

# KANGAROOS

**Tourism Australia named the red kangaroo as *animal of the month* in August 2018. And while some Australians enjoy the wonder of raising orphaned joeys, others bash them to death as part of a Government-sanctioned industry.**

## Policy

Kangaroos are sentient and sociable native Australian animals with strong cultural significance for First Nations and the nation as a whole. We must cease treating kangaroos as a “resource”, or a “pest” to be eradicated and stop the cruel mass killing for commercial and non-commercial purposes. We must learn to respect, protect and coexist with kangaroos and other wildlife.

## Key Objectives

1. Ban the commercial, non-commercial and “recreational” killing of kangaroos in all jurisdictions.
2. Outlaw the sale and export of kangaroo meat, skins and other body parts.
3. Protect kangaroo habitat (see our *Land Clearing Policy*<sup>1</sup>).
4. Ensure safe passage for kangaroos in various landscapes (e.g., removing barbed wire and exclusion fencing, and providing natural corridors (see our *Wildlife Protection Policy*<sup>2</sup>).
5. Combat the significant public misinformation about kangaroos by raising public awareness of their ecological role and cultural significance, of the animal welfare and ecological implications of lethal control methods, and of the impact of language such as “harvest”, “pest” and “resource” on public perceptions.
6. Ensure that agencies responsible for protecting kangaroos and other wildlife are well resourced, independent, and not subject to conflicts of interest and regulatory capture<sup>3</sup> by agricultural and commercial interests (see our *Animal Law Policy*<sup>4</sup>).
7. Support macropod carers and rescuers, who are under constant pressure.
8. Increase and enforce penalties for deliberate wildlife cruelty in all jurisdictions (see our *Animal Law Policy*<sup>5</sup>).
9. Encourage expansion of, and support for, kangaroo-friendly wildlife-based tourism (see our *Wildlife Protection Policy*<sup>6</sup>).
10. Strengthen the National Firearms Agreement (NFA) by removing access to guns for the purpose of lethal control or recreational shooting of animals (see our *Gun Control Policy*<sup>7</sup>).

## Background

Australia's native fauna includes a *large number*<sup>8</sup> of macro-pod species, including kangaroos, wallabies, euros, wallaroos, pademelons, bettongs and tree-kangaroos. This policy focuses on the larger species which are subject to mass killings for commercial and non-commercial purposes: red kangaroo, eastern and western grey kangaroo, common wallaroo, Bennett's wallaby and Tasmanian pademelon. To simplify this policy, they are referred to as “kangaroos”.

Kangaroos are social animals who live in family groups called mobs. Kangaroos can *communicate*<sup>9</sup> with humans in a similar way to companion dogs and cats.

They are herbivores, ranging across wide areas of grasslands, open woodlands and deserts, and exquisitely adapted to the Australian environment and its cycles of droughts. Two main factors that control herbivore populations in all ecosystems are *resource availability and predation*<sup>10</sup>. For kangaroos both of these factors have been disturbed since colonisation.

The perception that kangaroos compete with cattle and sheep for pasture and that localised kangaroo numbers are sometimes high has led the agriculture sector to seek a reduction of their numbers, if not outright eradication through commercial and non-commercial killing. It must be stressed, however,

<sup>1</sup>[https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/land\\_clearing](https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/land_clearing)

<sup>2</sup>[https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/wildlife\\_protection](https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/wildlife_protection)

<sup>3</sup><https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100411608>

<sup>4</sup>[https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/animal\\_law](https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/animal_law)

<sup>5</sup>[https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/animal\\_law](https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/animal_law)

<sup>6</sup>[https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/wildlife\\_protection](https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/wildlife_protection)

<sup>7</sup><https://animaljusticeparty.org/policieslist/humans/gun-control/>

<sup>8</sup><https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macropodidae>

<sup>9</sup><https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsbl.2020.0607>

<sup>10</sup><https://www.nature.com/scitable/knowledge/library/dynamics-of-predation-13229468>

that in the very best conditions, a female kangaroo may produce *one young to independence*<sup>11</sup> in 12-18 months. Claims of population 'explosions' and 'kangaroos breeding like rabbits' are false and not supported by kangaroo biology.

## Commercial killing

The killing of kangaroos is rooted in the false perception of kangaroos as either "pests", "sustainable resources" that can be "harvested", or both. The commercial kangaroo industry has exploited this false perception, operating for decades in all Australian states (since 2019 in Victoria) under state-approved management programs.

The commercial kangaroo industry is one of the largest<sup>12</sup> land-based wildlife slaughters in the world. It involves the shooting of kangaroos at night, on private or public land. Animals are eviscerated in the field, then carcasses are transported to cold storage and eventually to processing plants. The skins of the slaughtered animals are sold for leather which is used for fashion and sports shoes and the meat mostly ends up as pet food. Some skins and meat are sold on the domestic market but most are exported overseas.

The export of kangaroo skins, meat and other products is authorised only if the state management plan under which the animals have been killed has been *approved*<sup>13</sup> under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999*. Currently, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia's management plans are approved.

Over the past decade, commercial kangaroo "harvest" *quotas*<sup>14</sup>, that is, the maximum number of animals that can legally be killed under the wildlife trade plans each year, has fluctuated between 3 and 8 million animals for NSW, Qld, SA and WA combined. In Victoria, the killing of over 100,000 kangaroos has been allowed in the past few years under a *Kangaroo Harvest Management Plan*<sup>15</sup>. *Tasmania*<sup>16</sup> also allows for commercial killing of wallabies, but this program is not approved for export. See below concerns about discrepancy between numbers of animals allowed to be killed and those *actually* killed.

## Non-commercial and recreational killing

In all states and territories, kangaroos can also legally be killed for the purpose of "damage mitigation" when farmers claim that they compete with farmed animals for food or water. There is little to no requirement to demonstrate evidence of damage. Generally, there is no maximum quota for damage

mitigation and the animals killed are not allowed to be used commercially.

Most states and territories also allow some form of "recreational" hunting of kangaroos under licence.

Concerns about cruelty and conservation in both commercial and non-commercial settings are identified in the following sections.

## Cruelty concerns

Shooters who kill kangaroos for commercial purposes must comply with the *Code of Practice*.<sup>17</sup> The Code requires that animals be killed by a single headshot. It is difficult to determine whether this requirement is met, since most shooters remove the animal's head in the field. *Studies*<sup>18</sup> of carcasses in meat processors/chillers have shown that 4%-40% of animals have not been shot by a single shot to the head. This amounts to hundreds of thousands of animals each year who suffer a painful death. Many are left to die in the field as they cannot legally be used in the commercial trade.

The Code also requires that "any dependent young must be euthanised to prevent suffering". The recommended methods to kill pouch young are decapitation, cervical dislocation and concussive blow to the head; as well as shooting for dependent young-at-foot. The Code describes the killing of pouch young as "unpleasant" and that of young-at-foot as "problematic". For these reasons, *many young are not killed painlessly*<sup>19</sup>, while many others are left to die of hypothermia, dehydration, starvation, predation or stress (resulting in myopathy). After all, there is no incentive to kill them since they cannot be used in the commercial market either.

Commercial killing of kangaroos cannot be conducted without causing considerable suffering to a significant number of animals, especially the young – even when the killing is compliant with the Code.

Compliance with the Code is far from assured, given that the shooting occurs at night in remote areas and that overseeing agencies do not have the resources or the will to monitor activities. In practice, compliance with the Code is *poorly enforced*.<sup>20</sup>

Like all other animal "welfare" codes, this Code is problematic because it provides a defence or an exemption from State/Territory animal cruelty laws (see our *Animal Law Policy*<sup>21</sup>).

<sup>11</sup><https://www.publish.csiro.au/book/4781/>

<sup>12</sup>[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Tony-Pople/publication/43492044\\_Outcomes\\_of\\_the\\_workshop\\_Refining\\_aerial\\_surveys\\_of\\_kangaroos/links/00463530ff945479d0000000/Outcomes-of-the-workshop-Refining-aerial-surveys-of-kangaroos.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Tony-Pople/publication/43492044_Outcomes_of_the_workshop_Refining_aerial_surveys_of_kangaroos/links/00463530ff945479d0000000/Outcomes-of-the-workshop-Refining-aerial-surveys-of-kangaroos.pdf)

<sup>13</sup><https://www.awe.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/wildlife-trade/commercial/management-plans>

<sup>14</sup><https://www.dccew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/kangaroo-statistics-states-2022.pdf>

<sup>15</sup><https://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au/our-wildlife/kangaroos/commercial-harvest-of-kangaroos>

<sup>16</sup><https://dppw.tas.gov.au/Documents/Commercial%20Wallaby%20Game%20Licence%20Application%20Form.pdf>

<sup>17</sup><https://www.agrifutures.com.au/product/national-code-of-practice-for-the-humane-shooting-of-kangaroos-and-wallabies-for-commercial-purposes/>

<sup>18</sup><http://thinkkangaroos.uts.edu.au/news/shooting-our-wildlife-an-analysis-of-the-law-and-policy-governing-the-killing-of-kangaroos.html>

<sup>19</sup>[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291388646\\_Kangaroo\\_harvesters\\_and\\_the\\_euthanasia\\_of\\_orphaned\\_young-at-foot\\_Applying\\_the\\_theory\\_of\\_planned\\_behaviour\\_to\\_an\\_animal\\_welfare\\_issue](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291388646_Kangaroo_harvesters_and_the_euthanasia_of_orphaned_young-at-foot_Applying_the_theory_of_planned_behaviour_to_an_animal_welfare_issue)

<sup>20</sup><https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/INFORMIT.920821250368921>

<sup>21</sup>[https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/animal\\_law](https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/animal_law)

<sup>22</sup><https://www.awe.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/wildlife-trade/publications/national-code-practice-humane-shooting-kangaroos-and-wallabies-non-commercial>

Shooters who kill kangaroos for non-commercial purposes must comply with a non-commercial *Code of Practice*<sup>22</sup>. This Code is even weaker than the commercial code, as it allows for the use of shotguns, requires no competency testing and is practically not enforced. Animals killed for non-commercial purposes are therefore likely to suffer even more.

In addition to cruelty to individual animals, the mass killing of kangaroos can have *significant impacts*<sup>23</sup> on the mob structure, especially when alpha males or large females have been removed from their mob, including stress and trauma for the survivors. Hunting significantly *reduces*<sup>24</sup> foraging and juvenile play.

The industry remains inherently cruel despite decades of reviews and reforms. In 1988, the *Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare report on Kangaroos*<sup>25</sup> found that '[t]o some extent, cruelty to kangaroos has become institutionalised through the system of kangaroo management.' In 2010, a *review*<sup>26</sup> by THINKK found the shooting of kangaroos unnecessary, cruel, possibly illegal and a risk to sustainability. In 2021, the *Parliamentary Inquiry*<sup>27</sup> into the *Health and Wellbeing of Kangaroos and Other Macropods in New South Wales* found much to be concerned about in the commercial and non-commercial killing of kangaroos, including troubling evidence of inhumane practices, especially regarding the treatment of joeys.

Internationally, Australia is under scrutiny and criticism for the methods by which kangaroos are killed. Russia and the State of California in the USA have banned the import of kangaroo products on animal welfare grounds. As of 2022, the *Dutch government*<sup>28</sup> is pushing for the EU to halt the import of kangaroo products as it is incompatible with EU animal welfare import requirements. In Australia, the *RSPCA*<sup>29</sup> has recently banned the sale of kangaroo meat because of animal welfare concerns. The Animal Justice Party (AJP) agrees that the only solution is abolition and *actively*<sup>30</sup> *campaigns*<sup>31</sup> to stop companies trading in kangaroo products where governments fail to act.

## Conservation concerns

Widespread kangaroo kills are often justified as a means to deal with allegedly high numbers, although the *evidence points*<sup>32</sup> more towards local extinction rather than abundance. Localised high density of kangaroos and sometimes starvation are problems which have been exacerbated by fencing and animal agriculture practices. These problems could be

partly addressed by transitioning away from animal agriculture, and returning land to native vegetation. The kangaroo industry, along with the government agencies that support it, consistently claim that the commercial and non-commercial killing of kangaroos are "*sustainable*"<sup>33</sup> or undertaken for *conservation*<sup>34</sup>.

There are serious concerns, however, about the validity of these claims. In 2018, a Victorian government department assessment of the *Kangaroo Pet Food Trial*<sup>35</sup> recommended it should not continue. One concern was that it was an "unacceptable risk to the sustainability of kangaroo populations", however, the Victorian Government ignored the recommendations from their own department and established a permanent commercial program. In 2021, the *NSW Parliamentary Inquiry*<sup>36</sup> made damning findings about the NSW's kangaroo management in that State, including:

- lack of independent oversight of the management program
- deficient and opaque methodology for assessing population numbers
- lax monitoring and oversight of the non-commercial program
- lack of accurate figures for the number of animals killed in non-commercial programs and joeys killed in both commercial and non-commercial programs.

In essence, the number of kangaroos actually killed each year under commercial and non-commercial programs in NSW, and in other states, is grossly under-estimated because it does not include the following: kangaroos who are not headshot and would therefore not be accepted by meat processors; kangaroos who are injured and escape to later die; pouch young and young at foot who are killed or left to die; animals who are not reported when there is no requirement to report or the reporting requirement is not enforced. Millions of kangaroo deaths are therefore unaccounted for - a major impediment to claims that the killing is sustainable and humane.

Despite these major concerns, the killing of kangaroos is currently viewed as an acceptable "wildlife management" method by the main Australian political parties and some conservation organisations.

Finally, kangaroos, like other wildlife, are subject to many threats including loss of habitat, floods, droughts, fires, all

<sup>23</sup>[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259603520\\_The\\_welfare\\_ethics\\_of\\_the\\_commercial\\_killing\\_of\\_free-ranging\\_kangaroos\\_An\\_evaluation\\_of\\_the\\_benefits\\_and\\_costs\\_of\\_the\\_industry](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259603520_The_welfare_ethics_of_the_commercial_killing_of_free-ranging_kangaroos_An_evaluation_of_the_benefits_and_costs_of_the_industry)

<sup>24</sup><https://opus.lib.uts.edu.au/handle/10453/143876>

<sup>25</sup><https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2518052449/view?partId=nla.obj-2520574676#page/no/mode/1up>

<sup>26</sup><http://thinkkangaroos.uts.edu.au/news/shooting-our-wildlife-an-analysis-of-the-law-and-policy-governing-the-killing-of-kangaroos.html>

<sup>27</sup><https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=2707#tab-reportsandgovernmentresponses>

<sup>28</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/20/why-is-the-eu-under-pressure-to-ban-kangaroo-products-and-how-will-it-affect-australia>

<sup>29</sup><https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-10-04/rspca-removes-kangaroo-meat-pet-food-animal-welfare-concerns/101499412>

<sup>30</sup><https://markpearson.org.au/kangaroo-news/>

<sup>31</sup><https://markpearson.org.au/kangaroo-news/>

<sup>32</sup><https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1571&context=asj>

<sup>33</sup><https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/plants-animals/wildlife-permits/macropods/macropods-qld>

<sup>34</sup><https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/wildlife-management/kangaroo-management>

<sup>35</sup>[https://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/412723/KPFT-Evaluation-Report\\_Dec\\_2018a.pdf](https://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/412723/KPFT-Evaluation-Report_Dec_2018a.pdf)

<sup>36</sup><https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=2707#tab-reportsandgovernmentresponses>

<sup>37</sup>[https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/wildlife\\_protection](https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/wildlife_protection)

<sup>38</sup>[https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/wildlife\\_care](https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/wildlife_care)

to be aggravated by climate change, as well as collision with motor vehicles, dog attacks and random acts of cruelty (see our *Wildlife Protection*<sup>37</sup> and *Wildlife Care*<sup>38</sup> policies).

### Related Policies:

- *Animal Law Policy*<sup>39</sup>

- *Gun Control Policy*<sup>40</sup>
- *Land Clearing Policy*<sup>41</sup>
- *Wildlife Protection Policy*<sup>42</sup>
- *Wildlife Care Policy*<sup>43</sup>

**Date last reviewed:** 27 October 2022

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<sup>39</sup>[https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/animal\\_law](https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/animal_law)

<sup>40</sup><https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/policieslist/humans/gun-control/>

<sup>41</sup>[https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/land\\_clearing](https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/land_clearing)

<sup>42</sup>[https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/wildlife\\_protection](https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/wildlife_protection)

<sup>43</sup>[https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/wildlife\\_care](https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/wildlife_care)



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Authorised by: Geoff Russell, Suite 13, Level 5, 35 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, NSW, 2010