

Australian Society for Kangaroos

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

MEDIA RELEASE

CONSERVATION FEARS FOR VICTORIA'S LAST RED KANGAROOS AS PARKS VICTORIA EXTERMINATES MORE THAN 10,000 IN NATIONAL PARKS

The Australian Society for Kangaroos is calling on the Victorian Department of Environment, Land Water and Planning to suspend three wildlife destruction permits issued to Parks Victoria to kill more than 10,000 Red kangaroos and 10,000 Western Grey Kangaroos in National Parks in the Victoria's north amid concerns the permits could wipe out Victoria's last remaining Red and Western Grey Kangaroos.

In a letter to the Department Environment, Land, Water and Planning, the Australian Society for Kangaroos has urged Minister Neville to consider the serious conservation threat to Red and Western Grey Kangaroos in Victoria as a result of these government permits authorising the slaughter of tens of thousands of kangaroos in the state's national parks. In their letter ASK explained to the minister that the only scientific counts of Red Kangaroos in Victoria were conducted by government scientists in the 1980s, which showed Red Kangaroos at critical densities of just 0.15 kangaroos per square/km, and only 440 Red Kangaroos remaining in the state's national parks.

Nikki Sutterby said in a statement today that:

"Unless the Minister has evidence of a significant population boom of Red and Western Grey Kangaroos in Victoria since the 1980s, the survival of these unique kangaroo species in Victoria is under serious threat as a result of these permits".

Nikki Sutterby, President of Australian Society for Kangaroos reminded Minister Neville in their letter that:

"Since 2013 the number of Red Kangaroos killed under permit in Victoria has skyrocketed with a 1000% increase in the number killed from the 2010-2013 period, and with 10,680 Red Kangaroos authorised to be killed by the current Labor government in National Parks in 2016 alone".

ASK urged Minister Neville to:

“Immediately provide recent scientific kangaroo population counts in Victoria to support your decision to kill 10,700 Red Kangaroos and 10,455 Western Grey Kangaroos in National Parks in 2016, and more than 200,000 Eastern Grey Kangaroos in Victoria since 2015, to satisfy the requirements of the Wildlife Act that these permits will not be 'deleterious to the welfare or conservation of any wildlife or taxon of wildlife', and to reassure the public that these permits will not cause the extinction of Victoria's iconic kangaroos?”.

ASK urgently requested the population data from Parks Victoria and Minister Neville last week, but it has not yet been provided.

Please see below for details of the entire email sent to the minister and our sincere concerns for the welfare and conservation of Victoria's iconic kangaroos.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

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Dear Minister Neville,

In regard to the information recently published on your website including the number of kangaroos killed under Authorities to Kill Wildlife (ACTW) since 2009, details of the newly extended and expanded Pet Food Trial, and the number of kangaroos authorised to be killed by your government on public land in 2016, we must express our deep concern for the welfare and conservation of all kangaroo species and their young in Victoria that will be slaughtered as a result of these permits.

Our concerns are multiple and are well supported by scientific data and research.

Our concerns in relation to the welfare of kangaroos killed commercially and by professional shooters are well documented in a recently published government research report titled “Improving the Humaneness of the Commercial Kangaroo Harvest” by government researchers McLeod and Sharp (2014). This compelling research report revealed that professional shooters are routinely killing pouch young using practices that breach animal

welfare codes and animal protection laws, leading to prolonged pain and suffering for baby kangaroos orphaned as a result of their mother being shot. It revealed that 99% of dependent at-foot orphaned joeys are abandoned by professional shooters after they shoot their mother, leaving thousands of baby kangaroos to die every year from starvation, stress, exposure and predation. The research confirmed that dependent at-foot joeys who become separated from their mother, suffer severely, mentally and physically.

The report also describes how every night at the hands of the kangaroo meat and skins industry, hundreds of baby kangaroos are wrenched from their dead mother's pouch, and as they wriggle and cry out, are swung by their feet, bashed with iron bars, smashed against utility trays and rocks, or the shooter stomps on their head with his boot, with the shooter never even checking if the joey has died before walking away. As explained above orphaned at-foot joeys are simply abandoned and left to die alone. This treatment of orphaned baby kangaroos by professional shooters is in breach of ACTW conditions, the Wildlife Act 1975, the Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos, and also the EPBC Act under which skins taken from kangaroos killed under your Pet Food Trial are now being exported overseas.

Further concerns relate to the documented critical state of Victoria's Red Kangaroo populations, with the last known scientific counts conducted in the 1980s. According to NSW ecologist Ray Mjadwesch "Short & Grigg conducted aerial surveys of south-eastern South Australia and north-western Victoria, across 133 000 km² of the wheat / pastoral zones in 1982, with four national parks counted for comparison. Surveys of these wheat / pastoral regions provided densities far lower than those reported for similar regions in NSW and South Australia previously. For Red Kangaroos, Short & Grigg (1982) found that Red Kangaroos were recorded in only two of the degree blocks covering an area from Mildura south through Hattah, Ouyen and Hopetown to Birchip. Densities in these two blocks averaged 0.15 per square kilometre, to give a total of 3000. Red Kangaroos were observed on only two degree blocks in north-western Victoria, much of the surveyed area lying beyond their range in distribution. Reds occur to the west of these two grid squares (eg: in Pink Lakes State Park) but either at very low densities or in scattered patches such that they were missed by the low-intensity, scanning survey. In the Hattah-Kulkyne / Murray-Kulkyne area in Victoria, Short & Grigg (1982) found only 0.77 Red Kangaroos per square kilometre with the total population in this park estimated to be only 380 individuals. At the Pink Lakes VIC (Short & Grigg 1982) this park's population was estimated to be only 60 animals. So two parks contained Red Kangaroos in Victoria in 1982, and they numbered as low as 440 animals. Were they listed as threatened in Victoria? What is the Red Kangaroos' status in Victoria now? ".

We note that since 2013 the number of Red Kangaroos killed under permit in Victoria has skyrocketed with a 1000% increase in the number killed from the 2010-2013 period, and with 10,680 Red Kangaroos authorised to be killed by your government in National Parks in 2016 alone.

The scenario is similar for Western Grey Kangaroos with the number of Western Grey Kangaroos now being killed in Victoria increasing by a massive 1000% since the 2010-2013 period with 22,700 Western Grey Kangaroos killed between 2013 and 2015 and another 10,455 to be killed in National Parks under your governments authorisation in 2016.

According to ecologist Ray Mjadwesch, Western Grey Kangaroo populations are restricted to small areas and reserves in Western Victoria, making these figures very alarming.

As for Eastern Grey Kangaroos, between 2013 and 2015 alone, 318,149 were killed under government authorisation in Victoria, with a massive 275% increase in the number killed since your government took office in 2014. There is currently no scientific population data on the number of Eastern Grey Kangaroos in Victoria other than anecdotal reports that are considerably prone to bias, and for your government to kill this number of kangaroos in a state without any scientific baseline data to support is of great concern. According to NSW ecologist Ray Mjadwesch in his report Kangaroos at Risk (2011),

“For Grey Kangaroos (which would previously have occurred across most of Victoria, with the possible exception of the harshest environments), Short & Grigg found that they were completely absent from 4 map sheets in their study area. Where they did occur: Grey Kangaroos were recorded at densities of less than 0.01 per square kilometre in 32% of the area surveyed. Of the total area, 85% had a density less than 1.0 per square kilometre. Hacker et al defines these densities as “quasi-extinct” in 2004. “Quasi-extinction” is where “the nominal value of kangaroo densities is taken to be the effective loss of the species”. [Harvest] strategies that produce average densities of less than five per square kilometre would result in minimum densities of less than two kangaroos per square kilometre and could be considered a threat to species conservation”. Short & Grigg (1982) again: “Such low densities seem to reflect the effects of intensive land use and the marginal nature for kangaroos of the remaining areas of natural vegetation””.

We refer to your department's policy in regard to the issuing of permits to kill protected wildlife and note that you state: “all practical non lethal solutions must be exhausted before ACTW's will be considered” and “once all other options for managing wildlife are explored, ACTW's are a last resort”, and “DELWP will only assess applications for lethal control methods when the applicant demonstrates on the ATCW application form that non-lethal management methods have been attempted to manage the wildlife problem”.

We also note your policy on your website that “All participants in the trial must adhere to the Wildlife Act 1975. Professional shooters are also required to adhere to strict conditions consistent with the National Code of Practice to ensure that kangaroos are controlled humanely”.

In light of our concerns, your policies in regard to wildlife management and welfare, the research available, your apparent commitment to transparency in regard to the issuing of ACTW's in Victoria, and the requirements of the legislation under the Wildlife Act 1975 (Section 23,1c) that the issuing of permits to kill protected wildlife should not be “deleterious to the welfare or conservation of any wild life or of any taxon of wildlife”, could you please provide the following information to our organisation to satisfy our concerns and the concerns of the public that these permits do not put any kangaroo species at risk of extinction in Victoria and that kangaroos and their young are being slaughtered humanely:

1. Can you please provide recent scientific kangaroo population counts in Victoria that supports your decision to kill 10,700 Red Kangaroos and 10,455 Western Grey Kangaroos in National Parks in 2016, and more than 200,000 Eastern Grey Kangaroos in Victoria since

2015, which satisfies the requirements of the Wildlife Act that these permits will not be “deleterious to the welfare or conservation of any wildlife or taxon of wildlife” ?

2. Can you please provide evidence that the killing of kangaroos under your government authorisation is operating “humanely under very very strict conditions and standards” as expressed by you in The Age (Feb 24,2016), and explain what supervision is taking place at the point of kill to ensure these kangaroos and their young are being killed humanely, to ensure adherence to the Code of Practice, and to prevent the orphaning and suffering of dependent at foot young as documented by the RSPCA (2002) and by the Australian government in their research report detailed above (RIRDC, McLeod & Sharp,2014).

3. In regard to the permits issued to kill kangaroos on public land in 2016 by your department, can you please provide evidence that kangaroos are directly impacting on attempts to restore threatened woodland vegetation communities, that killing kangaroos has directly enhanced the restoration of woodland vegetation communities and that kangaroos have had a “strong population growth” within the Wyperfield, Murray Sunset and Hattah Kulkyne National Park?

4. Can you please provide details of the non lethal measures exhausted before the permits were issued to kill kangaroos at these National Parks and reserves?

5. Are any of the kangaroos killed under your authority on public land in Victoria to be utilised by the Pet Food Trial or for any other commercial purposes?

6. Can you please provide any research proving that large scale killing programs at Puckapunyal has enhanced animal welfare outcomes for Eastern Grey Kangaroos, taking into consideration the fact that the Puckapunyal Kangaroo Management Plan (2008) clearly documents that shooting kangaroos at Puckapunyal had not been shown to improve animal welfare outcomes for kangaroos living at the base?

7. Please provide kangaroo population data for Eastern Grey Kangaroos at Puckapunyal, and details of what non lethal management strategies were exhausted to improve animal welfare outcomes for Eastern Grey Kangaroos at Puckapunyal before you issued the permit to kill 3000 Eastern Grey Kangaroos in 2016?

8. Please provide evidence that Eastern Grey Kangaroos are at risk of starvation and that shooting large numbers at Swan Island previously has increased animal welfare outcomes?

9. What non lethal management strategies were exhausted on Swan Island before you issued a permit to kill 165 Eastern Grey Kangaroos?

10. Please provide evidence that kangaroos are at risk of starvation at Greenvale Reservoir and Edithvale Wetlands and that large scale killing programs enhances animal welfare outcomes for kangaroos?

11. Please provide evidence that kangaroos are a risk to the water catchment at Greenvale and Edithvale?

12. Please provide details on non lethal management that was exhausted before permits were issued to kill 85 kangaroos and their joeys at Greenvale Reservoir and Edithvale Wetlands?

13. Please provide details of what non lethal management strategies were exhausted at Mirboo North Treatment Farm and Dutson Downs before a permit was issued to kill 250 Eastern Grey Kangaroos and their joeys?

Given the seriousness of this matter, the fact that there are significant conservation risks apparent as a result of the permits you have issued to kill Red and Western Grey Kangaroos in National Parks in Victoria, and the fact that large scale shooting programs have already commenced in the Murray Sunset, Hattah Kulkynne and Wyperfield National Parks, we request that as a matter of urgency you immediately provide the scientific population data for Red and Western Grey kangaroos in Victoria that clearly illustrate that these ACTW's will not put at risk their conservation.

Thanks for your time,

Regards

Nikki Sutterby

President

ASK