your full name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

Naim KURT: Naim Kurt, representing Hume City Council.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you so much for that. We now welcome your opening remarks but ask that they are kept to around 10 to 15 minutes to ensure plenty of time for discussion and questions.

Naim KURT: Understood. Good morning, Chair, committee members. My name is Naim Kurt. I am a councillor representing the Tullamarine ward and Deputy Mayor of Hume City Council. I acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people and their custodianship of this country and the space that we are meeting in today, in particular their deep connection with wildlife, which this inquiry is here to discuss. I also pay respect to their elders, past and present and to all First Peoples who are with us today. I do thank the members present for your interest in this topic and for accepting our council's submission to your inquiry.

Just to give you a picture, Hume City is located in Melbourne's north and west and is one of the fastest growing local government areas in this country. Every year our population is growing by close to 10,000 people, and by 2034 we are expected to top over 335,000 residents. Not only are we one of Australia's fastest growing communities, we are also incredibly diverse, with our residents coming from over 170 different countries, whilst also including the three most disadvantaged statistical areas in Greater Melbourne. All of this presents unique problems, and our community has shared with us that they want us to consider the impact this growth is having on our natural environment and how we can enhance and protect the environment and the decisions we make as a council. It is through our council plan where this commitment has been reflected as we work towards

protecting and enhancing our natural environment for the benefit of not just our residents today but also future generations.

Our geography is particularly unique in that it stretches over 504 square kilometres. We are the only local government area with two urban growth corridors, one around the established Sunbury township and then the other extending north from the Hume Freeway and the established suburbs of Broadmeadows, Campbellfield, Tullamarine and Gladstone Park in the south to expanding areas in Roxburgh Park, Craigieburn and Greenvale in the middle and then new growth areas in Mickleham and Kalkallo in the far north. These two urban areas are separated by a green wedge comprising the Melbourne Airport, which accounts for 10 per cent of the total area of our city, and extensive rural areas to the Woodlands Historic Park and around the Bulla township. The green wedge also has significant natural and cultural heritage, particularly along our major waterways. Rapid urban growth is occurring in and around areas of high-value grassland habitat across Hume City, particularly in Mickleham, Craigieburn, Greenvale, Kalkallo and Sunbury, regions that are either within or adjacent to the municipalities designated green wedge, an urban exclusion zone that protects grassland biodiversity and the airport.

This urban expansion is increasingly fragmenting wildlife habitat and isolating animal populations, resulting in the landlocking of species, most visibly the kangaroo. Drought conditions have further exacerbated the issue, with habitat resources diminishing and becoming inaccessible or contaminated due to overpopulation.

Kangaroos are then compelled to move through urbanised areas and across major roads in search of food, water, shelter and space. This movement is contributing to a marked rise in wildlife vehicle collisions, and the issue is particularly acute for kangaroos, which are highly mobile but strongly tied to their home ranges. Just as recently as last week, RACV reported that RACV insurance had received over 23,000 claims for kangaroo-related collisions in Sunbury over the past four years, making it the number one suburb for insurance claims in Victoria. We also know that Suncorp last year said that Sunbury ranks as the number two area in all of Australia for insurance claims.

In responding to growing community concern about road wildlife strikes, our council recognises that no-one owns wild animals. It is, however, up to land managers to determine their response to issues on their land and/or roads, as per the *Wildlife Act 1975*. Wildlife road strikes are not just a local issue; this is a statewide problem that impacts road safety, animal welfare and community wellbeing. In Hume city, where urban growth is pressing hard up against ancient habitat, we are seeing the consequences on a daily basis, and we do play a part as a council. As the local authority responsible for the management of local roads and roadsides, council has been undertaking a number of initiatives to help address this issue. In this space Hume City Council engages with and provides education to our community regarding our environment and how to respond to wildlife incidents. We collect deceased animals from council-managed land and roads when reported by our community. We manage the vegetation on conservation reserves and parks. We oversee the delivery and management of local roads and traffic infrastructure. We triage community inquiries and refer them to the relevant team or external agency when required. We request and review kangaroo management plans from developers and also review and provide comment on state precinct planning. We cannot and must not, however, be burdened with doing this on our own, and as outlined in our submission we are calling for a coordinated, state-led approach.

Today I will highlight the four key themes that underpin our recommendations – firstly, clear accountability and governance; secondly, proactivity and integrated planning; thirdly, evidence and innovation; and finally, resourcing and collaboration. I will elaborate on each of these areas shortly to demonstrate their importance to our council and no doubt to others in the same predicament across our state.

Our first recommendation is clear accountability and governance. Wildlife does not recognise municipal or tenure boundaries, yet our agencies and procedures do. In one day a single kangaroo may move across land and/or roads managed by Hume City Council, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria and the department of transport, and when they are eventually struck by a car, the response is then left to overstretched wildlife volunteers, or often, in some cases, it is not even reported at all. Councils face the same complexity internally, with multiple departments involved and rising community expectations. Whilst we are reviewing our own processes as a council, state leadership is urgently needed to provide guidance and consistency at a regional level.

We are calling for the long overdue revision of the *Wildlife Act 1975* to legislate clear responsibilities related to wildlife management and responding to incidents; leadership from the Department of Transport and Planning, acknowledging wildlife road strikes as a road safety issue in line with Transport for New South Wales' approach; an update to DEECA's *Living with Wildlife Action Plan*, including, importantly, the development of a Victorian kangaroo management strategy; and finally, a legislated statewide framework for wildlife rescue volunteers, establishing foundations for organisations and agencies to work together effectively. Mandated accountability would replace today's fragmented, ad hoc responses with clear, consistent frameworks that guide land managers, protect animals, support volunteers and give confidence to communities like ours that wildlife road strikes will be addressed.

Our second recommendation is proactivity and integrated planning. To support biodiversity, community wellbeing and connection to country, we need to embed wildlife and habitat connectivity into urban development and transport planning at the precinct stage, identifying permanent habitats, preventing landlocking by ensuring appropriate and adequate wildlife corridors, and factoring in carrying capacities. Planned coexistence requires ongoing monitoring of both human safety and biodiversity health underpinned by clear accountability frameworks. Done well, coexistence can both enrich our community and the wider ecosystem. Right now the lack of proactive planning leaves councils ill equipped to manage the consequences, relying on cheap road signs that we know simply will not solve the problem, and where habitat cannot be retained, early decisions must be made about the ongoing presence of wildlife, rather than waiting for crises to emerge. We also recommend wildlife road strike triggers be included in road and traffic legislation so speed limit reviews and other mitigations can be applied proactively before and not after tragedy occurs. In terms of traffic planning, the response is often that it is too late for expensive wildlife crossings, that more signs will not change behaviour and that education is the only option. But we believe proactive and reactive mitigations can be justified when supported by strong data, which does link directly to our next recommendation.

Our third recommendation is regarding evidence and innovation. Our ability to act is only as strong as the information we hold, yet right now access to data is fragmented, inconsistent and often ad hoc. We recommend the development of a centralised wildlife population and road strike database, accessible to all relevant stakeholders to enable regional collaboration, forecasting and targeting responses to emerging issues. We also need investment in research and trials of mitigation tools, including road design, vegetation management and emerging technologies. Evidence must be driven by action so that solutions are tested in the Victorian context and scaled where they work. Community pressure is already pushing some councils into adopting unproven tools like virtual fencing. Instead we need funding for more evidence-based trials in urban environments, including locations within Hume city that represent Victoria's fastest growing peri-urban landscape. We have relied on critical work of key researchers in this space, many of whom have provided submissions to this inquiry. By establishing a centralised database facilitated by the Victorian government, we can better analyse the problem at a landscape level and work towards solutions, which leads us to our next and final recommendation.

Recommendation 4 – resourcing and collaboration. Collaboration is already making a difference through DEECA's recently established kangaroo land managers network, where councils, agencies and researchers are sharing valuable knowledge. Our council is also partnering with Melbourne University students on a wildlife road strike project, with insight to be shared across our networks. But not all councils or agencies have the capability to take on this work, especially when not legislated or mandated. Research and trials must be led and supported by state government, ensuring findings are robust, scalable and accessible to all. Collaboration must extend to wildlife rescue organisations, who currently carry the burden through an overstretched, self-funded volunteer workforce. This is not sustainable as incidents continue to grow. We also recommend increased funding for wildlife rescue services to build a trained, resourced workforce with proper safety equipment, insurance and mental health support alongside a legislated framework so councils and agencies can work with them consistently.

In summary, we know wildlife road strikes occur mostly due to a lack of proactive action such as poor precinct planning, fragmented accountability, under-resourced agencies and non-legislated processes. Additionally, the reactive response is equally fragmented and is not forming good decision-making for the future. But it does not have to be this way. With clear governance, integration of wildlife considerations into planning, investment in data and innovation, and proper funding for coordinated research, we can reduce collisions, protect wildlife and keep our communities safe. Whilst we are realistic in acknowledging that incidents of wildlife road strikes may continue, we do see a path forward where proactive and reactive processes benefit from legislation, evidence,

education and collaboration. Hume City Council is ready to play its part. We are currently reviewing our own internal processes and assessing site-specific solutions, but meaningful change and consistency across regions and organisations will only come with state leadership and investment.

Thank you for your time in reviewing our submission and for the time afforded to us to present to this hearing this morning. As you will have read and heard today, we believe there is much to do to make a difference on this issue.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much. That was very thorough. We will move to questions now. We will go to Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Councillor. That was fantastic and very in depth, and clearly the council has done a lot of work and thinking around this. There is actually a lot to dig into from it. I will start with the growth corridors and also the idea of having wildlife corridors. One question that occurs to me is: is it already too late, though? If we have got PSPs – and clearly you are in a massive growth area, you have got growth projecting out and growing into the fields – is it already too late to create those wildlife corridors? Are we already planned out of that?

Naim KURT: As a council we cannot say it is too late, because the effect that this is having is – when we talk about it, we have got the highest suburb in all of Victoria for roadside collision, so this is having an impact on our community as well and their ability to get about.

Richard WELCH: But you would know where the houses are going to go already. Geographically, has that already compromised the ability to establish these wildlife corridors?

Naim KURT: We do advocate for continued landscape connectivity where we can. I think, as our submission highlights, there are opportunities for wildlife corridors as well.

Richard WELCH: Within the PSPs as they are now?

Naim KURT: Within the PSPs. There are examples where wildlife bridges or wildlife tunnels have been built under roads. But that is not infrastructure that council is capable of investing in and delivering, and it is not infrastructure which is supplied for in PSPs.

Richard WELCH: So your view and the council's view is that even without amendment to the PSPs, we can still construct wildlife corridors through your region.

Naim KURT: Yes.

Richard WELCH: It is still viable to do it.

Naim KURT: Yes.

Richard WELCH: Okay. Thank you. Data keeps coming up – it is a very obvious point where we just do not know what we do not know in a lot of respects. In terms of Hume stats, you have got a 137 per cent increase in reported collisions incidents. Two questions: where does your data go to, so where does it get aggregated up to; and could you just define what you consider an incident?

Naim KURT: I believe that a lot of this data has been purchased from Wildlife Victoria, so that was I think about \$11,000 that we spent on that. But we refer to an incident as when a car hits an animal, and they are only the ones that get reported to us. As our submission outlined, not all of them are always reported and wildlife and kangaroos are not always dealt with by our volunteer networks. Often when they jump across or retreat into private land, the outcome of that animal is not known in terms of their health.

Richard WELCH: Does the council keep its own stats at all? On the ones that it is dealing with, do you have your own stats?

Naim KURT: We do have some data sources available, and we do include deceased animals on our local roads within those stats.

Richard WELCH: Where does that data go to? Do you feed that back up to Wildlife Victoria, or where does it go?

Naim KURT: At the moment there is no statewide database for all of this. Part of our submission is that we do need a statewide database. We would be seeing that as a state government-led process. So we will be able to feed that data into it as well.

Richard WELCH: So this is an example of Wildlife Victoria not having perfect knowledge. Your data does not go to them, so they do not have the data. This is a good example of the fragmented nature.

Naim KURT: As I said earlier, we purchased our data from Wildlife Victoria, but our data sits with council. We have got kangaroo management network that we have established, which is I think the first in the state, and that data is shared amongst the group. But there is no overarching authority in the state, and it is part of our submission that we need something like that in place.

Richard WELCH: Yes. That is a big problem. In your report you say that you request and review kangaroo management plans from developers. Could you just explain how that looks? What is in that management plan? What factors and parameters is it attempting to address?

Naim KURT: I might have to take that on notice and come back to you. I am not a town planner, so I am not dealing with those issues directly, but we can get that information to you in a written form.

Richard WELCH: That would be handy.

Naim KURT: My apologies.

Richard WELCH: Thank you. How much time do I have, Chair?

The CHAIR: A few more minutes.

Richard WELCH: I feel like I am rushing.

Naim KURT: We do have an ecological study that does look at the development and presence of kangaroos, so that is the general process. But we can get more information on that.

Richard WELCH: Yes. I think it would be useful for us to know the details of that plan. What are the parameters they are looking to address within that plan, because that may be relevant for –

Naim KURT: We do look at, I guess, the impacts of construction. I do know that there is sometimes temporary fencing put in place to keep kangaroos out and other wildlife, but we will get a fuller answer as well.

Richard WELCH: Thank you. That would be handy. I noticed you mentioned trains, which I think is the first time trains have come up in this inquiry.

The CHAIR: Yes. Vets for Compassion raised them briefly – that is it.

Richard WELCH: You have got the data anecdotally from the train network, but it seems to me to be a very interesting angle to look at as well – what they do, what they do not do or anything else.

Naim KURT: I am happy to take that one on notice and get any numbers back to you that we might have as well.

The CHAIR: That would be amazing.

Richard WELCH: You also mentioned DEECA's *Living with Wildlife Action Plan*. I have not seen that, but how much does that influence what council does? To what degree is that relevant to your work?

Naim KURT: As a state framework it guides a lot of the work that we do, but our issue with that plan is that a lot of the recommendations have not been followed through. One of the main ones was for a kangaroo management plan for the entirety of Victoria as a state. We really think that there were some key

recommendations in that that were not followed, and we would like DEECA, as a first step at least, to go back and look at following through on that body of work from 2018.

Richard WELCH: Is DEECA the right body to be doing that or should it be another body? If they are doing a statewide plan, do you think DEECA is the right body for that?

Naim KURT: I think DEECA are presenting later this afternoon; it could be a question for them. But our view would be that they have developed the plan and the recommendations and that they should probably be funded to do so. The feedback that we have had – I have heard from our environment officers at council – is that they simply do not have the resources to do all of that. That is why we as a council are not saying that this all should be on DEECA – we are ready to play our part as a local government as well and work with them – but it should primarily be led by the state.

Richard WELCH: Gotcha. I am bouncing around a fair bit, but I am interested that on roads with speeds greater than 60 kilometres an hour you do not collect the carcasses – for safety reasons, I presume. Does that mean they also do not go into stats? Do you know what happens to those?

Naim KURT: Any wildlife strike that is reported to us and is on a local road is recorded in council's stats. The 60-kilometre limit is for road traffic management plans. If it is under 60 kilometres, officers can attend and collect, but beyond 60 kilometres it does mean there needs to be a traffic plan put in place, and that obviously places additional resourcing on council and additional costs as well. It takes time to put all of that in place, but generally within 24 hours our council are pretty good at attending to incidents, when they are reported to us, on local roads.

Richard WELCH: No, sorry, the question was really: what happens on the greater than 60-kilometre-an-hour roads? Who takes care of those?

Naim KURT: If it is a local road, council does, but if it is an arterial road, it is up to the Department of Transport and Planning. So it is again that fragmented approach. But on any local road, council deals with it. It is only the fact that if it is above 60 kilometres an hour, we must put in a traffic management plan, which makes it more costly for council to attend.

Richard WELCH: But you actually still do go and do it?

Naim KURT: On all local roads that are council roads, council deals with it; Hume does, yes.

Richard WELCH: Great. Thank you very much, Councillor. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thanks so much, Mr Welch. Mrs Deeming.

Moirá DEEMING: Thank you. Now, as I was fiddling around with my sound, I may have missed some content, and I am sorry if the same question is asked twice. I think I misunderstood your original submission about the speed limits. Am I right in saying that what you are asking for is a review of the speed limits to do with how you collect the carcasses or that you want a review of speed limits in general for reducing the strikes? I am very sorry if that has already been asked.

Naim KURT: When it comes to road speed, the issue in the Victorian context is that it is only based on human fatalities. If there have been a number of human fatalities, road speeds might be looked to be engaged or changed, but we do not look at wildlife strikes. So effectively you can have a stretch of road which has had a hundred kangaroo and human strikes on it. Nobody might have been killed in those incidents, but you have got incredible economic damage which has been done to vehicles. Every crash which happens with a car is about \$4000 worth of damage on average, and about 15 per cent of the cars in our community are written off. We are a highly car-dependent community, just because of the growth and low public transport options which are available, a community which works often in temporary jobs or in logistical work or at the airport, which requires people to drive around. We do not always have the luxury as a low socio-economic community to work from home. So it does put a great economic impact on our community as well. We would not be looking to change road speeds, but we do think that there is a body of work at a state level about giving recommendations and including wildlife strikes within that. That could be an option then to be considered.

Moirá DEEMING: So you are happy for it to be considered is the way I should read it?

Naim KURT: It should be. I mean, we have said that New South Wales has got a model which we think that the Victorian Department of Transport and Planning should be looking at.

Moira DEEMING: Fantastic. I might leave it there, because I have only just stopped fiddling with my sound. But thank you very much. I enjoyed your presentation; I was able to listen to that, so thank you.

Naim KURT: Thank you, Moira.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mrs Deeming. We will go to Ms Copsey.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. Thank you, Deputy Mayor, for joining us today and for the great and very detailed submission. I wanted to come back to some of the planning issues. We have heard from other witnesses to this inquiry that they would like to see that populations of wildlife are taken into consideration far earlier in the planning process, so that we can, you know, not be trying to take preventative steps or remedial steps down the track. How much does Hume currently know about wildlife populations, and do you communicate that to the department of planning? Where in that process do you think the breakdown is occurring? Is it a lack of data or is it a lack of acting on data that is causing this not to be considered?

Naim KURT: I think as a local government we are always involved with the VPA, the planning authority, in the development of precincts, and council always gives feedback. But I think there has been more acute attention put onto wildlife and road strikes. In the nine or 10 years that I have been at council, probably in the early years that was not the highest of priorities and considerations. We do have a lack of data which exists. That is why, again, we are calling for a statewide database for that information, so there is a central body for that body of work or those numbers to sit with.

Katherine COPSEY: Your recommendations that you have build on existing guidelines and the *Wildlife Act* and so on. But would you be supportive in principle of there being changes in the overarching planning scheme in Victoria to assess and deal with this much earlier in the planning process?

Naim KURT: The feedback we have had is that it is not required as part of legislation. When you look at the economic impact that it is having on our community, and I spoke to that earlier, certainly there needs to be something built into the planning scheme or planning development a lot earlier to take it into account. The *Wildlife Act* was 1975, so it is well past 50 years that it has been in place. We would say that definitely needs to be updated in the interim. But also if there are reviews from this committee to go to state legislation and planning regulations, I think that we would support that as well. Because we are hearing from communities that they love the part of Melbourne that they are in and they love the environment – they love the animals – but we also want to make sure that they are safe and that our people are safe when travelling to and from work as well. Kangaroos in the majority are moving in the dawn and dusk periods, and that is peak hour traffic for our community. Some of our arterial roads have 30,000 or 40,000 traffic movements on them, and the risk to them in collisions is really high in those periods. So we would be happy and supportive of that, I imagine.

Katherine COPSEY: Great. Thank you. In terms of infrastructure, we have been hearing again from other witnesses in the inquiry about the cost and expense of trying to retrofit something compared to, if wildlife population movements and location had been known earlier, some of that cost potentially having been avoided. But that is excellent evidence that you are bringing around the cost to individuals and at the community level as well, which I do not think has been brought out by other witnesses so far. Could you just take me through some of the impacts that you are hearing from community members? You have spoken about individual property damage and so on, but there is some evidence as well of the emotional and mental health impacts on your staff and community members that you have outlined in your submission.

Naim KURT: Yes. A lot of this submission has been done by our officer Laura Gabriel, who was employed on a fixed contract to undertake this work, and we put it into our wildlife plan to review our kangaroo management practices. I know that she has been highly engaged. Just last week she was telling me she saw on Aitken Boulevard a kangaroo which had gone down. She pulled over, and there were two or three volunteers there. They had to anaesthetise the animal. For it to get put down in a safe manner – that kangaroo had two broken legs and so was unable to move – there was no veterinarian locally who could do that, and so it took a veterinarian from Kew travelling to Craigieburn to do that work. In that time we had community members, volunteers – we have got a small network of only 15 people that are involved with this locally – who had to sit there for 2 to 3 hours next to an animal which was in intense pain, waiting for a vet. For them to come from the

other side of town, it is taking them from their service and serving their community over there. And I know that vet had a tear in his eye. Even though he has been a veterinarian for 30 years, he had a tear in his eye having to do that work. So it has an incredible emotional toll – a psychological toll – on our community and our volunteer network that does it, and it is why we are also seeking support for more funding for wildlife groups that exist. We have heard from Wildlife Victoria that if they were to establish a wildlife hub, they would be doing it in the Hume region, because we have got so many of these crashes and incidents occurring. We do know as well that there have been some very early conversations with Melbourne Airport, and they would be supportive of working to establish one as well. So if there was government support for a hub like that, we as a council, knowing the effect it is having on our community, would move heaven and earth to support it as well, I am sure.

Katherine COPSEY: Fantastic. Thank you. Just one more question from me for now. On the requirements for kangaroo management permits – coming back down now to the individual development level – are you finding that that system is well understood by developers? And is it working? I would say we have heard evidence of land-locked populations where obviously you are not getting ahead of the problem, and the solutions in the kangaroo management plans are not ideal either. How would you observe that process has been working, particularly with the developers you know are active in your region?

Naim KURT: I mean, my interactions with developers are somewhat limited because we sit at the council level. I am sure you remember from your time in local government as well, Ms Copsey.

Katherine COPSEY: As a councillor – yes, I do.

Naim KURT: But there are landlocking issues and there is a fragmentation. I think sometimes – ‘It’s not my problem’ – there is a passing of the buck. So we as a council have said we do not see this as a state issue and we do not see this as a developer issue. We are ready to work with everyone. It should be the whole of community working together, and we are ready to do our part as well. I think for developers, it is less of a priority for them. In our instance in Hume, it is more about delivery of housing to meet housing needs, and I think animals sometimes come second or third – or wildlife does – in those instances. So going back, again, to having something in legislation to strengthen that as well I think would be important, whether it is through planning or review of the *Wildlife Act* as well.

Katherine COPSEY: Great. Thank you.

The CHAIR: I will go next. Thank you so much for such a detailed and thorough submission and for actually bringing solutions to us and for caring about this as a council. Obviously we hear a lot from our communities in frustration that nothing has been done about this, so it is really great to see an example of a council taking the lead in this area. I live in the neighbouring council, Macedon Ranges, where this is obviously a really big problem as well. I guess my first question was: do you work with other local government areas to share information or what you are trying to do about this issue?

Naim KURT: Absolutely. As our submission says, we have established a kangaroo management network, and that has been done in consultation with DEECA. I think it is actually the first in the state. We have taken a real lead in that, and that is not just our local government area and DEECA and wildlife groups but it is neighbouring councils as well. I think we are only three meetings into it so far, but the feedback I have received from officers is that information is coming thick and fast through the sharing of research and also knowledge sharing. Macedon Ranges I can confirm is a part of that network too.

The CHAIR: Yes. Thank you for that. Just in relation to the local community’s view on this issue, do you find that it is something that constituents in Hume care about? Are they distressed at the increased incidence of wildlife road strike and seeing that really visible suffering of native animals in the community?

Naim KURT: Initially when this came to the council meeting I spoke to the fact that driving up and down Mickleham Road I think I counted about 16 animal carcasses on the route. That is an arterial road managed by the department, and their ability to deal with strikes is more limited than what we can do at a council level. So you think about 40,000 car movements going through there, witnessing that on a day-to-day basis, people taking their children to school – it is incredibly traumatising. The front picture of our submission in fact is the carcass of a kangaroo which was on an intersection, I think on Somerton and Mickleham roads, and because of where it was placed, it effectively ended up staying there, rotting and then washing away in the rain. Every car

that lined up at that point was witnessing that. We as a council are limited in our ability to get to those because it is not a council road network, and it is why again we have got that issue with land fragmentation. We are seeking in that submission to have better coordination between private landholders, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, state land and then also council land.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you. You highlight in your submission the absence of formal triggers for signage placement. Do you think that legislated thresholds such as collision numbers per kilometre would improve consistency on where this is prioritised?

Naim KURT: As I outlined, we do not in Victoria count animal strikes for the implementation of signage, so we would support that. I think that we do have an issue that too many signs can distract people, and they do not always pay attention. We have also seen with variable signage and electronic signage that it does get the community's attention. It is just that there are no guidelines as to how many animal strikes need to occur. We do not have the statewide database of how many strikes are occurring for us to properly implement that. If that was something put into road development guidelines, that a certain amount of injuries per year would warrant signage of a particular style and at certain points along a road network, I think that we as a council would be 100 per cent supportive and ready to do our part in putting that up.

The CHAIR: I am not sure if you will know the answer to this one, but could you tell us a little bit about the feelings in the wildlife rescue community across Hume right now having to deal with this issue every single day? Obviously you spoke about the fact that they are underfunded – well, self-funded. Is there an issue with retention or getting rescuers to respond to cases?

Naim KURT: As our submission outlines, we have only got I think 15 people who are working as volunteers in this space, and they are voluntary – they have got their own commitments, their own family life commitments as well. The trauma of those injuries does mean that not everyone can withstand and do it for the periods that are needed. Of the strikes, I think 21 per cent are dealt with by volunteer networks within our municipality and the other 79 per cent are actually coming from outside our area, so from some regions like Whittlesea, Macedon Ranges and further north, probably from Mitchell shire as well. In our own community, just with the amount of injuries that we are facing, our own voluntary network cannot always deal with it, and it is requiring others from other areas to step in. As I said, if Wildlife Victoria were to establish a hub, from the conversations we have had they would want to do one in our area because of the amount of strikes which are occurring.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you so much for that. That is all of my time, so I will go to Ms Broad to end.

Gaelle BROAD: Thank you very much, Deputy Mayor. It is clear that this is a really big issue for your council, and I am sure that there are many other councils that would say what you are saying reflects their experience as well. I am just interested: how long has this been an issue, the wildlife road strike in your region, over the past five to 10 years? What pattern are you seeing over that time?

Naim KURT: We do have statistics I think in our submission that outline the amount of strikes. It has been trending upwards. Basically, as housing is increasing, we are having more of that urban interface abutting nature corridors as well. We are pretty unique in Hume in the sense that, because of the airport, we have got effectively green wedge zones between major housing precincts, where in other areas it might be all housing through a particular area. We have got housing from Sunbury, then it is a green wedge precinct, then there is more housing and there is another green wedge into urban break. All of that means that there are often animals transgressing onto roads and getting in the way of traffic as well. It is a growing issue, and we only see it getting worse and worse as time goes on, affecting our community, I suppose, as housing continues to grow.

Gaelle BROAD: You have mentioned housing development having an impact. Have there been any other contributing factors? Has breeding increased or anything of kangaroos with the conditions, the wet seasons? Are there any other factors apart from housing development?

Naim KURT: We are seeing I think drought issues as well. It means that kangaroos, which are highly territorial, are having to move to other parts around to feed. Often I think that there is a difference in mowing schedules between local government and the main road authorities as well. We tend to do our mowing schedules eight to 12 times a year, whereas the department of transport might be, from what I have heard previously, maybe three times a year. That means that often for animals and kangaroos to find food they are

often having to go out to main arterial roads where there is higher grassland and better feeding habitat, which is not ideal in the early morning hours or evening hours in peak hour when our community is trying to get home from a long day at work, putting them at threat too.

Gaelle BROAD: I have been on the local council inquiry and heard about the financial sustainability of councils and how challenging it is. There have been a number of costs that have been pushed from state government onto local councils. You mentioned a burden earlier in your statement. In preparing the wildlife plan – vehicles, personnel, community information sessions – are you able to put a price on what it is costing the council?

Naim KURT: It would probably be difficult. We could work out dollars per incident attending and then work out how many incidents our officers are having to attend to, maybe to collect animals in those instances. The community information sessions that we do – we have run at least a half-dozen of them this year, particularly at our community centres in new growth areas where services have been done for migrant communities. That is part and parcel of the work that we do as a council in teaching our community about the local habitats. That is something that we are sustained for and can do. But it is more the economic impact on individual families. As I said, on average it is a \$4,000 cost per strike; 15 per cent of cars are written off. Our community – often a low socio-economic community – cannot afford insurance and things of that nature, so even when a car is minorly damaged, it means that it is many weeks for that car to get repaired. It means that they are off the roads as well – they are not able to earn a living. So it affects their economic ability and their ability sometimes perhaps to pay rates and deliver on that. We do sometimes have as a community a backlog in rates of our community being able to pay, then that affects council's bottom line. To work all of that together into a number would be a big task, but we can take it on notice at least for our depot team, how much it costs per strike. We will take that one on notice.

Gaelle BROAD: You just mentioned the cost of vehicle impacts being about \$4000. I think the RACV estimate in the last financial year for the average claim following an animal collision was \$8984, so yes, it is pretty significant, the costs we are seeing. How are the information sessions going? Are they well attended? How is that working?

Naim KURT: The feedback that I have heard from officers is that they have been going really well. We do host them at our global learning centres, which are our big library precincts, and those have been well attended. We have also taken them to our community centres in Kalkallo and Mickleham and also in Greenvale, because we are finding particularly out there that housing is right on the urban interface, so they are often seeing kangaroos, and particularly in drought conditions a lot of them are actually venturing into neighbourhoods as well. I can get on my phone now and show you probably half a dozen different posts just on different social media groups over the past weekend of people spotting kangaroos moving through suburban streets, which is not ideal habitat for kangaroos. So it is a major issue, and that is why we need to have those local sessions as well, just to inform the community and make them aware.

Gaelle BROAD: Now, you mentioned organisations being able to work together and some collaboration. Can you name the different types of organisations that you would like to see involved?

Naim KURT: Can you repeat that question?

Gaelle BROAD: I guess you talked about collaboration and bringing organisations together for planning in the state – leading that. Can you name some of the different organisations that you would like to see – or stakeholders, I guess – involved in that conversation?

Naim KURT: Well, just to go back to the previous question, we have about had about 60 people attending those sessions, but in bringing groups together we will be looking – it would be obviously the state authorities, so DEECA. It would be emergency services, SES and maybe CFA when they are having to attend to it as well. It would be wildlife networks as well, so there are the different friends groups that are attending to that, and we will probably involve environment friends groups as well. We have got different friends groups for different creek lines, you know – Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek, friends of different areas as well – and we will be bringing them all together along with council officers. So we see it as an all-collaborative approach.

Gaelle BROAD: Yes. I am just interested in wildlife corridors, and you talk about coexistence as well: can you explain if there is a difference between the two?

Naim KURT: Can you repeat that?

Gaelle BROAD: Just the wildlife corridors and coexistence – do you see sort of a difference between the two?

Naim KURT: Wildlife corridors enable animal movement, so that is primarily what we are seeking: allowing animals and kangaroos to move safely from one area to another. Hume is basically basalt volcanic country, so it is a high grasslands region, which is perfect for kangaroos and for them to do their nature work, but we also see the interface as part and parcel of where we are. The kangaroos are highly territorial. They are not going to be moving to other areas. They are going to be always with us in our community; wildlife is always going to be with us, and that is why our community loves to live where they do, because they love that interface as well. So they are separate issues, but we do not see that interface changing. It is a part of our community character.

Gaelle BROAD: Yes. And from a council's perspective, with wildlife corridors, do you have any preferred methods? Are there any risks with roads being used as a corridor as opposed to other overpasses or underpasses or other ways of doing it? Do you have any preference?

Naim KURT: We do not have research on that just yet, but I would be happy to get you a formulated response on notice if you like, Ms Broad, thank you.

The CHAIR: Just one more.

Gaelle BROAD: Just one more. I guess your submission very much focused on kangaroos – do you have any issue with wombats? I know it is not wildlife, but we have heard about deer being in some areas too. Can you speak to any other animals affected?

Naim KURT: We do have, I think, past Sunbury more wallabies and wombat strikes which are occurring; I think about 85 per cent of the strikes which occur across our city are kangaroos, but we are seeing a deer movement happening from the eastern suburbs and coming across the northern suburbs and coming into our community as well. So that is that is an emerging issue as well.

Gaelle BROAD: Okay. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Great. Thanks so much, Mrs Broad. That is all we have time for today, so I just want to say thank you again for making the time to appear and for giving us such a detailed submission and remarks. It was really, really helpful. That concludes the public hearing.

Witness withdrew.