

*My name is Lesley Rosochodski. I live in the Macedon Ranges, Victoria. Biodiversity loss is having a substantial effect on my life. I find I am constantly saddened and increasingly frustrated over the apparent lack of governmental care and action on this issue. As an artist the images and emotions I feel may stay with me more. They haunt me.*

*In recent years, I have noticed the absence of yellow tailed black cockatoos on our property. They used to arrive yearly, screeching overhead in joyous unison. I loved to see them flying above in large flocks, eagerly seeking food in the surrounding trees. Now 5 properties on either side of us have been subdivided. The trees have gone. So have the black cockatoos.*

*Last year my children brought home a sulphur crested cockatoo they found sitting on a lawn in the evening; odd behaviour for a bird at dusk. There was no help available locally so we took it to the vet at midnight; drove all the way to Lort Smith from the Macedon Ranges. That poor bird had to be euthanised due to beak, feather, tail disease. We found out that scarcity of food due to habitat loss can lead to this awful disease, a terrible, slow way for a bird to die. Every time a tree is cut down by developers a bird's life is compromised. They lose whole ecosystems, which are vital to their survival.*

*Birds have such short lives. Why would we deny them the food and shelter they need to survive and enjoy life?*

*Last year around the same time we found a poor, injured duck on the side of a road. It too was just sitting there, all alone, waiting to die. It had been hit by a car. No one stopped. The person who hit it didn't bother; it was just a duck. But it was suffering, as we would if hit by a car. Imagine the outcry of a hit and run. People would be shocked. Why can no one feel the pain of that little duck? Why are humans so insensitive to the pain of any other species?*

*Earlier this year, I called local wildlife rescuers for a poor koala we saw lying on the freeway in our area. No one had stopped; certainly not the driver. There are so few Koalas left in the Macedon Ranges. Many are injured in dog attacks. I painted a picture of one climbing a Hills Hoist. But I didn't imagine this painting; it happened near where I live. The Koala sought refuge in the clothes line from a dog attack. Where were its trees?*

*I used to cry on my way to work, at the sight of the poor kangaroos killed or crippled by cars. Once I saw one waiting to be shot, lying on its side while a ranger put a gun to its head. Then I had to go to work as though nothing had happened! I have carried that image and sadness with me to this day. The sight of their poor bodies cast aside; twisted and tortured and just left there alone in a heap. I always thought:*

*"If these were people someone would care. Imagine the outcry if they were children? Why does nobody care?"*

*Our family moved to the country at my request. After I had breast cancer I knew that I needed to be near nature to survive. The entire time I was ill I just wanted to be in and amongst nature. I knew instinctively that the greyness of suburbia was killing me. So we relocated.*

*The trees, the sweet air, the sounds of nature, the sight of living animals all around me: a tonic for my soul. Twenty years later my body is well and I have survived against the odds, which were not good. I knew I needed to be close to nature. I was reminded that we are all part of nature. It is essential to our health. Yet there are no protections in place to guard our most essential life force. Perhaps this is a reason why so many people get cancer.*

*As an artist I now exclusively paint wildlife. I want to capture the beauty of nature's wild things and use my art to touch other people, so that they love them too. Government doesn't afford protection for these magical creatures from a time long ago, that we are still fortunate to be able to see. So I feel I must help them to survive by doing whatever I can. I give a lot of my earnings to wildlife rescue, because money talks. I know it's the most practical thing I can do. I am not well off, yet I do what I can. Why do I have to do this? Why doesn't the law afford wildlife sufficient protection?*

*Last year as I was driving to Sunbury, I saw a most beautiful sight.*

*A mob of about 20 'Gooeem' ... we call them Kangaroos*

*A mob of about 20 Gooeem bounding up a slope in a large paddock by the side of the road*

*Absolutely breathtaking to watch them all moving at once*

*Speeding up the hill in strong, graceful leaps*

*And a herd of cows chasing after  
With no hope of catching up  
The Gooeem just sailed off up the hill  
I could almost hear them blowing raspberries and giggling with the fun of it all  
Absolutely beautiful  
Life in it's moment*

*I painted this scene. I painted the Gooeem bounding up that slope. And then it became something else. My soul took over as I painted. I saw the ending. I painted them disappearing into the Dreamtime, as so many other species are disappearing here in Australia, in the land of their native birth right. Here in Australia, where we have earned a reputation for the worst extinction rate of species in the world.*

*Now the Gooeem are also threatened by shooters; exploited for profit. I see the supermarket shelves lined with Gooeem products. The story is that there are too many Gooeem. But I know this is not the case. I have seen these unique animals disappearing from the landscape. That mob of Gooeem is no longer in that paddock in Sunbury. They have inexplicably disappeared. And the hungry eyes of developers are now on other fat parcels of land in that area; land where wild mobs live. They LIVE there! Yet the developers are now set to take that land, with no thought of protection for those native species that inhabit the area.*

*Allow me to draw a brief parallel. A mere forty years after the arrival of the First Fleet, all of the indigenous people of the Sunbury area were gone; driven away or dead.*

*The Gooeem will die of exploitation by hunting; of exploitation of their habitat for housing, of loss of habitat by degradation from cattle, of pollution associated with development, of invasion of non-native species such as paspalum grass, and of killings on more roads that will be built, with no adequate wildlife under or over passes to link up with wildlife corridors.*

*New, successful ideas have been in place for some time, to protect the passage of wildlife, in countries such as Canada. Why not here? There are currently no protections in place for them here. Developers seem to do as they please.*

*How can that be right? It is immoral to hem the Gooeem in, run them over and leave them to suffer or shoot them, cull them, kill them, say there are too many, when humans are the ones constantly expanding into their territory. There are in fact too many humans and humans are greedy. They need legal boundaries. We are taking the land of the Gooeem, just as we took indigenous lands.*

*What has happened to the Australia of my childhood; Of Blinky Bill and Dot and the Kangaroo; Of all the wild things living in the world of Snugglepot and Cuddlepie? Of the magical, mythical legendary Australian outback of Banjo Patterson and Henry Lawson and Henry Handel Richardson and so many more who wrote of the beauty of this wild land, including the original inhabitants, the First Nations people who gave us many of their dreamtime stories. Why are we taming this land beyond endurance for all living things? Where are the laws and government protections to ensure that this wonderful land, teeming with nature's bounties and a vast bio diversity of species, survives?*

*And so I plead with you and I demand from you. Revise the laws; respect and protect our national wildlife; all species, before it's too late. I don't want to feel anxious about the state of the environment any more. I want to feel safe in my country; in a country I'm proud of. I don't want to feel powerless about the impact we humans are having on other species. I want this government to facilitate change and avert this bio diversity disaster.*

*To finish, I would like to tell you one more story.*

*A couple of years ago I decided that I could help wildlife rescue groups by painting portraits of rescue animals. I decided to paint the Gooeem joeys and donate 100% of profits to said rescuers. The orphans who had somehow managed to survive the car accidents that took their mothers, the fence hangings that tore their limbs, the shootings that killed their mothers while they were still at foot or worse, in pouch. Such sad lives they have.*

*So I visited Five Freedoms Animal Rescue and met Helen and Manfred and all of their wild babies. I saw firsthand the injuries. I saw how the orphans had to be carefully bandaged and carried from place to place and hand fed special formula and housed and tended medically every day and I saw the terrible toll it took on the rescuers who look after them each day, 365 days a year.*

*I painted a series of portraits, starting with Rufus. I painted him first because he was the most curious, affable, intelligent, bright eyed, handsome little joey. He followed me around, wanting to meet me and interact with me. Did you know that from the middle of their backs the fur grows up one way and down the other, to allow the rain to slide down their coats? Isn't that an amazing adaptation? Here I was, with the oldest animal species on earth; their live young grow in an external pouch! How amazing is that?*

*I exhibited Rufus' portrait, together with his story, with a couple of other rescue portraits, in a local exhibition. He was snapped up and I was besieged on the spot by people asking me if I was really donating the proceeds to help wildlife. People cared; a lot! They told me how sad and helpless they felt about the loss of wildlife, in particular the Gooeem. They wanted to do something. They too wanted the laws to change. I had commissions coming in for months after that, enabled me to donate to wildlife rescue groups from then on.*

*Following on from that, last year I held a wildlife charity exhibition again. I painted over twenty portraits of rescue animals, contacting rescuers locally and interstate for photos and stories as well as painting my local favourites. That exhibition was a smash, with the same result. Once again I saw, people really love wildlife. They care about it. They want our wildlife to survive, but they feel hopeless and helpless. Their generosity enabled me to donate a large sum to wildlife rescuers again.*

*So I say to you, as the leaders of our beautiful country, can you please find it in your hearts to help our wildlife? Can you please change the laws to protect our environment and the vast biodiversity of this great Land Down Under?*

*To sum Up, I submit that our Australian wildlife and the ecosystems that support them are under dire threat. We need strong, new laws to protect the rights of Australian wildlife. These new laws need to:*

*End the commercial harvest of kangaroos and wallabies.*

*Overhaul or terminate the current, outdated Authority to Control Wildlife (ATCW) System*

*Develop eco tourism programs around the most iconic Australian wildlife species such as kangaroos, koalas, wombats, possums, gliders and flying foxes.*

*Mandate wildlife overpasses and underpasses, linking wildlife corridors, as has been done successfully overseas in Canada and Europe.*

*Investigate and implement new and successful 'species protective' ideas, such as 'sound barriers' which have been installed along sections of road on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland.*