

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Wildlife Roadstrike in Victoria

Melbourne – Monday 1 September 2025

MEMBERS

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Richard Welch – Deputy Chair
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David Davis
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Michael Galea
Renee Heath
Sarah Mansfield
Rachel Payne

WITNESSES

Krysti Severi,

Leanne Sultana,

Vicki Clark, and

Sue Johnston.

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.

To kick off we will just have committee members introduce themselves to you. We will start with Mrs Deeming on the screen.

Moira DEEMING: Thank you. My name is Moira Deeming, and I am a Member for Western Metropolitan Region.

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-East Metro.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for taking the time to appear 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. 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 all please state your full name and any organisation you are appearing on behalf of. We will start down here with Krysti.

Krysti SEVERI: Krysti Severi – my own organisation Rescue Rehabilitate Release.

Leanne SULTANA: Leanne Sultana. I rescue under Wildlife Victoria.

Vicki CLARK: Vicki Clark, under Vets for Compassion.

Sue JOHNSTON: Sue Johnston, Sue's Roos Kangaroo Rescue.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you. We now welcome your opening remarks but ask that they are kept to around 15 minutes to ensure plenty of time for discussion and questions. Feel free to do it however you wish among the four of you.

Krysti SEVERI: My name is Krysti Severi. I am a wife, a mother, a daughter and a friend, and I am a volunteer wildlife rescuer and have a registered wildlife shelter. I have been volunteering for around nine years. I am what we call a high-volume rescuer. I used to rescue seven days a week, day or night. My phone would ring at any hour, and I would answer, but burnout has caught up with me. I may get emotional – sorry. My family life would suffer, and my social life suffered. My body will no longer allow me to work at that level. I never knew how to switch off, but now I have to – because this work is relentless, because the suffering of our wildlife is relentless and because the failures of our government and society are relentless. I almost did not come today because I feel nothing will ever change, like it will always be us fighting the government while our wildlife pay the price.

We pour our hearts and souls into rescue. We give everything, and still we are broken – financially, emotionally and personally – and worst of all, the animals still suffer. The work we do as wildlife rescuers can be soul-destroying. It challenges your faith in humanity to see animals left to suffer from catastrophic injuries without help. Every life matters, and every call for help is a chance for us to show kindness and make a difference. We see things no-one should have to see. We see car crash victims every day – not human victims, kangaroos. I could show you photos on my phone that would make you dry-retch. You would turn away, but we cannot. Those images live in our heads. They replay every time we pass the place, every time we close our eyes. Have you ever had a pet die in your arms or made the heartbreaking decision to have a pet euthanised? Have you ever felt a connection so strong and a pain so deep it settles in your chest and never really leaves? We feel that pain too. A joey in care losing the will to live, calling out continuously for their mother – a call that sadly will never be answered: it is a haunting cry. Out on rescues we hold broken bodies in our hands, we watch lives slip away despite everything we try, and most times we have to make the agonising decision to end a life, to end the suffering. It is a grief that cuts just as deep as losing your own pet, but unlike with pets, it happens again and again, for every kangaroo, every possum, every bird, every joey that we cannot save.

Wildlife rescuers and carers are burning out. Cases that would once have been picked up within minutes now sit on wildlife networks for hours, sometimes days. The emotional toll, the financial burden, the endless death and suffering and the lack of meaningful support are pushing rescuers and carers to a breaking point. We are losing rescuers and carers at an alarming rate, and when we lose rescuers and carers, we lose lives. We do not do this for praise or thanks, we do it for the animals, but we cannot keep doing it alone. We need awareness, we need compassion, we need government and wildlife networks to step up and support the people on the front lines, because if we cannot keep going the animals do not stand a chance. As rescuers and carers, we know these animals better than anyone – better than someone with a few letters after their name. We see them at their best, we see them at their worst, and these animals, without a word of a lie, can actually see into your soul.

It upsets me no end to see development pushed forward around a mob of kangaroos who have absolutely no way out. The laws that are supposed to protect them to allow relocation are an absolute joke. Homes are built, fences go up, pushing them out onto streets and roads to take their chances with cars, dogs and temp fencing surrounding the homes that were once theirs. How is that fair? It is their home too. We make it ours and force them out with nowhere to go. And then the complaints begin: ‘The kangaroos are a nuisance.’ No, the nuisance is our failure to coexist. Let me make this clear: kangaroos do not understand roads, they do not understand cars, they do not understand death, so how could they possibly know that road plus car equals death? They do not wake up and say, ‘I’ll hop onto the road today and let a car hit me.’ The only animal that understands that equation is a \$50,000 guide dog. And why does it understand – because it has been trained. Kangaroos are not stupid. The only stupidity lies with the humans who expect them to think like us.

We need action. High crossing areas must have large signage, flashing lights, a drop in speed limits, clear lines of sight and better planning for roadsides. New estate residents ought to be educated on living with wildlife, with more and more signage with wildlife phone numbers and a change in the current signage as it is clearly not working. We cannot keep relying on kangaroos to survive on luck alone.

And then there is DEECA. They need to go. We need an independent body to regulate our wildlife. They grant me permission to raise joeys, dictate how I must raise them, allow me to spend up to \$2,000 per animal, and then they give my neighbour permission to shoot as many kangaroos as he pleases. Their bodies are either left to rot or used to feed our introduced pets, our cats and dogs. Statistics are twisted to justify their slaughter, numbers fabricated. Even mathematicians have proved the counts are wrong, and still the killing goes on. I have euthanised kangaroos who were body-shot, their wounds riddled with infection. I have seen kangaroos with jaws blown off, unable to eat or drink – some we have helped, some we have not – mothers unable to feed

or clean their joeys, joeys starving, wounds alive with maggots. This is the truth. This is the industry they call humane.

The legislation orders that all pouch young must be destroyed, ripped out of pouches, swung by their feet. Joeys' heads are smashed against bull bars, heads are stomped on, decapitated – and these are the kangaroos I have raised under DEECA's own guidelines. People overseas call kangaroos pests, vermin, giant rats and other insulting names. At home, radio stations and TV hosts crucify them, celebrities mock them. Comments on social media are vulgar. Cooking shows push their meat as ethically sourced. There is nothing ethical about it: it is unregulated, it is cruel, it is vile.

And beyond this cruelty there is ignorance. The public do not know who to call; some even do not think that they should call. This has to change. Public awareness is paramount. It should be an ethical and legal law that all animals that are hit must be called into a wildlife organisation. We need education in schools, rescue numbers on drivers licences, wildlife awareness in learners probationary tests and a national advertising campaign – not hidden at 2:48 in the morning when no-one's watching, but in prime time. We can create tasteful ads. We have the technology, so why aren't we doing it? We cry out against the Yulin dog festival, against whaling, seal clubbing, bear bile farming, poaching. We condemn cruelty overseas, but here in Australia we are treating our native animals just as brutally every single day and every single night, and no-one seems to care: 'So what? It's just a kangaroo. One less, plenty more.'

I started my rescue page to showcase the beauty of our wildlife and also as a place for me to grieve, a place to tell their stories as they deserve to have an identity, to educate, to expose. It is graphic and confrontational. I make no apologies for that. I have followers all over the world. They are horrified at how we treat our kangaroos, and they have a right to be horrified. We parade our kangaroos as a symbol of pride on sports teams, on one of the world's biggest airlines, on our coat of arms, for shit's sake. We use them to sell this country, but behind the scenes we treat them with cruelty and contempt. It is shameful. It is hypocritical. It is a national disgrace. Ruby the Roo is the brand ambassador for Tourism Australia – what an insult.

These animals are designed for this land. They belong here more than we do – more than sheep, cows, dogs, cats or horses. This is their country, their food, their birthright, and yet we treat them as disposable. I challenge each and every one of you and your peers to spend just one day with us – walk beside us, see what we see. Feel the weight of an animal's suffering pressing down on your shoulders. Witness the heartbreak of the decisions we are forced to make every day. If you truly understood what it takes, the sacrifice made and the toll it leaves on them, you would never look at a rescuer the same way again. We do not need sympathy. We need understanding, support and change. This has to end, this has to change, and it has to change now. Thank you.

Leanne SULTANA: Hi. I would like to begin by thanking the Chair and the committee for allowing me to speak today about the seriousness of the road strike crisis that is devastating our native wildlife in Victoria. Since making my submission, the situation has worsened. At that time I reported 460 wildlife fatalities from road strikes over a 14-month period within the Dandenong Ranges, and in just three months since then that figure has risen to 729. The majority of these deaths have occurred along a 21-kilometre stretch of Wellington Road between Emerald and Rowville. Since January this year 372 animals have been killed on this road. July alone was the deadliest month on record, with exactly 100 animals killed and 89 of these were just kangaroos. In eight months of this year we have lost 220 kangaroos, 39 wallabies, 47 possums, 22 wombats and 26 birds, to name a few. These figures only represent the cases that we are aware of, and we have no doubt that the toll is double that at least. They do not account for near misses or unreported hit-and-runs.

I began documenting the road strike using the iNaturalist app, and this enabled me to gather solid data that identified road strike hotspots, complete with live GPS locations, as well as detailed records of the dates, times and species affected, and the numbers that I have been recording have been staggering. In March I decided to take action by creating a petition on change.org, which I shared across community noticeboards on social media. And to date over 5500 people have signed expressing their support for proposals directed to the Department of Transport and Planning, local councils and local MPs. In my petition I have proposed the following immediate measures: reduce speed limits from dusk till dawn, the use of variable message signs and the installation of virtual fencing.

I have endured years of frustration and despair from the lack of communication, action and care when repeatedly reaching out to governing bodies about the alarming number of wildlife deaths on this road in

particular. Years ago I wrote as a concerned member of the public; for the past five years I have spoken as a wildlife rescuer. In both roles the silence has been deafening. Recently the Yarra Ranges Council and two local MPs have not only listened but also begun taking meaningful action on our concerns. The petition has raised awareness and fast-tracked the conversation, but only because we have now reached a crisis point. The scale of loss we are witnessing is unsustainable, and it can no longer be ignored. However, while we fully acknowledge and appreciate the support and action that is now being expressed by council, I also understand that addressing and amending policies and procedures takes time. But our wildlife does not have that time. With every passing day, they continue to be obliterated on our roads.

Wellington Road is not only a gateway to two major tourist attractions but also a major access route to the rapidly developing outer suburbs. These are the very areas where we are also witnessing the decline of wildlife and the rise of other road strikes. All of these factors together form a melting pot of disaster for wildlife, for the community and for human life. It is only a matter of time before a human life is lost, but how many lives of our wildlife are we willing to let slip through the cracks? Are their lives not as valuable as our own? I am certain if you ask them that, they will beg to differ.

Immediate action is required, and virtual fencing can play a role in addressing this crisis in the short term. In 2019 virtual fencing was installed and trialled over a 2-kilometre stretch within the Wellington Road break in Lysterfield. During this trial a clear reduction of kangaroo strikes was observed, proof that this prevention method worked. However, the fencing has not been maintained and is now broken and falling apart. It is a travesty that this life-saving technology has been allowed to deteriorate and to fall into neglect.

As rescuers we volunteer our time to help protect wildlife in need. We do this because we deeply care about their welfare and understand the daily threats these animals face. Yet the situations we regularly encounter are nothing short of horrifying. We are confronted with scenes of prolonged suffering and almost always death. For someone who cares so profoundly for wildlife, witnessing this level of trauma is overwhelming, and it is made even more devastating knowing that so much could have been prevented. I sincerely hope that, together with the submissions from fellow wildlife rescuers and carers, this highlights the urgent need to protect our wildlife and our community from further road strikes. Wellington Road is a treacherous road, but this is not an isolated incident. Road strikes are endemic throughout the state. I urge the government to take swift and effective action so that together we can reduce these tragic incidents and create safer roads for everyone.

Vicki CLARK: How do I follow those two? My goodness. I do not come to you today with stats of the devastating loss of life. What I have is my experience, my truth and many stories of heartbreak, devastation, and despair but also drive, determination and hope – quite literally, Hope. Last week Elaine and Nicole from Vets for Compassion showed you a short clip of Hope, a young joey who stood alongside her deceased mum on Wellington Road, her fear and confusion evident as she called for her mum. Why was she not coming? Why was she cold, hungry and covered in blood? After a lengthy period of clucking back and forth, Hope finally returned a headshake, and I knew I had gained her trust. Finally, she allowed me to safely approach her as she made her way to me. I made Hope a bucketload of promises that day. I promised to care for her. I promised I would fight for change, promised her I would do everything possible to prevent further joeys from feeling that same fear and confusion she felt. Today, just a few months on, with every bottle I make, every poop I pick up, every tap of my credit card and every time I look into those little eyes I am reminded of my promises. Hence why I am here today – to fight for Hope.

The impact of the road strikes does not only affect our wildlife. There is also the human toll. On four occasions in July I attended incidents where cars had to be towed away – two likely irreparable, one owner telling me he was angry at the recent speed reductions. Never did he expect this would happen to him. It is only a matter of time before someone is hurt.

Just last week we were travelling Wellington Road when my partner let out a squeal. At 6 foot 3 and 100 kilos, squealing is not something he typically does. There, standing on the side of the road, was a large sambar deer. We were lucky we had only just turned onto the road so were building speed. Had someone come through doing the designated 80-kilometre speed limit, it could have been a very different situation. How many animals need to lose their lives before change happens? If we weigh up the loss, both the emotional and financial toll on carers and rescuers as well as the public, and the risk to human safety, change seems a no-brainer. It is hard to justify having to fight so hard for the change. Small changes can make a big difference – signage repaired, increasing of virtual fencing, speed reductions. For Hope's sake, we need that change.

Sue JOHNSTON: Chair and members of the committee, thank you for inviting us to speak today. I have been rescuing kangaroos for 20 years, mainly around the Lysterfield area. Most of the animals I attend have been hit by vehicles. I am on call 24/7, taking calls from across the state, and when I cannot personally attend I coordinate with other rescuers to ensure no animal is left to suffer. Over the years, I have logged thousands of hours in the field. As Lee has already mentioned, there has been an alarming spike in collisions on Wellington Road in Lysterfield and Rowville since April. Several key factors have contributed to this increase. A school is currently being built adjacent to the national park on land that served as kangaroo grazing territory for decades. Where there were once large mobs, only 28 kangaroos remain onsite – the rest have been pushed north in search of food and safety. The drought conditions have left the park with little feed, pushing kangaroos onto roadsides and grass verges, placing them in immediate danger, and their access points and movement routes between two adjoining parks have been blocked off, funnelling kangaroos into the suburban streets of Rowville and further on to Wellington Road. There has not been a discernible increase in the local kangaroo population. These animals reproduce slowly – just one joey per year. Parks Victoria conducts a population count every two years, and there is no data to suggest a cull is warranted. In fact when 20 large males were culled 10 years ago it caused major disruption to the mob structure, displacing kangaroos into unfamiliar suburbs and increasing collisions.

The virtual fence on Wellington Road once helped to protect part of Wellington Road. Many of its sensors are now damaged or missing, with recent support and advocacy from Yarra Ranges council and Member for Monbulk Daniela De Martino, we are hoping this will be repaired and extended after three years of trying to get that done. Thanks to support from Casey council, we have seen real success on the southern side of Lysterfield Park. In collaboration with funding from VicRoads, large motion-activated flashing signs have been installed. These are far more effective than the standard signs most drivers ignore. Additionally, Casey council installed 8.5 kilometres of virtual fencing over the past four years. I am aware studies have questioned the effectiveness of virtual fencing, and it is not perfect, but in my experience it has significantly reduced vehicle collisions, particularly with the rise of silent electric vehicles. For example, prior to fencing I responded to an annual average of 79 kangaroo collisions on Churchill Park Drive just in Lysterfield South; in the six months following installation of virtual fencing that dropped to 12, five of which occurred during daylight hours and five where sensors were missing. It works, but only if it is maintained. Vegetation must be managed, and the signal must be periodically changed to prevent kangaroos from being accustomed to it.

Please consider the following actions: expand virtual fencing to high-risk areas and ensure regular maintenance; install more motion-activated flashing signs in known crossing areas; improve road signage to clearly provide a wildlife rescue contact number; launch public awareness campaigns encouraging drivers to report injured wildlife – no-one expects someone to pick up a kangaroo, but they do need to make a call to somebody to get some help; formally recognise wildlife rescuers as emergency responders or at least extend the ‘slow to 40 k’s with flashing lights’ rule to include wildlife rescuers; provide access to traffic control training for rescuers working on roadsides; and support wildlife shelters with realistic funding – the current \$3000 grant barely covers the cost of raising 1½ joeys per year.

We are not just volunteers; we are frontline responders delivering a critical public service every day. We rescue injured animals, provide education, respond to community concerns and offer immediate support to traumatised members of the public. This work is financially, physically and emotionally exhausting, but it is essential, and we cannot continue without help. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much. We will move to questions now, and we will start with Ms Broad. Members, we have gone slightly over time, so I might keep it to 5 minutes, and then we will go around again if we have got time.

Gaëlle BROAD: Thank you very much. Thank you all for your contributions, because I can see it is very emotional when you have got to go through this on repeat. It feels like *Groundhog Day*, the movie – you just keep waking up and doing the same thing. A couple of you, Sue and Krysti, mentioned that 24 hours being on call. What improvements do you think can be made to make it more sustainable, for other volunteers to be involved? What lessons have you learned that you could share that would help?

Krysti SEVERI: I think the problem is, as a whole now, I just do not think that there are enough people stepping up to what we do, whether or not it is because they hear about what we do. I think we get a lot of people that think that they can do it, but then it just controls your whole life. It actually controls everything

about what you do, and that is what I said in mine. I would stop going to functions. I would be all dressed, ready to go, and I would get a rescue. Now, not many people can do that. I do not know how we are going to get more people involved, but I certainly think that more people do need to become involved in what we do. Whether it is by financial encouragement or something, I do not know. I do not know the exact answer, but I know that we need a lot more people to do this because, as I said in mine, I cannot go at this level anymore. I physically cannot do it – I just cannot.

Sue JOHNSTON: I think the problem with kangaroo rescue is a lot of it is euthanasia, and for a lot of people it is very confronting, very hard to do. It is also very physically demanding.

Vicki CLARK: The financial burden.

Sue JOHNSTON: The financial burden. That is my main concern. It does cost a fortune to care for and rescue kangaroos as well.

Gaelle BROAD: We have heard about phone numbers being different in different areas. I guess you mentioned too that people may have your direct number once you have responded. What would you like to see in future? Is there more –

Sue JOHNSTON: A centralised number would be fantastic, it really would. Krysti and I get calls all the time. They google ‘kangaroo rescue’ and we come up. If we cannot go, we put it onto Wildlife Vic. A centralised number which also works with other organisations would be ideal.

Krysti SEVERI: Yes. And that is the whole thing. Everyone has got their own issues with each group and this, that and the other, but we are all here for the same reason. We need to actually all work –

Sue JOHNSTON: That gets clouded.

Krysti SEVERI: Yes.

Sue JOHNSTON: Because someone does not like someone else or –

Krysti SEVERI: Yes. We need to all work under the same banner.

Sue JOHNSTON: Yes. It is not about the group, it is about getting that animal help immediately.

Krysti SEVERI: Correct.

Sue JOHNSTON: So yes, we do need a centralised number.

The CHAIR: Time for one last –

Gaelle BROAD: Leanne, I was interested that, I think it was, your submission had the iNaturalist app.

Leanne SULTANA: Yes.

Gaelle BROAD: That looked quite informative.

Leanne SULTANA: It is amazing.

Gaelle BROAD: Can you just talk to that? And are other groups using a similar app to share data? How does it work?

Leanne SULTANA: I have encouraged some people who I have spoken to, who are rescuers, to use it. It is an amazing source. It basically is such an easy application. It is on your phone. I use it with every single road strike I come across. Literally, you take the photo, and that just records the immediate GPS live location, takes the image and uploads it and the time and date, and then you can actually put in what species it is and it comes up. It is very accurate. What I love about it mostly is when you have a look at the map that you are looking at, it will show you all the GPS spots and where all the hotspots are. That is the part that actually scared the absolute crap out of me, because when I was seeing all those little dots I was like, ‘That is astonishing.’ But it is so accurate, and that is where I think it is really important to be able to work with places like council. If they are

looking at putting in any kinds of measures, we can identify these particular hotspots and what species are related to what. I know that there is one part on one end of the road that is very heavily dense with possums and then on the other side it is very, very dense with kangaroos. It is a great resource, and I highly encourage everyone to use it.

Gaelle BROAD: Thank you.

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

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. As you have referenced, there are different views around virtual fencing, and perhaps it works in some locations but does not work so well in others. Does anyone else have experience with virtual fencing in your neck of the woods that you can share?

Krysti SEVERI: City of Whittlesea have not erected it. I do not think City of Hume have done it either. I am in Mernda, so nothing over that side has been –

Sue JOHNSTON: I think Manningham have just installed some. It is interesting – I find all the studies seem to say that they are not effective, but those rescuers on the ground actually see the effectiveness. We have done many studies over the years, and it is not perfect, but it really has dramatically decreased the amount hit. It does not work during the day and the signal is probably not correct for a kangaroo, but they do stop – you see that they stop. If they are in the middle of the road and there is a car coming, there are lights and noises coming from everywhere and they do not know where to go, but it really does help. I would not be pushing for it and advocating for it with council if it did not. Casey have put it all around their side of Lysterfield Park, and I am hoping we can get it on the other side as well.

Katherine COPSEY: You have spoken as well, and we have heard from other witnesses, about the impact that urban encroachment or residential encroachment is having. In your experience locally, would you say that there is knowledge beforehand around where particularly kangaroo populations are? How well would you say that is being integrated at the moment in planning decisions?

Krysti SEVERI: It is not – not at all.

Sue JOHNSTON: If I can refer to the school, no. It was made very aware by different studies of the kangaroo population what would happen with that, and it was still passed and the school is being built.

Krysti SEVERI: There is a mob in Mernda that is on Plenty Road. You have a big, brand new sports area going up on this spot here, there is a vacant paddock here and then all of this is developed. These roos have absolutely have nowhere to go. The only place they have to go now is the streets or Plenty Road – that is it. So they will most likely be shot.

Sue JOHNSTON: You have a lot of the housing development up there.

Krysti SEVERI: Huge.

Sue JOHNSTON: We do not really have it; it is already developed.

Krysti SEVERI: And there are no corridors; there is no way out for them. It is just a labyrinth in there, and they do not know where to go at all. So there is no planning – nothing.

Katherine COPSEY: There is another topic that I wanted to hear your thoughts on. Some witnesses have said that kangaroo populations are booming, that there is a population increase. Based on your experience, your awareness of location and population density, what is your response to that?

Sue JOHNSTON: Well, Parks do a count in Lysterfield Park every two years, and they have said there has been no discernible increase. The mobs have moved. I do not want to just keep blaming the school, but because of the school development, that large group of kangaroos has moved north into the park. There is not enough food there, so now they are being pushed onto Wellington Road. Also, on the southern and the western side their access points or the holes in the fence have all been blocked off, so they cannot go from park to park. They are pushed out into Rowville and onto Wellington Road. There was a planned burn back in February right in the middle of their path.

Vicki CLARK: So we now have three groups of kangaroos that have all been pushed to meet together in the middle.

Krysti SEVERI: And in saying that too, as Vicki said, there are three lots of kangaroos, but some people will actually say, 'There's thousands of them.' There are 56 kangaroos there. 'Oh, no, there's thousands'. No, there are not. As we were saying, they are mobs that have been actually pushed together due to having to be pushed together for development, or their area now has been temporarily fenced and they cannot get back in. So there are not these mass mobs that people think that there are – it is impossible.

Leanne SULTANA: It is happening suddenly too. One month you are seeing what you would usually, and then all of a sudden there are all these kangaroos coming up and you are seeing more road strikes. People keep on saying that they breed in plague proportions – 'But they weren't here a couple of weeks ago' – so this is a forced migration, definitely.

Sue JOHNSTON: In contrast, I live on the southern side of Lysterfield Park. We have always had kangaroos in our estate. They live there, they come out at night, they eat their grass and they go back. There are no more than there were anytime. I mean, they have a baby every year, but there is no great –

Krysti SEVERI: Boom.

Sue JOHNSTON: boom. No.

Krysti SEVERI: I do not believe so either.

Vicki CLARK: There is no way they can be breeding at the rate that we are losing them at the moment.

Sue JOHNSTON: Yes, and I cannot understand – I think we are at a crisis point where we are not going to have any left in the park because of Wellington Road. Well, it is not Wellington Road's fault, but because they are all ending up on Wellington Road.

Krysti SEVERI: I think those words 'plague proportion' get thrown around a little bit too freely, personally.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Ms Copsey. I will go next. I just want to say thank you again. I am familiar with all of your individual work, and it is really good to have you here in front of us. We are very much committed to doing what we can to support you in my office. I just wanted to say a really, really big thankyou, which is what my questioning is actually in relation to. I know you have lots of great proposals for how we can reduce wildlife road strike, but obviously a really key part of that is supporting the people who are responding to it. Something that has been abundantly clear is that the wildlife rescue community and the entire sector has been undervalued and undersupported for far too long. One of the things that was put to us by some witnesses was a model of ongoing financial support that is not the \$3,000 grants, which barely cover the cost of raising a joey or two. Some other rescuers proposed a model where people pay a voluntary \$2 payment on their registration fee to fundraise this money. Could you tell us what something like that would mean for the sustainability and longevity of your work to ensure that you can continue to respond to wildlife road strike?

Krysti SEVERI: How would you, though, work out who gets some of that money?

The CHAIR: That is a great question. That is something we would have to explore. But I guess what I am interested to know is what ongoing funding would mean in order to continue your work.

Sue JOHNSTON: I think it would make it easier for us, but the longer term rescuers would still be doing it without the money.

Krysti SEVERI: Yes.

Sue JOHNSTON: It would encourage new ones to come in, though.

Krysti SEVERI: Yes. I agree.

Sue JOHNSTON: Two dollars for me really would not make a difference, but –

The CHAIR: Two dollars on every car registration in Victoria would be about \$10 million a year for the wildlife rescue community to be divided.

Krysti SEVERI: It would probably allow me to put four tanks of fuel a week in my car rather than three. More sets of tyres. That is the whole thing – the wear and tear is huge. Fuel is insane. I think the biggest week I did was nearly four tanks of fuel, and I have got a diesel car at 80 litres. That is a lot of kilometres, and, like these guys, I do not just do my area; I travel. I think I have gone as far up as Bonnie Doon to dart a kangaroo, and that was all free. Not that I want – but I am just saying it is all at no charge. We do so many at our own cost, but you do not put a limit on an animal needing help. You just go, ‘All right, just get in the car and go.’ So, yes, I think it would definitely help with more servicing, more tyres, more wear and tear on vehicles, but for us personally, we will just keep doing it.

The CHAIR: That probably leads into something that came up in a previous hearing. There does seem to be a generational divide in terms of who is taking up this work. Obviously the retention in the wildlife sector has been poor, particularly over recent years, from the cost of living and burnout and the emotional toll of responding to rescue. Are you seeing many new rescuers come in in the areas that you service?

Krysti SEVERI: Not really. You will get some that will come in, and they are just all guns blazing and they are so keen and eager, and then you see them dropping off. The burnout starts; the compassion fatigue starts. Whereas obviously we rescuers that have been doing it for a while learn the signs, and we are like, ‘Okay, time to switch off the phone, time to debrief and go out with some friends and family.’ These rescuers do not know how to do that yet, so they just go hammer and tong, and that is when we see them starting to drop off and not accepting the calls as much. But also we have got two really, really big shelters of ladies that are getting older. Once they go and they stop doing it, what is going to happen? Because there are not many people that are buying property that backs onto areas where they are not culling or they are not doing anything that involves shooting. We are bugged. There is going to be a high increase of euthanising perfectly fine joeys because there is nowhere for them to go. And that happened at a vet clinic the other week – a perfect little 3-kilo joey euthanised. No carers for it; nothing wrong with it.

The CHAIR: Yes. And obviously when we talk about road strike, it is normally unintentional, but I know, Sue, you have dealt with some intentional road strike in your community. Is this something that you think is increasing, and how has it come about? Is it sort of this, I guess, disregard particularly of kangaroos and how we view them?

Sue JOHNSTON: Yes. Mine is not to question why a psycho runs over kangaroos. Yes, I think the first one was someone thinking it was something fun to do, and then I think there have been a couple of copycat incidents as well. But yes, in all of the years of rescue, all the things I see, all the death, the horrific injuries, that is what got to me: intentionally running them down right near my house. I have joeys at home – or I do not anymore, because of that. But it is just something that does not make sense. It is unfathomable that they would do something like that.

The CHAIR: Yes. Great. My final question is: when you are doing the response, the rescue and then the care element, one thing that I have been trying to encourage the government to do is consider the impact at least on rescued and rehabilitated animals and the risks that they face when they are released to the wild. Could you tell us what your fears are for the animals that you put years into rehabilitating? What could happen to them when they are released?

Sue JOHNSTON: Well, as Krysti said, if you release them to the wrong area and they are shot – in my area, we do not have that, apart from the one cull we had 10 years ago. But yes, there is the risk of people running them down; there is the risk of them being hit by a car –

Krysti SEVERI: Turning into dog and cat food. Turning up on *MasterChef*, for example. And I think that is the problem – it only takes one person to move into the property where you have been releasing for years and years and years and they do not like kangaroos. If they apply for a permit, bang, it is accepted. Up at Eden Park a guy has been approved for 800 kangaroos.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Krysti SEVERI: That is a lot of kangaroos. And he grows grain. Eight hundred roos – permit to kill.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Krysti SEVERI: It is concerning. We have put everything into those animals, absolutely everything. And they are our native animals, for God's sake. They have got more rights to be here than sheep and cows, yet they are crucified every day. As we said, we put everything into them, we raised them, we love them, and we put them out in that world, and they come home, and there have been shelters that have had roos come home with bullets in them; they have been shot. It is wrong.

The CHAIR: Yes. Okay. Thank you. That is all I have time for. I will go to Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, everyone, for your contributions today. I am really glad you are here. I think there are there are two sides to this. The biggest way we can help you is to reduce road strike – okay, that is a given – and there is lots of talk and strategies. But I want to focus on the other side: how do we support you as a community? We hear lots of evidence around this that we need to systemise the data, we need to centralise the data, we need more state support, we need more harmony of who is responsible for what, which I think – you can nod or something – is a good way to go about it. But I often worry about this a little bit, because any volunteer base that is primarily driven by compassion, one of the quickest ways to kill that volunteer base is to wrap them up in compliance and process, because you did not get into this to be part of a big system. So for me, there is a conundrum here, because if we are seeking to put more rigour around it, there is obviously a trade-off. The trade-off is going to be compliance. It is going to mean less ability to choose your hours and things of that nature. So I am really interested in that trade-off, where you sit on that. Who do you think should govern you? Who are you going to be happy to have governing you? Are you going to be comfortable with more deterministic hours and approaches and people putting more guidelines on you? Because they will help you, but it may also dim the flame a little bit as well. I would just be really curious and interested on your views around that.

Krysti SEVERI: It is a hard one. Okay, I vote you two in. You can be the bosses. I am happy with that. It is a hard one. I think it still sort of falls under the volunteer side of it. But yes, there definitely has to be more legislation and I suppose rules and whatnot that come into it. I do not know –

Sue JOHNSTON: Can you see an organisation telling you you are only allowed to volunteer for 2 hours a week? Can you see yourself doing that, adhering to that rule?

Krysti SEVERI: No, because I would do it anyway.

Sue JOHNSTON: Neither can I.

Krysti SEVERI: Yes, it would be hard to be, I suppose, governed by something like that, because that is not what we do.

Sue JOHNSTON: Again, who do we choose?

Krysti SEVERI: That is right. That is the problem. So it is a hard one.

Richard WELCH: Yes, it is, isn't it? I feel like the easiest way, the most common way we could help you, is: 'Okay, we'll put rules and process in and then you'll get this much resource and you'll get that much resource. Then we'll coordinate across the regions, and it will be very efficient.'

Krysti SEVERI: You would go rogue.

Richard WELCH: Yes. But the other edge of that sword is you guys are burnt out without it as well. Very little of this, any way we can help you, is going to happen without your consent, because if you do not like what gets implemented, you are not going to work with it. Therefore I think it is a bit beholden on you to tell us what you are willing to concede in order that we can help you. So help us to help you. Again, I am very happy for you, when you have had time to reflect, to come back and put some thought on it. I think this is the nub of it for you guys, to be honest, because it is physical, financial and emotional – but we are going to put you in boxes, so pick your poison around it.

Krysti SEVERI: Yes, it is something to think about; definitely something to think about.

Richard WELCH: And it all comes back to data too. If we do not get our hands around the data, it is going to be very hard to do anything systematically to help you. Again, it is so fragmented – and it is fragmented for a very good reason – but we have got to make some choices, I feel. Sorry, I am talking to you. You should be talking to me.

Krysti SEVERI: I agree.

Sue JOHNSTON: I think the centralised data is very important at the very minimum. But yes, it is something we need to reflect on.

Richard WELCH: How can we have our cake and eat it too, really.

Krysti SEVERI: Correct. We definitely need to think about it.

Leanne SULTANA: Yes. It is not something that we can answer, because you are asking a lot from us to think about, and it is quite a complicated thing.

Richard WELCH: Yes. And think about who you would want to be run by, because there are some obvious candidates that exist, whether it is DEECA or Wildlife Victoria or – I do not know. Across the whole of the community, you are a very diverse group of people. Who would you sign up to?

Krysti SEVERI: It is a lot to think about.

Vicki CLARK: It is a struggle. The part I struggle with the most is our governing body – our legislation now – are the same people that sign off on culls. It would be nice to have somebody separate that will fight the good fight rather than the same people that do sign off on the culls. That would be a starting point, for me.

Krysti SEVERI: That was mean – that was really mean.

Richard WELCH: I have reduced you all to silence.

Krysti SEVERI: Yes. We are thinking.

Richard WELCH: They are the only questions I actually have. But thank you, again.

The CHAIR: That is about your time anyway. I will go to Mrs Deeming to finish.

Moira DEEMING: Thank you so much. You obviously care so much about what you are doing, and you are doing the whole community a service. Other people have canvassed most other issues. I think the one that I did not hear about was your recommendation 5, which is to strengthen driver penalties for reckless and intentional harm to wildlife. Could you elaborate on what you had in mind there?

Leanne SULTANA: I think one of the big things that we all struggle with as wildlife rescuers is that when an animal gets hit, almost all of them hardly get called in. We do not know about it. We find out the aftermath hours later – or in my case, when I am driving to work and I see them. Some do get called in, and I think it is absolutely the driver's responsibility to make that call. And it is just a call – we are not asking drivers to handle the animal or to do a pouch check or to stabilise them, we are just asking them to make one simple phone call to someone so we can get to that animal to help them asap.

Another thing too is that drivers are just flying down these roads. They are flying down these roads where there are wildlife crossings, and I think that is just a crime in itself, when they are doing the speed limits and they are hitting an animal and they are not calling for help. That should be first and foremost. In relation to, say, something that Sue has been dealing with, the deliberate hitting, that should come with the highest of penalties there, I believe. But first and foremost, driver education needs to be at the forefront of this, because a lot of drivers have no idea of what to do when they hit an animal. It is simple: it should just be an obligation that everyone should just make that call to someone.

Moira DEEMING: I really liked your idea about making the contact phone number easier for people to find. When I hit a kangaroo years and years ago, we just did not actually know who to call. It was years and years ago, but it was an odd situation to be in, and I did not want to leave it there on the side of the road either.

Leanne SULTANA: I do not think there are any excuses now. Everyone has got the internet on their phones, so all it is is they just do a quick Google search and a number will come up.

Moira DEEMING: Yes. Even back then that is what we did, but we had to sort of search around to find the appropriate one, because we were in a place that was not our local area. I just like the idea of having at least that one-stop shop or a clear number.

If anyone else wants to talk about what you were thinking about in terms of penalties – because I have asked this of a few others. One of the other groups who made submissions was talking about having the hit-and-run penalties similar to that for humans. You have said something different to that group: you said that you did not expect them to stop and have to give care but to just make the phone call. Anyone can comment on this. I would just be really interested in some more clarity on what you were thinking. What would you like to see more specifically on not just helping – preventative and helping the behaviour – but in terms of the penalties in the law?

Sue JOHNSTON: There is a law under section 61, I believe, of the road traffic Act: if someone is to hit a person or an animal, they are supposed to stop and render assistance however they can, or however that is written. If wildlife were included in that, because it is really not specific – I think it refers to pets – that would be a good thing, and whatever the penalties of that are, I cannot remember –

Moira DEEMING: But just ‘on par’ is what you are saying?

Sue JOHNSTON: Yes. If it was just included in that section 61 of the road traffic Act, which I often quote to people, what they should be doing, but apparently it is about pets. I am not sure if it should be at the level of hitting a person.

Krysti SEVERI: A minimum \$500 donation to a wildlife shelter.

Leanne SULTANA: That is a good one.

Moira DEEMING: Thank you so much. Everything else that I was interested in asking was already covered. I appreciate you making the submission. Thank you for everything that you do, and thanks for giving some more clarity on that other area.

The CHAIR: Thanks so much. That is our time. Thank you so much once again for making the time to appear before us today and for giving some really great information to the committee. It is great to get that lived and on-the-ground experience from you all.

Witnesses withdrew.