

Inquiry into the Loss of Biodiversity and Ecosystems

Submission: The Commercial Kangaroo Industry

Written by Charlie Vincent

My name is Charlie Vincent and I am the Animal Justice Party candidate for the upcoming 2020 Alpine Shire Council Elections. I am a Board Member and in a volunteer with a Wildlife Shelters and Animal Welfare Organisations and I am making a submission regarding the Victorian kangaroo populations because I believe that the policy decisions that are made now regarding the commercial harvesting of kangaroos has the potential to create irreversible damage to kangaroo populations in Victoria. Whilst I am not a scientist or an academic, I am an active member of the Alpine Shire community and I am writing to advocate for the protection of Australian wildlife.

My husband and I, along with our two young girls, moved to the Alpine Shire from Adelaide in 2019. On the outer parts of Bright township, we were fortunate enough to move in next door to a mob of 19 kangaroos who live in the neighbouring bushland. At the other end of our street is a large cattle farm which is home to hundreds of cows along with kangaroos, wombats and other native wildlife.

From our kitchen window we watch over the grazing mob daily. It did not take long for us to establish a fascination with these incredible individuals. Peaceful and family oriented by nature, our lovely neighbours exhibit characteristics, individual personalities, strong family bonds and incredible cooperation. I felt compelled to learn about kangaroos and began researching and volunteering with a local Wildlife shelter.

What I have learned is that kangaroos have been living in Australia for more than 16 million years. They are perfectly suited to our unique and harsh environment and bring immense ecological benefit. The significance of the kangaroo is intertwined with the Australian Indigenous history and culture as well as the western culture of Australia. Overseas, visions of a kangaroo almost always accompany any mention of Australia as our official and unofficial National Icon. An icon that an overwhelming majority of Australians embrace with pride and passion.

Watching the kangaroos sharing paddocks with the cows fascinated me and I decided to research further to understand this unique coexistence. After hearing many times that kangaroos compete with farmed animals for food and therefore are considered a pest, I was surprised to learn that in actual fact, Kangaroos' soft padded feet and long tail are integral to the ecological health of the land, as regenerators of native grasses. Kangaroo urine and faeces is a natural fertiliser essential to the health of the soil and many species depend on the kangaroo for this reason. Their waste is not high in nitrogen like that of livestock and unlike sheep and cattle, kangaroos do not destroy plant roots when they eat. If anything, the presence of kangaroos is of great benefit to farmers who have grazing animals.

The fires that raged through our Nation from late in 2019 to April 2020 were ferocious, unrelenting, and resulted in comprehensible loss of environment and wildlife. But we are no strangers to extreme bushfires. This was not the first of its kind and we know that it will not be the last. We know that eight of the hottest years on record have occurred in the last ten years. And we know that this trend is not slowing. The climate emergency is here, and we must reflect this in our political decisions about the future.

As we evacuated our home on January 2nd and placed as many buckets of water out for our neighbouring mob before we drove away, I sobbed with helplessness. I knew they would most likely not survive what was coming our way. As Australia burned out of control, money, aid and messages of support poured in from all over the world. Global headlines depicted images of kangaroos desperately fleeing raging flames along side community halls and school gyms filled with make-shift wildlife hospitals caring for injured and orphaned animals. Our hearts, and hearts all around the world, wept.

I vividly remember the day I discovered the frightening facts of the commercial kangaroo industry. I simply had no idea that our native kangaroos were being killed by the millions each year to be sold as pet food and leather goods. I had no idea of the level of cruel brutality of the slaughter process or of the horrifying fact that joeys are bludgeoned to death after their mothers are shot. But the most frightening fact that I learned that day, is that not only is this slaughter legal, but that it is endorsed, encouraged, and supported by the Victorian Government.

The commercial killing of Kangaroos is the largest wildlife trade in the world. As a Nation we have condemned countries such as Canada and China for their gross disregard and cruel slaughter of native animals to the point of extinction. We have portioned against such barbaric, unnecessary killing and yet here we are, doing the same in our own back yard. There is no doubt that where there is money to be made, incentives and justifications will be found. As is the case with the commercial kangaroo industry. But what we must understand is that no commercial interest can outweigh our duty to protect Australian wildlife and ensure the security of their ecosystem. The argument that kangaroos are pests and are overpopulated is simply industry marketing tactics which have been allowed to permeate into policy making and it must stop now. The sustainability of kangaroo populations in Victoria depend on it.

We need only look at Western Australia or NSW to see the rapid decline of kangaroo populations to see that this is not a viable industry or a humane one. Data extrapolation tactics to determine so called "harvest quotas" bring gravely dangerous consequences when misconstrued. And then there is the unexpected events to come. The next big fires. The next floods. The next drought.

Kangaroos are a part of the fabric of our Nation and we have a duty to ensure they continue to thrive into the future as we face the most uncertain times we have ever faced in history. I ask you, please ban the commercial killing of Kangaroos in Victoria as a permanent commitment to this duty.