

Inquiry into Wildlife Roadstrike in Victoria

Victorian Kangaroo Alliance Submission

June 2025



Kangaroos: iconic and integral. Credit: Szumai Anderson.

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Introduction

Victorian Kangaroo Alliance Inc. (VKA) is a network of advocates dedicated to protecting Victorian kangaroos from persecution and exploitation via the world's largest land-based wildlife trade. Our mission extends to advocating for kangaroos facing a myriad of threats, such as habitat loss and roadstrike. We seek to achieve better protection for kangaroos by encouraging legislative change, and by educating the public about the challenges kangaroos face, and how they can help. We encourage and support communities to defend their local mobs and promote harmonious interactions. We advocate for these magnificent beings to be treated with respect, and inherently valued as an ancient totemic keystone species, worthy of full protection. We value their lives and respect their inherent right to live freely on this land which has been their home for many millions of years.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. Whilst we are not a wildlife rescue organisation, our team are committed wildlife volunteers and advocates. Additionally, we regularly hear from Victorians around the state about the plight of roadstrike victims. It is devastating to learn of the immense suffering and death inflicted on kangaroos and other wildlife, as well as the distress of members of the public, and the trauma and hardship experienced by the volunteers who attend to them. Australia is woefully behind in tackling this issue, so we are pleased to have this inquiry, and look forward to Victoria leading the way with innovative solutions that reflect respect and value for wildlife.

Terms of Reference

(1) The scope, application, and enforcement of relevant legislation and regulatory frameworks, and their ability to monitor wildlife road strike, promote driver education and raise public awareness

Current planning legislation and approvals processes at local and state government levels fail to consider wildlife welfare. Wildlife habitat is frequently destroyed, degraded, and fragmented by development, leaving animals displaced and vulnerable to roadstrike. This is discussed further in ToR 5.

There is confusion over who is responsible for roads and improving wildlife collision hotspots as some are managed by councils, and others by VicRoads. Regional and rural roads in particular pose significant risks to wildlife due to high speed limits, narrow roadside verges, and overgrown vegetation that impairs visibility. To mitigate these risks, speed limits should be adjusted to prioritise safe driving in wildlife habitat, with reduced speeds in high wildlife density areas, and reduced further from dusk to dawn using electronic variable speed limit signs (EVSLs). Additionally, regular roadside maintenance should ensure clear visibility near corners and challenging road sections. Often rescuers will have detailed local knowledge of roadstrike hotspots, but there is no effective means of raising issues as the fragmented management of roads between VicRoads and local governments makes the process opaque and frustrating. There needs to be a clear contact mechanism for wildlife safety issues that will reach the correct authorities, such as a centralised 'Office of Wildlife Road

Safety' (see ToR 8). The data could be centralised through an open database, such as an app. This app could collect and share data on wildlife roadstrikes, allowing for more effective tracking, analysis, and response. This database should be accessible to the public and wildlife rescue services, with features for reporting incidents and identifying high-risk areas.

Currently, there is a lack of clarity around driver responsibilities when hitting wildlife, with no clear obligations, or penalties for reckless behavior resulting in wildlife injury or death. To address this, legislation should establish minimum responsibilities for drivers, including stopping when safe to do so, checking the animal's condition if competent, and seeking assistance from wildlife rescue services if necessary. There should be strong penalties for reckless driving, deliberate roadstrike, and failing to render reasonable assistance. Consequences are necessary as there is a broad-scale lack of respect for wildlife amongst many in the population, and the impunity with which they can inflict carnage on our roads further reinforces this anachronistic attitude.

The need for driver education is acute. There needs to be a concerted effort to inform motorists about driving safely with wildlife, and what to do if a collision occurs. This could be through television, radio, and digital advertising, in the same manner as other road safety messages are delivered by the Transport Accident Commission (TAC). This needs to target current drivers, but we should also be consistently targeting learner drivers with this essential information, none of which is currently included in the 'Road to Solo Driving Handbook'. It is critical that learner drivers know that they should avoid driving from dawn to dusk in wildlife areas, and should drive slowly and extra cautiously if they choose to do so. They should know simple facts, like if one kangaroo crosses in front of them, there are likely to be others nearby. They need to know that if they hit an animal, they must stop when safe to do so, and either render assistance or call wildlife rescue. We recommend that basic wildlife rescue skills such as assessing whether an animal is dead, pouch checking, and checking for signs of at-foot joeys (e.g., an elongated teat), and marking and moving deceased animals, should also be taught to learner drivers. By simply moving deceased animals off the road, they will prevent scavenging birds and animals being the next victims. These basic skills are not difficult, and wildlife rescue phone operators can talk them through the process. This would relieve the burden on wildlife rescuers, whilst also fostering a sense of responsibility and accountability in new drivers. This may empower them to stop and check other roadstrike victims, and feel pride in their ability to provide a helpful service for animals, road users and wildlife rescuers. We suggest that this education could begin in high school, with wildlife rescuers providing annual classes on basic roadside skills for students in years 10-12. Similarly, knowledge of how to drive in wildlife areas and who to call should be mandatory for all tourists hiring cars, and pouch checking skills should be mandatory for emergency services and council workers. Police and rangers should be educated on humane roadside euthanasia for critically injured wildlife. Any training should be developed in consultation with experienced rescuers.

(2) The involvement, training and expenditure of paid and volunteer rescue and rehabilitative organisations and individuals in attending to, and managing, road strike incidents

The wildlife rescue and care network, predominantly staffed by self-funded volunteers, faces significant challenges. The financial, mental, and physical toll on these dedicated and selfless individuals is immense, and has ramifications for their families, relationships, and employment. We frequently hear from rescuers that they are suffering from trauma, exhaustion, burnout, hopelessness, and financial hardship as a result of their rescuing efforts. They are desperate for support.

A key issue is that many areas have far too few rescuers for the magnitude of the caseload, and they may need to drive long distances to attend callouts, particularly in regional areas. With volunteers spread thin, there may be no alternative to injured wildlife being left to suffer tremendously for extended periods, an outcome which is heartbreaking for the rescuer, and for members of the public who care enough to wait until help arrives.

Wounded animals who do not need euthanasia will often require veterinary attention. This creates stress and a financial burden for veterinarians, who are required to provide free treatment for wildlife. This can potentially lead to delays in care and impact the thoroughness of assessments and treatment. This is exacerbated by the fact that roadstrikes most often occur at night when veterinary care is least accessible.

To address these challenges, a multifaceted approach is needed. At the very least, wildlife volunteers should be able to claim reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses, such as fuel and equipment. Ideally, they could also claim compensation for their time, and/or there would be a number of paid full-time rescuers in every local government area. Similarly, veterinarians should be able to bill the government for all costs related to treating injured wildlife, including consultations, medications, and tests. Incentives could be offered for veterinary surgeries to offer after-hours services for wildlife emergencies. Ongoing mental health support should be offered free of charge to manage the trauma associated with this work. In addition to revenue raised from point-to-point speed cameras (as explained in TOR 3 below), we wholeheartedly support a scheme proposed by Macedon Ranges locals (and supported by the Animal Justice Party) to financially support wildlife volunteers by adding a tiny \$2 levy to annual car registration fees. This miniscule financial outlay for car owners would generate approximately \$10 million annually.

As discussed in TOR 1, the burden on wildlife volunteers could be substantially lowered if motorists were educated on how to avoid hitting wildlife, and how to perform basic checks if a strike occurs or if they see dead or wounded wildlife on the roadside. If police and rangers were trained to do basic pouch checking and humane roadside euthanasia when required, this would also lower the workload for volunteer rescuers and reduce the time that animals are left suffering. Another suggestion to reduce the burden on volunteers is to develop training and resources for ride-hailing drivers (such as taxis, Uber and DiDi) whereby they can be booked (paid by the council or state government - ideally a dedicated 'Office of Wildlife Road Safety') to collect and transport wildlife in cases where specialist equipment is not required for the transfer.

(3) New and emerging technologies and infrastructure used to prevent road strikes

To effectively reduce wildlife roadstrike, innovative solutions need to be funded, evaluated, and implemented on a statewide scale. There needs to be a clear agency responsible for this work to ensure best practice and a consistent approach.

We suggest the use of virtual messaging signs (VMS) to alert motorists that they are in a wildlife hotspot, and electronic variable speed limit signs (EVSLs) to reduce the speed limit from dusk to dawn. VMS is important as motorists commonly habituate to static signs, and EVSLs is critical as reducing speed is the most effective means of preventing collisions.

We encourage the use of point-to-point speed cameras in known hotspots. Particularly when used in combination with VMS and EVSLs, many motorists will drive with increased awareness and care, and reduced speed. The revenue raised from point-to-point speed cameras should be used to fund wildlife-friendly road initiatives and support wildlife volunteers.

We also support the use of virtual fencing, but we would like to see the technology improved by adapting it specifically to Australian wildlife. The virtual fencing currently in use was developed in Europe to deter European animals, and unfortunately the evidence suggests that it does not translate clearly to Australian species. Whilst there is scope for significantly more research (including targeting various other species), there are some aversive stimuli that are known to influence the behaviour of Eastern Grey Kangaroos (EGK). As EGK makes up a significant portion of roadstrike victims, and their larger body size poses a greater danger for motorists, it stands to reason that adapting virtual fencing to consistently deter EGK should be a priority. Technology such as *Cherrp™* with kangaroo specific auditory deterrents could be integrated into existing virtual fencing, potentially in combination with aerosolised olfactory deterrents, such as synthetic dingo urine (a known deterrent for kangaroos). Further capacity for virtual fencing bollards to detect animals approaching the road and issue a warning to nearby motorists should also be investigated. Whilst any virtual fencing is a boon, there is huge scope for improvement which could further prevent suffering for wildlife and motorists.

Additionally, the *Roobadge* technology currently being developed by Volkswagon and Melbourne University sounds promising, and is the sort of innovative solution that should be supported by state and federal governments. Further novel initiatives could be developed via sponsored PhD projects.

It is not new technology, but wildlife underpasses and overpasses should be common sights on our roads.

Any technology and infrastructure programs should be subject to rigorous evaluation to avoid unintended consequences. This is particularly important for kangaroos as they can be severely impacted by disruptions to their ancestral tracks, and may react to deterrents with stress (stress myopathy can be lethal) or end up crossing in different locations that are similarly or even more dangerous. This is a major concern with roadside fencing, as is fence entanglement, so this method should be treated with caution and used only under advice from local wildlife volunteers who have detailed knowledge of their local kangaroo mobs.

(4) The impact of road strike on Victorian motorists, including major trauma incidents and motor vehicle damage

Wildlife roadstrikes have significant financial, emotional, physical, and social impacts. There may be trauma, physical injuries, and out of pocket or insurance premium costs to bear. The trauma and guilt felt by drivers who hit animals can be exacerbated by later learning that they did not respond appropriately and potentially left an animal to suffer. For example, many believe that if a kangaroo hops away from an accident that they do not need to call wildlife rescue. Unfortunately, the reality is that critically wounded kangaroos can hop some distance on adrenaline and proceed to die slowly from their injuries, potentially leaving an orphaned joey to starve. These issues can only be mitigated by taking concerted action to reduce wildlife roadstrike, educating the public, and supporting wildlife volunteers. Consideration should also be given to providing counselling for drivers and passengers involved in roadstrike incidents.

(5) The impact of development and infrastructure on incidents of wildlife road strike

Property development is a significant contributor to wildlife roadstrike by destroying, degrading and fragmenting habitat, inevitably displacing wildlife. Animals are forced to roam in unfamiliar territory as they seek essential resources like food, water, and shelter, resulting in more animals ending up near roads and urban areas. The irony for kangaroos is they are then referred to as a 'pest' and a 'hazard', when it was human thoughtlessness that caused their displacement.

Existing planning requirements neglect wildlife considerations, and new developments frequently overlook the importance of wildlife-friendly design. To address this, we urgently need a legislative framework that prioritises wildlife welfare in development planning and approvals. This framework should ensure the preservation of wildlife corridors, mature trees, and as much undisturbed habitat as possible. Where the development will likely bring wildlife in contact with roads, wildlife overpasses and underpasses should be considered, as well as implementing other technologies (see ToR 3) and reduced speed limits, particularly from dusk to dawn. Independent evaluations of wildlife impacts (and how to mitigate them) should be conducted to inform design decisions and community input, rather than relying on environmental impact assessments alone. These evaluations should include consultation with local wildlife volunteers as they often have decades of knowledge about local wildlife and the movements of local kangaroo mobs. Similarly, wildlife volunteers should be contracted as part of ongoing reviews and collaboration regarding the welfare of wildlife impacted by developments. Importantly, in cases where there are no alternatives, experts (such as Vets for Compassion) should be contracted to translocate kangaroos when they have become entrapped in dangerous situations. Ideally, with improved planning regulations and habitat protection, these situations will not occur. However, until that day, it is essential to support this non-lethal option which is safe and humane when conducted by those with the necessary expertise.

(6) International best practice standards to decrease wildlife road strike

There is a great deal that can be learned from successes achieved by other forward-thinking nations. Funding should be allocated for research into methods and technologies that have been successful abroad, and developing adaptations to tailor these techniques to Australian wildlife.

(7) Current methods of collating data on wildlife road strike and its effectiveness

Currently, data on wildlife roadstrike is collected by various organisations and individuals, with no centralised data repository. The lack of comprehensive data makes it difficult to evaluate the extent of the problem and inform decision-making. To address this, we strongly recommend developing a centralised database, such as an app and/or website, that allows data entry from diverse sources, including the public. This platform should interface with existing systems to streamline data collection and provide publicly accessible information. This data could be used to identify hotspots, and to guide legislation, planning, and resource allocation.

(8) Any other related matters.

There is a lack of clarity over who is responsible for wildlife roadstrike issues. Councils, statutory authorities, state government departments, and volunteer organisations all play various roles, leading to confusion and poor outcomes. We recommend a dedicated state government 'Office of Wildlife Road Safety' (for example) responsible for centrally administering and evaluating wildlife roadstrike mitigation efforts. This would ensure a streamlined and consistent process to tackle this significant issue and provide a clear line of responsibility and accountability.

Underscoring the wildlife roadstrike issue is the general lack of respect offered to wildlife, and kangaroos in particular. All too often, kangaroos are mown down without a care, or concern only for the vehicle. Whilst kangaroos continue to be treated with gross disrespect by our leadership, both state and federal, inevitably their callous attitude that treats them as a disposable 'pest' will filter through society. This leads to uncaring citizens who do not think twice about driving on when they have hit a kangaroo, or when they pass a wounded or dead kangaroo (potentially with a joey) by the roadside. When our leadership can model and foster a positive, caring, and proactive attitude to kangaroos (and indeed all wildlife), this will be reflected in the behaviour of citizens.

Conclusion

Victorian Kangaroo Alliance (VKA) strongly encourages every effort to keep wildlife and motorists safe, including:

- Educating drivers
- Modifying behaviour to reduce speeding and respond appropriately to collisions
- Supporting wildlife volunteers and veterinarians
- Embracing innovation and technology
- Learning from overseas success
- Improving infrastructure and planning
- Promoting a wildlife-conscious approach to development
- Improving data collection and analysis
- Supporting translocation by experts when necessary
- Centralising responsibility

By adopting these solutions, we can significantly reduce wildlife roadstrike and promote safer coexistence between people and wildlife. We share collective responsibility for wildlife welfare, and decisive action on this serious issue is desperately and urgently needed.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. We look forward to the day when seeing the bloodied and battered bodies of our precious wildlife on the roadside is a thing of the past.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Alyssa'.

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We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands where we live and campaign, recognising sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge their deep spiritual connection to Country and their customs that have nurtured this land. We honour their Creator Spirits and Sacred Totems and the one we are sworn to protect, the majestic Kangaroo.