

An open letter from concerned experts regarding the Commercial Kangaroo Industry

To United States Members of Congress:

We offer a factual, science-based perspective on the management and the status of kangaroos. We welcome and support the effort by lawmakers to promote the Kangaroo Protection Act, H.R. 917.

We represent a collective of scientists, economists, statisticians, lawyers, and others who have extensively studied kangaroos. Contrary to the claims of the Australian Government and kangaroo industry we highlight five major concerns relating to the commercial killing of kangaroos. These concerns relate to kangaroo welfare, weak and unenforceable regulations, depleted regional populations, unsafe and unhygienic handling of carcasses used for meat, and the importance of live kangaroos to Australian culture and economy.

Four species of kangaroo are killed for meat, skins and leather on Australia's mainland. These include Eastern Grey Kangaroo (*Macropus giganteus*), Western Grey Kangaroo (*M. fuliginosus*), Red Kangaroo (*Osphranter rufus*) and Wallaroo (*O. robustus*) (herein kangaroos).

The kangaroo industry is the largest consumptive mammalian wildlife industry in the world, with a high risk to kangaroo welfare, to the role of kangaroos in threatened ecosystems and to Australian society.



Kangaroo Welfare

Significant welfare issues arise from the commercial shooting of kangaroos, including high wounding rates of kangaroos, killing females with dependent young, inhumane methods used to kill young kangaroos (blunt force trauma aimed at joeys), and the damage that shooting causes kangaroo culture and society (mob). Adult kangaroos are shot at night when they are most active. [Studies](#) indicate that non-fatal body shots are as

high as 40%, causing injuries and painful prolonged deaths. [Government studies](#) investigating the welfare of joeys after their mothers were killed concluded that the majority of joeys were not being euthanized by shooters. Instead, they are left to die as a result of starvation, exposure or predation without their mothers to protect them and teach them vital survival skills. An estimated 800,000 dependent young suffer an inhumane death in the wild each year.

Weak and Unenforceable Regulations

Contrary to claims, the kangaroo industry is not well regulated. Welfare standards for the commercial killing of kangaroos detailed in the [National Code of Practice for the Humane](#)

[Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Commercial Purposes](#) (herein the Code) are not enforced. The Code permits the killing of male and female kangaroos. Shooters are instructed to kill young kangaroos via decapitation, a forceful concussive blow to the head or a single shot to the brain or heart. It is difficult to monitor shooters in the field because shooting occurs at night in regional areas. Regulatory agencies do not monitor kangaroo kill sites and consequently cannot enforce the Code and therefore fail to achieve good welfare outcomes for kangaroos.

Conservation Compromised

Kangaroos face multiple threats including commercial and non-commercial shooting, extreme weather events i.e, drought, fire and flooding, habitat destruction, disease, vehicle strike, entanglement in fencing and restriction of movement by exclusion fencing. These factors seriously impact the health and welfare of kangaroos. The commercial killing of kangaroos is not ecologically sustainable nor socially acceptable.

Local and regional extinctions have been observed in 2019 and 2020, with kangaroo populations further decimated by devastating bushfires, floods and drought. Wildfires impacted an estimated [4.96 million macropods](#) including kangaroos, wallabies and pademelons. Kangaroos that were not killed by the fires suffered from injuries, predation and lack of access to food and water. Despite this, the Australian government continues to authorise the commercial killing of kangaroos without any updated assessments (except in Victoria), adding new "harvest zones" despite a diminishing populations. Open woodland [kangaroo habitat has been largely cleared](#) across Australia limiting resource availability. Land clearing and installation of water points has [not improved kangaroo ecology](#) because the presence of kangaroos depends on habitat, not water availability. Eastern and Western Grey Kangaroos frequent woodland habitats, remaining close to these refuges when they move into grasslands to graze.

Counting the number of the four commercially killed kangaroo species is challenging, given the vast size of the commercial kill zones. Current methods used to estimate the population of the four species are flawed and inaccurate. Concerns arise over the representativeness of surveying kangaroos from the air and the mathematics used to account for unobserved kangaroos and to calculate population estimates. Large fluctuations in population estimates reported by the government between years cannot be explained by climatic conditions or movement, and do not correspond with the reproductive biology of the commercially killed species. We question the validity of population estimates and are concerned by regional population depletions, particularly in times of [drought](#).

All four kangaroo species establish strong family groups (mobs) that maintain social knowledge through matrilineal bonds and shared experiences. Shooting causes immense psychological harm and damages mob culture and structure. Those left alive remain [fearful](#) and reduce time spent foraging and socializing (e.g., playing and grooming).

Kangaroo Meat Hygiene

Contamination of kangaroo meat is logistically unavoidable as kangaroos are butchered in the open. As wild-caught animals, kangaroos carry parasites and diseases that may [threaten human health](#). Kangaroo meat is not routinely tested for parasites and zoonotic pathogens such as *Toxoplasma gondii*, which has been recognized as a serious long-term human



health risk. Human health considerations are of paramount importance given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on human health and the world economy.

Cultural Importance of Kangaroos

The kangaroo is an iconic species valued and recognised worldwide. There is a growing awareness internationally of the government sanctioned cruelty towards kangaroos. Kangaroos are of cultural, social, and spiritual significance to a great many Australians. Most significantly Indigenous Australians who hold kinship ties and traditional knowledge about kangaroos, other native animals, and to the Australian landscape.

Signed,

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