

Australian Society for Kangaroos

'Dedicated to the Victims of the Largest Wildlife Slaughter in the World'

11 August 2015

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.

Governor

State of California

State Capitol

Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Kevin DeLeon

President pro Tem

California State Senate

State Capitol

Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Toni Atkins

Speaker

California State Assembly

State Capitol

Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Brown, Pro Tem De Leon and Speaker Atkins,

We the undersigned, thank you for the opportunity to write to you in regard to your scheduled reactivation of the ban on kangaroo products in California on January 1 2016, and request that you please consider our concerns regarding the animal welfare implications of this industry and it's potential impact on the conservation of kangaroos across Australia, should this reactivation be reconsidered.

Our concerns in relation to the welfare of baby kangaroo joeys are as follows:

In 1985 and again in 2002, the Australian Royal Society for Prevention Cruelty Animals (RSPCA Australia) reported significant animal welfare concerns after investigating the commercial kangaroo meat and skins industry.

In their report titled: *'A Survey of the Extent of Compliance with the Requirements of the Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos' (2002)*, investigations by the RSPCA into the fate of orphaned joeys found that:

"It is not known what the average survival rate of abandoned joeys is, however a proportion of kangaroos orphaned through shooting will die of starvation, exposure or predation in the days and weeks following the loss of their mother",

"the use of a heavy blow to the head is not considered a humane method of euthanasia for most species", and

“RSPCA Australia believes that the only solution which would avoid the potential of cruelty to pouch young would be to avoid shooting females altogether”.

Unfortunately the Australian Government and the Kangaroo meat and skins industry failed to follow the recommendations of the RSPCA in regard to the killing of females, and to this day the industry continues to slaughter a significant proportion of female kangaroos with the full support of the Australian government, leaving hundreds of thousands of pouch and at-foot dependent young to an inhumane death. In 2014 alone, state government data revealed that at least 150,000 female kangaroos were killed for their meat and skins, resulting in the orphaning of at least the same number of baby kangaroos who are either left to die by shooters (RSPCA, 2002, McLeod & Sharp, 2014), or bludgeoned to death or decapitated as required under the National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies. (Commonwealth Australia, 2008).

Following repeated requests by the RSPCA decades earlier, the Australian government finally commissioned research into the fate of orphaned joeys who fall victim to the commercial kangaroo meat and skins industry, and in 2014 the Rural Industries Research Development Corporation (RIRDC) released the findings in their report titled: *'Improving the humaneness of commercial kangaroo harvesting'* (McLeod & Sharp, 2014).

The results of the study are disturbing, exposing institutionalised, inherent, legalised, government sanctioned cruelty and neglect of baby kangaroo joeys who fall victim to this industry after their mother's are shot for their meat and skins. These are just some of the findings from the report:

'The total number of adult kangaroos harvested over the 15 nights of observations was 278. Of these, 187 were males and 90 were females. This equates to about 30% female, which is close to the long-term average in NSW. Sex could not be determined for one kangaroo – it was shot and presumed killed, but the carcass could not be located due to thick vegetation. Another animal (a female with a large visible in-pouch joey) was wounded but not killed and it escaped and could not be found'.

'We observed that harvesters used a few different ways of using blunt trauma to the head of young. Most held the animals by the hind legs and swung them in an arc so that their head hit the tray of the utility (Figure 7). Some did the same action but hit the head on the bar on the top of the utility rack or on a large rock on the ground. Another method was to hold the joey by the back legs, so that the head was hanging freely downwards and then hit the head with an iron bar. Sometimes the head of the joeys was also stamped on with a foot after hitting the joeys head on the utility tray or on a rock. This was done to ensure complete destruction of the brain'.

'It was also observed that when joeys were held by the back legs and hit on the head with an iron bar they struggled and moved their head, making it a more difficult target to hit. These animals sometimes required two or more blows to cause unconsciousness, which is unacceptable as it could result in pain and suffering prior to losing consciousness. With blunt trauma to the head, applying the blow to the correct position with sufficient force to cause immediate insensibility is essential for this method to be humane'.

'In only one case was death (of the pouch joey) confirmed by the harvester'.

'Although it may have been possible to shoot the 8 stationary young-at-foot it was not done. Also, when the alarmed young-at-foot took flight, none of the harvesters pursued or searched for the young-at-foot or waited to see if they would return to the location where their mother was shot. If a young-at-foot was not seen, but the female had a long teat indicating she was likely to be suckling a young-at-foot, none of the harvesters spent time searching for a young-at foot, nor did they wait to see if a young-at-foot returned to the location where the female was shot'.

'Despite the Code stating that young-at-foot must be euthanased, during this study, only one out of the 24 observed YAF was euthanased. Another young-at-foot was shot at twice but these missed'.

'If orphaned young-at-foot do suffer after their mother is shot—and we hypothesise that this is likely—then the magnitude of this problem is very large'.

'Although not all changes reported in other species were observed for the separated young-at-foot in this study, the changes we detected provide sufficient evidence to conclude that maternal separation causes a negative welfare impact. It was in Domains 4 and 5 that we observed the greatest compromise, which indicates that, in the short-term, the mental state of young-at-foot is highly affected by an abrupt and permanent separation from maternal care. The other domains—nutritional, environmental and health—are likely to be affected by longer-term separation. It is likely to take more than ten days for responses in these domains to become evident; however there were some indications that changes were already starting to occur'

At least 150,000 pouch and at foot kangaroo joeys are dying this way every year at the hands of the kangaroo meat and skins industry.

Our concern for the conservation of commercially hunted kangaroos in Australia.

Despite claims by pro kangaroo industry advocates that there are 30 million kangaroos in Australia, the reality is that the government's methodology and interpretation of the data is misleading, with kangaroos counted in sample blocks where kangaroo populations are larger, and then the data extrapolated to the rest of the state where densities are low. This apparent manipulation of the data as well as the continual increase in population correction factors serves to artificially inflate actual kangaroo numbers and mask ongoing decline.

Even if the government was accurate in their current estimate of kangaroo numbers and there were in fact 30 million kangaroos as they claim, it is imperative to consider that this figure includes four different species of kangaroo including the Euro (Wallaroo), the Eastern Grey, the Western Grey and the Red Kangaroo. What is also important is the fact that this population figure covers more than seven million square kilometres, or the total land area of Australia. So when this is taken into account the four commercially hunted species of kangaroo are in fact at very low densities of approximately one kangaroo (of each species) per square kilometre, or one kangaroo per 60 football fields (1 sq/km).

These low densities are also apparent when you look at each of the state government's 2015 Quota Submission reports which present the population data on a regional level. This state regional data shows that all commercially hunted kangaroo species are at critical densities of less than five per square km across most of Australian. In Queensland and Western Australia in particular, population surveys conducted in 2014 show dramatic declines of around 50% across all areas surveyed. Across the entire nation, kangaroo numbers have declined by 40% since 2001 (Australian Government Department Environment).

These regional kangaroo densities of less than five per square kilometre are of concern, and according to a report commissioned by the Murray Darling Commission titled "Kangaroo Options in the Murray Darling Basin" (Hacker et al, 2004):

'Harvesting over most of the region ceases to be economically viable at densities considerably higher than those commonly regarded as minimum levels for conservation (5 k km²)',

'Reduction of kangaroo densities to less than 5 kangaroos per square kilometer over large areas would result in the demise of the kangaroo industry', and

'Pastoralists' would need to accept that reduction of kangaroos to very low densities (<5 k km²) over large areas is neither commercially feasible, ecologically defensible or economically justified'

This further highlights our concern that kangaroos are in fact at very low densities across Australia and at significant risk of local and regional extinction if commercial hunting continues.

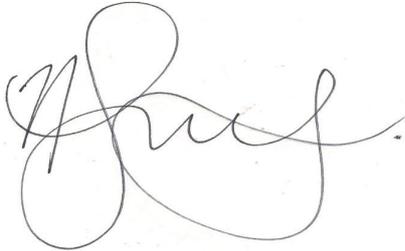
Please refer to the final page of this letter for details of all reports and research referenced in our letter.

We hope that this adequately explains our concerns for the welfare of kangaroos and their young currently being killed in Australia by the meat and skins industry, and our concern for their conservation if this industry continues.

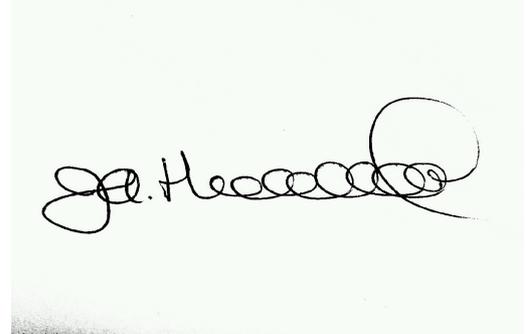
We sincerely thank you for your time, and for taking into account our concerns. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you require any further information about this industry or our letter.

Yours sincerely,

Nikki Sutterby- President
Australian Society for Kangaroos



Jan Heald- Co Ordinator
Australian Wildlife Protection Council



Glenys Oogjes-Executive Director
Animals Australia



Matthew Collis- IFAW
Policy and Campaigns Manager



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