

REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

**PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 7 - PLANNING AND
ENVIRONMENT**

**HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF KANGAROOS AND OTHER
MACROPODS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

CORRECTED

At Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney on Tuesday, 15 June 2021

The Committee met at 9:00 am

PRESENT

Ms Cate Faehrmann (Chair)

The Hon. Mark Buttigieg

The Hon. Catherine Cusack

The Hon. Ben Franklin

The Hon. Mark Pearson (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. Penny Sharpe

MAX DULUMUNMUN HARRISON, Aboriginal Elder, affirmed and examined

RO MUDYIN GODWIN, Aboriginal Educator, before the Committee via teleconference

The CHAIR: Welcome to this public hearing of the inquiry into the health and wellbeing of kangaroos and other macropods in New South Wales. Before starting this session, I again acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today. I also acknowledge the lands you are coming from today. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present. I welcome our next witnesses, Uncle Max Dulumunmun and Auntie Ro Mudyin Godwin. Auntie Ro is joining us on the phone, so the Committee will take her evidence unsworn. Auntie Ro, would you like to start by making your opening statement first? Please take the time you need.

Auntie RO GODWIN: Thank you so much. Good morning, everyone, and thank you for taking the time to chair this vitally important inquiry. For the first time, those of us who have been negatively and severely impacted by the relentless colonialism surrounding kangaroos and the barbaric slaughter of sacred totem kangaroo now have a voice. In the pointed words of Mr David Brooks, honorary associate professor in Australian literature at the University of Sydney, in the article "Re-thinking kangaroos: The ethics of the slaughter of a species" published by ABC Religion & Ethics on Monday 7 June 2021:

It is no longer as widely acceptable as it was to regard non-human animals as unthinking, unfeeling, unsuffering commodities. ... There seems at last to be a growing understanding that, when we slaughter, we slaughter beings *like ourselves*.

I would like everyone to think about that as we yarn here together today. I am Auntie Ro Mudyin Godwin, Palawa woman, Indigenous educator and writer. I am just one of many Indigenous people whose lives have been almost destroyed thanks to the distress caused by the Australian and New South Wales government sanctioned commercial kangaroo killing industry. The treatment of country and kangaroo by the unsustainable farming sector and by the colonialism that infects the minority of the people causes the majority of the destruction across country. It is colonialism that sees country as only something to gain a financial profit from—to be used, to be abused—and that sees kangaroos as a pest. It is used on a daily basis as a tool to try to justify the unabated slaughter of sacred totem kangaroo and the ongoing destruction of country.

The kangaroo is my family totem. A totem is a natural object, plant or animal that is inherited by a clan, individual or family as a spiritual emblem. We have caretaking and conservation responsibilities for our totems. Totem defines people's roles and responsibilities, our relationships with each other and creation. The kangaroo are my ancestors. They are my culture and my family's spiritual connection to country. Every time one of these totemic animals is gunned down a part of myself—my family—dies. Our cultural connections die. The interconnectedness of country dies, our creative spirit torn apart. Indeed, I wonder if that is seen as a treasured bonus in the eyes of the colonial killer. To see the very government that governs this stolen land under the coat of arms, the kangaroo and the emu, profit from the commercial slaughter of kangaroos like some sort of trophy exemplifies blatant and obnoxious colonialism.

I have chosen to appear before you via audio link today as I now fear for my personal safety as a result of being a very vocal Indigenous woman and a truth teller, speaking out and condemning the abhorrent commercial kangaroo killing industry—and indeed speaking out against the unsustainable farming sector, which continues to cause so much destruction to not just kangaroos but increasingly all wildlife and ever-increasing areas of country. Clearly, from the death threats I have received over the years, the aforementioned are worried about the truths that I speak. As long as sacred totem kangaroo are slaughtered, gunned down and treated as garbage I will never be silent and I will never be silenced. The wording in the death threats again shows the poisonous infection of colonialism.

It was not enough that the invaders of this once-pristine country mass-slaughtered Indigenous peoples—my family, my ancestors. It was not enough that they took body parts of Indigenous peoples, our tools, our artwork and the bones of those they slaughtered to the other side of the world as trophies. No, that was not enough. It is never enough as that behaviour pattern, that mindset, continues today. No lessons have been learned. In fact that very mindset and those behaviours repeat themselves ad nauseam and without any care, daily, via the behaviours of the government-sanctioned commercial kangaroo killing industry. These sacred totem animals, their spirits are never able to rest as they are gunned down. Their flesh and body parts are taken, cut up, shipped around the world and taken again. Their internal organs, their heads, are severed and tossed aside like garbage as they are killed. If kangaroo joeys are not legally bludgeoned to death by shooters those surviving little babies—little joeys—will ultimately die lingering deaths alone as they call to their slaughtered mothers. A lucky few will find their way to the arms of wildlife rescue, and we are so thankful for them.

Not only are kangaroos gunned down but they are poisoned, run down, run over or herded against exclusion fencing and gunned down for fun—no respect for these ancient ones, no care. Indeed, I recall a farmer

in the unsustainable farming sector who laughed as he spoke about a kangaroo caught in a section of his exclusion fence. Carrying around the bloodied mess, hanging by her broken feet, he laughed about it as she in terror fought for her life—to which the farmer responded, "Who cares, mate? They're a bloody pest." He left her to die a lingering death in terror and agony. The hypocrisy of those calling kangaroo a pest is breathtaking.

I have been honoured to have recently contributed to the book titled *Injustice* by documentary journalist Maria Taylor. From that book I quote the following extract from the yarnning between Maria Taylor and Indigenous Elder, wood carver and artist Billy Doolan:

In the old ways, he says, "we danced the trails, waterholes, animals. We were part of nature." Not separate as a dominator, I understand from this statement. "We walked with the animals. We are true children of the earth; it provided what we need. This place was virtually untouched when Captain Cook came. Animals were the ones that did all this," he tells me. He mentions the soil-enriching worms, insects that pollinate, eels that clean the rivers, and marsupial grazers with their soft feet unlike the hard-hooved animals that came with the invasion. "That's why we had the beautiful grasslands."

...

"It's the native animals, they keep the system going."

Billy continues:

There is hope if people make changes to heal the land and live with the native species. Mother Earth can heal herself if we help.

And then somewhat of a warning from Billy, which indeed continues to be ignored:

If people keep doing what they do, things are going to be very bad. ... Everybody is responsible to look after this beautiful country.

I wonder how much longer it will take for the veil of colonialism to lift, given the ongoing behaviours of destruction. How much longer do we have until everything is gone? These sacred totem animals—this kangaroo—encompass the evolutionary, ecological and cultural processes that sustain all life and all culture. The slaughter of kangaroos must stop. The colonialism must stop. Enough damage has already been done, but sadly not enough damage has been done to satisfy some.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Aunty Ro, for that very powerful opening statement. Now we will move to Uncle Max.

Uncle MAX HARRISON: The kangaroo preceded our Indigenous culture more than 80,000 years ago and deserves both the land and living rights above all other introduced species, the right to live without cruelty and exploitation. Native animals, birds and reptiles have the highest respect in our cultural totemic system. The kangaroo is an Australian icon adopted by the Australian government and is shown on shields, coins, emblems and Parliament House itself—along with official letterheads and other paraphernalia—yet it appears on the brink of becoming an endangered species.

This powerful, soft-footed animal that shares our nation with us has been relegated last, replaced by the hard-hooved introduced animal species, creating displacement and desecration. Inside cultural practice, we only took whatever was needed for food and medicine. We never harvested meat or medicine for profit. It is not spiritual practice to kill our iconic animals for \$80 million per annum. It was not an industry that drove the hunt. It was our ceremonial practice for food and medicine, and still is today. There are other little bits there, but I will just leave it at that point. I think that I do not know Aunty Ro, but I was so proud to hear her talk.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Uncle Max. We will proceed to questions now. We have members here from the Government, the Opposition, The Greens and Animal Justice Party. We will go to questions first from the Hon. Ben Franklin for the Government.

The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN: Thank you both for being here and for your testimony today. It is a very important perspective, I think, for this Committee to hear from Indigenous First Nation voices, so thank you very much for that. I have just got one question, and I would be interested in both of your perspectives: Do you think that there are Indigenous kangaroo management practices that the Government can learn from to incorporate better into government management—things that First Nation people do and have done for many, many years that the Government can incorporate into what we do in terms of managing kangaroos?

The CHAIR: We will start with you, Uncle Max, if that is okay.

Uncle MAX HARRISON: Look, that is a big question just to throw at me now, you know; but, yes, there is. And I need to get back and sit down with all my young men and talk with them. I have got to go back to Dreamtime. You see, my Dreamtime is my history. My Dreamtime is what we do about our animals. As I am talking to each young man and older men, I am talking to them mainly about their totems, their totemic systems, and I am coming up with a lot of cross-totems with a lot of them in, and it is moving in and out of the kangaroos. Even as they are driving out as they are going out to camp, they are talking about—they will say, "Uncle, did you

see that poor fella there, hanging on the fence?" or, "Did you see him on the side of the road?" We had to stop and pick him up and bring him off and bury him—give him a decent send-off.

Do not think this is not happening today. They are doing this while they are driving a motor car. They are doing this while they are coming out to lore with me, to sit with me for 10 days. They are doing this kind of thing. They are still in practice of looking after their iconic animals, even if some of them have not got that animal as a totem. It is to respect lore how these old fellas—I am talking about the kangaroo here—has helped our people in survival for 80,000 years and upwards or longer than that, you think. We have to respect them. My thing about the shooters, it is how they are doing it. I do not know if you have looked at the film *Kangaroo*. That is something. That is an eye-opener. Just have a look. It is why we are angry about that.

You know, if I walked into St Vincent's Hospital or this hospital next door to you and I grabbed a little newborn baby—I am going to put it to you hard and rough here—and I walked in and grabbed those little kids and bashed their heads in and said, "There are too many of youse." Where would I end up? What would happen to me? But it is not about me. I am talking about an animal here—an animal. It cannot go anywhere at times because of fences and the fences are diverting the animal. Then they go through in masses and then all of a sudden they become a pest. You know, apparently some of you must live in the country. You live on the country, but do you live with the country? That is the point I am trying to make here—not only just live on country, but live with it.

This is what I have been doing for 85 years. I have tried to protect our icons. You see, and again, as I said, it is not how they are shooting them and killing them but it is the little ones—the little ones that are suffering. We have a woman that we have got down the South Coast who has got a little sanctuary and the sanctuary is of kangaroos, free kangaroos. They are not fenced in but they come there. They come to this woman's place for refuge. And this can happen. These are the things that should be done. You know, when you are driving through the outback you will see signs, you know, "cattle", "sheep", but holy hell, you do not see a sign about kangaroos and emus and wombats. I am just sick and tired. I am sick and tired of a fight. I am sick and tired of having to come and defend these iconic animals and to be here questioned like this.

What if I had broken the law? It is not me breaking the law. You people are the law-holders. Change it! For Christ's sake, change it! Make a difference and you will not have this them and us. You see, we have animals. If you go into the zoo over there and you slaughter them, what would you be? How would you feel? How would the people feel about you then? And we call those animals "dumb animals". For goodness' sake, they have been here before us. They have been here before you. So where is the passage of right for these iconic animals? Why does questioning and letter writing have to happen? Just take a look at the film. That is all I ask you to do.

The action is speaking for itself. Hear the farmers down there talking about how the kangaroos are a pest. They are cutting all of the grass up and he is standing among sheep—throwing up the bloody dust all around him. There are things like that and they are making those statements. I do not know what this Committee is going to do about this but what does it do? What does it do against defencelessness? What will it do against defencelessness? Have you got any friends that have property with sheep, cattle and horses? There are things that are going away from the Snowy Mountains where we are trying to stop the horses that are cutting the rivers off. Nothing has been done about that. These hard-hoofed introduced species are doing more damage—the cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and horses. I guess there will be an inquiry on that and by that time the rivers will be cut because they are blocking. They are turning the taps off great rivers.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Uncle Max, for those words and for that contribution. Please rest assured that all of us are taking your words and wisdom very seriously. We have a report to make. You wanted to know what we are doing with this information. We have to make recommendations to Government. As I said, the people here are not just the Government. We are from a range of different parties and we are all looking at this issue with concern and with the seriousness that it deserves. We are very thankful and grateful that you are able to make it here today. We will continue with our questions. I just wanted to see whether Aunty Ro had any contribution to make at this stage?

Aunty RO GODWIN: I just wanted to quickly say on this whole use of the word "management"—kangaroos do not need to be managed. They never have needed to be managed and they never will need to be managed. Right there in that question that was asked we see that strain of colonialism coming through. The commercial kangaroo killing industry flies in the face of Indigenous culture. Traditional hunting was done, as Uncle Max said, on a survival basis. The commercial industry is a profit-driven industry. If the Government needs to adopt anything it is: Just stop killing them. We have had enough of the destruction. We have had enough of the distress being caused. We have had enough of culture being destroyed. Just stop it. Stop doing it. There is no need for a commercial kangaroo killing industry. There is no need. It is being done for greed and profit.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Aunty Ro. I will say as well—which I neglected to say at the beginning—we do have a member of the Government, Catherine Cusack, who is dialling in via videoconference as well today. Ms Cusack has a question that she would like to ask now.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Thank you very much. My question relates to the impact of hoofed animals in arid landscapes—the impact that that has had on food resources for all animals, native and otherwise.

The CHAIR: I think we will go to you again, Uncle Max, because you were talking about that with the feral horses. Did you hear the question?

Uncle MAX HARRISON: Not quite. Could I have that question again please?

The CHAIR: I can say it if you like. It was essentially about the damage that hoofed animals have particularly on the arid environment and how this impacts on the food resources for all animals.

Uncle MAX HARRISON: God love me. We have carriers and we have birds that come and pick up seeds, and that does the plantations in other parts. All of the hard-hoofed animals are just pressing that down. Whatever birds—you are passing the old animal environment. Once you start separating animals with wallabies, kangaroos and horses, cows and sheep—you talk about the environment. That word is not our word. It was introduced again. That word "environment" is about everything—grasses. Birds pick up those seeds. Then, if they drop them, they are plantations of other things. They do that. They know that. They are our gardeners also. We have different little gardeners and people do not realise it. You have got to look at nature, understand nature and live with it, whatever that word "nature" is. I am using it now but do we abuse it? That looks like what has been done. Nature has been abused and that includes the animals—the soft-footed animals who can carry grasses and drop them out of their paws. Hard-hoofed animals press it down. They are doing the gardening for us with grasses and all of this kind of stuff. That is why they went across the Blue Mountains and they saw the green pastures. They did not have to do it here around the Sydney Basin. It was still untouched; it was virgin. But out there was just about the same.

Nature is the greatest teacher of all and people have got to understand that. Nature is the greatest teacher of all. This is how animals were back in them old days, when the old fella sat me down—my grandfather sat me down in a classroom. My classroom was a tree. My classroom was a bush. There I sat while he taught me because I was not allowed to go to school. So I had to learn about nature. He said to me, "Nature is the greatest teacher of all. It can speak to us without voice." I got up and I walked away from my old grandfather and I thought, "This old fella is going gwani. Was he hit with a boondi too often?" No. He taught me some of the greatest lessons about nature, about the grasses and about the plant life. As I said, the hard-hoofed animals will press it. I do not know if anyone has seen the film that we have done up at the head of the Murrumbidgee—one of our greatest rivers. God love me. It is a boghole—by the hard-hoofed animals. We asked for that. Nothing has happened. They did not do an inquiry about that. When is there going to be a decent inquiry about all of these hard-hoofed animals? Where are you going to put them if you want water?

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: Thank you very much for coming, both of you, and for your extraordinary opening statements and answers so far. We have been given evidence and claims that the commercial kangaroo industry actually offers employment to Indigenous people.

Uncle MAX HARRISON: To shut them up.

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: What is your view about that?

Uncle MAX HARRISON: It shuts them down. It keeps them quiet. Is that what the employment is?

The Hon. MARK PEARSON: The claim is that First Nations people have jobs either in the processing plants—either driving carcasses to processing plants or killing them as a shooter. What is your view, both of you, on that claim that it is important to the Indigenous communities to have these jobs?

The CHAIR: We will go to Uncle Max. Did you want to respond first? Then will go to Aunty Ro.

Uncle MAX HARRISON: Look, that is another mission manager's job. That is what the mission manager did back in the forties, thirties and fifties—show our people how to do things and being told by the manager. I worked for rations—10 pounds of flour for every fortnight—and I still see this method happening now. You just spoke about it. You have got this enticement there and again the enticement is the money part of it. And the people—most of those fellas that will do that are going to be the fellas out on the plains country, on the flat country. They will be running at that because there is no—all that surrounds them is sheep stations and cattle stations for miles around them. So they will take something different. Take it or your dole is cut off. There is always a thing there that is going to dangle for our people to go into something that they do not like doing.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Aunty Ro, did you care to comment on that as well?

Aunty RO GODWIN: I absolutely agree with Uncle Max and I will say this: In my view, no true Aboriginal person would ever be involved in such a barbaric industry that brings so much distress and destruction upon culture, country, animals and indeed those of us who hold kangaroos totem. I refer to these people as being whitewashed, as Uncle Max has outlined there. There could be, if we had forward-thinking governments, plenty of job opportunities so these people will become involved in showing and teaching how to coexist. You must coexist. If we are to move forward in any way, shape or form we have got to coexist. This has got to stop. This slaughter has got to stop. It flies in the face of Indigenous culture. It is a profit-driven industry and it just has to stop.

The CHAIR: Aunty Ro, in your opening statement you talked about the kangaroo being your family totem. Could you expand more for the Committee around the impact of having your family totem killed in the way in which kangaroos are being killed in this country? I know you talked about it briefly in your opening statement but explain more the totem in terms of significance to your family and then the impact of seeing your totem treated the way in which kangaroos are treated.

Aunty RO GODWIN: Totem—okay. It varies from clan to clan, obviously. It is not one blanket definition.

Uncle MAX HARRISON: Yes.

Aunty RO GODWIN: In regards to myself, I was taught at a very young age about the creator spirit being the kangaroo. I am Palawa. I was taught that this kangaroo moved across Tasmania and created river systems, mountains and the country which we see. They are my ancestors. If I did not have kangaroo, then I would not have ancestors. They are my creator spirit. I think the distress comes when—and I am just trying to think how I can put it in to sort of a white perspective. Basically it is like having your entire family gunned down every night—and extended family gunned down every night—and their bodies dissected, butchered, cut up, sold off, taken overseas and dressed up as a commodity for profit. It causes immense distress because our future generations—my nieces, my nephews. I want to be able to take them out on country and say, "Look here. This was created by the kangaroo. This valley here, these rivers, these creeks—all this area, created by the kangaroo." Every time these animals bound across the country, all the vibrations from the thudding of their feet and their tails—sending vibrations out, regenerating. When these animals are taken and slaughtered then a part of us is missing. I cannot do that anymore.

Right now where I am, I am taking kids out on country and there is nothing there. It is like a big dead zone. It is almost like a zoo—there are only the animals there that whitefellas want to be there. And only in the numbers that they want to be there. So how do I then teach my kids—and this is a question for you fellas. How do I teach the future generations about a strong connection to country? How do I teach them about how kangaroos are a part of us, are part of our very being, a part of our spiritual connection to everything? How do I teach them that when there is nothing there that I can show them to teach with? How do I do that? And I think that is a question that you fellas need to answer. If this slaughter continues and it gets to a point where there is nothing left—and we are getting pretty close to it despite what the Government says and all their overpopulation and all this carry-on. We know it is all a farce. That is all being done just to run a profit-driven industry.

In actuality, I am going out there standing on country with kids, looking out, and I cannot see anything. There is nothing there anymore and I am so overwhelmed and distressed by what I do not see that it has led to me being suicidal at times. Why am I made to feel like that? Why? Because of the behaviours of a few. Because of the greedy take and the greedy want of a few. You fellas have got to stop. You have got to stop. Our future generations depend on this animal to regenerate country, to provide interconnectedness of country. Our future generations need to learn about their culture, how they belong to this land and how we all belong to this land together.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Aunty Ro. Uncle Max, I will go to you in a minute in relation to totems as well. But I also wanted to ask you, Aunty Ro—you mentioned that it is like having your family gunned down and you mentioned how stressful that is. In other words, the stress that this imposes on your people is extreme. To see this happen is leading to increased, I assume, stress, mental health issues and sickness. Is that fair to assume? I am sorry if that question sounds slightly flippant or—

Aunty RO GODWIN: No, no.

The CHAIR: Would you like to talk about that more?

Aunty RO GODWIN: Do not assume it because it is happening. There is no assumption there; it is happening. My mother will not even talk about it anymore, she is so distressed by the whole thing. When I was five years old she began rescuing joeys; we are talking 45, 46 years ago now. These joeys—I remember saying to my mum, "Where are all these little animals coming from? They do not just fall out of the sky." Then she told me

about how whitefellas were going out killing all these kangaroos and these little babies that we had in care before wildlife rescue was a thing—these orphaned little children. From that age I understood what was happening, and from that age—a very young age—I became distressed because I could not understand how somebody who, for all intents and purposes, is introduced to this country would then pick up arms and go out and gun down those who belong here, who have been here for thousands of years. I could not understand that as a child. I still cannot understand that as an adult.

I got to a point where I was feeling so overwhelmed—nobody was listening, I always put my hand up, sent emails, ring politicians, yarn to Elders, "Come on, you've got to stand up." They do not want to get involved. They cannot even get their head around the extent of the slaughter, let alone try to get involved in it. They just cannot understand, like I cannot understand to the point where just over six months ago I found myself wandering up to the local highway, wanting to stand in the middle of the highway—a four-lane highway. I had had enough. In exposing this blood industry, I have had to look at the most distressing photos, watch unbelievably cruel videos of shooters laughing, stomping on the heads of joeys, laughing and calling, "Here you are, you black coon, have a look at this, eh? Have a look at this, you black coon!" What is that? I cannot respond to that, and when I do I get death threats. Where I live is surrounded by CCTV cameras. I very rarely go out alone anymore. I have always got to have someone with me. What is that? Does anyone ever stop to think about that while everyone is running around gunning down all these animals, "Oh, they're a pest. Let's whack up a little bit more exclusion fencing"?

There are very, very wide-impacting ramifications from all this. And some people simply just cannot cope. It has been going on for so long, first with our Indigenous people, gunned down. All that was talked about before, and it is still going. It is almost like a trophy, "Here you are, look at this, eh. Look at this!" All these carcasses hanging off the back of a truck. And then they post photos on Facebook of truckloads of these animals—no heads, no forearms, no tails, just bloody matted mess atop bloody trays—of blokes jumping around and all these little laugh emojis and all this carry-on in response. You just have to stop and think about what is happening and how it is impacting us. The only reason I got talked out of walking on that highway was because the people who got me back from there reminded me that I do not need to impact other people's lives; this is selfish. And it is in a way because I do not want to impact other people's lives by taking my own. I had to take a step back and really look at how I can keep going and keep fighting and look after myself mentally.

So, I think it is a very real and very ongoing problem that is not often spoken about, and I think for wildlife rescue carers as well. These people are dedicating their lives to saving these animals, and it is unbelievable that they even have to do that. Why do they have to do that? It is unbelievable that we are sitting here at this inquiry having to talk about this, having to rally a government, chat to a government, to stop this killing. It is 2021, not 1788. It has got to stop. More people are going to die, and more people are going to die feeling hopeless, feeling disconnected. Is that what everyone wants from this industry? Take away the kangaroo, destroy the culture and continue to destroy Aboriginal people?

The CHAIR: Thank you, Auntie Ro, for that very powerful statement. I am not sure you can see us, being on the phone, but everybody is incredibly moved by your words. We only have about five minutes left of this session. Uncle Max, would you like to comment on anything? I asked the question in relation to the family totem, but I invite you to say whatever you would like to say to us.

Uncle MAX HARRISON: Different families, different nations within this country you call Australia have different totems. In those nations are all the tribal mobs. All those tribal mobs, they become a community. Each and every one of that family has had a totem. Some kids have one or two totems, and usually the parents hand them that totem down, and mostly I am looking at a lot of that now. There are a lot of kangaroos being passed down and given as totems within the family. I myself, when I am doing my cultural lore, all of them that I will give, I will always include five to six kangaroo totems and different other totems. We have to look at all these. So, all your tribal groups then have a right, if they could remember their responsibilities of looking after the particular totems that they are given, then they are the ones that will jump up in arms if that totem is being decimated, not being treated well. You see?

There are lots of the mobs with the kangaroo totem, and they hold that. They look at it and if someone else has eaten that kangaroo, they will say, "Dear brother, don't eat that near me," or "Wait until I get out of your road." You see? The respect that we have for that iconic animal is pretty huge, it is pretty big. All the groups are starting to identify a lot of their totems, so I keep saying to them, "Don't forget the little fellows." The little fellows, when I am saying that, is also your birdlife and lizards, snakes and that and whatever. So every time I take men out to camp, I give them a totem. There is always the kangaroo that is included in my handing down of the totems. A lot of our mob—some of them might not recognise their totems or do not know their totem because of the Stolen Generation, when their parents were taken away. The parents that were taken away, or most of them, are all grannies now—grandmothers and grandfathers, you know? So they never had a time to even think about handing their totems down. But they have their spiritual connectedness. I have got to keep going back to their spiritual

connectedness with land, animals, water and trees. That is very important in the totemic thing in looking after the totems.

I myself am another sacred one, which is out on the ocean. I am not on land, I am on the ocean and I am sharing my knowledge there of Gurruwul the whale. Gurruwul the whale was given to me at a late age. In 1947 I was told a story about Gurruwul the whale. I held that story for 70 years. I talked about it but I never done anything about it to go and find the actual story, where it was. I was told to go to a place called Tasmania. I did not have a clue at the age of 11 in 1947 to go to wherever Tasmania was. It was not until five years ago that I went down there and I found the remains of the story engraved in stone. My grandfather and these uncles told me to go there to look for one of my totems' story, and that was Gurruwul the whale

Here I am; tomorrow until Sunday I will be out on gadoo—the ocean—talking and telling people, "I'm telling the story on water about one of my totems." You have got to really think about Aboriginal people when they are saying that this is their totem and that is their totem. If you start to think in any of this, "Holy hell, that's a lot of totems," that's a lot of years handed down and memory of what we are told. It is that genealogy memory, if it can be brought back—this is what I am trying to do with my mob, is bring that genealogy memory back to them so that they can understand their totemic system. I share that with non-Indigenous people to make them realise what animals and how important they are to us as peoples, to give them a better understanding of looking after that animal and helping us as Indigenous people to maintain the livelihood of those animals.

You see, totems are not just something you put up as a trophy on your wall. Totems are a thing that you think about, sleep with, eat with and live with, and yet here I am giving evidence about a totem that has been desecrated by greed, not need. We can kill them, we kill them for meat, but there is always a ceremony—always a ceremony. The only ceremony of killing them today is the pull of a trigger, the sound of a rifle. That is the only ceremony. It is so important, folks, if you can understand me and Aunty. I have never met that auntie yet but I would love to meet her, so thanks for bringing us together through communication. That is one thing I can thank this Parliament for, is for bringing me in touch with another person who is fighting for the rights of our totems. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Uncle Max and Aunty Ro. Please be assured that your evidence today and your words have been very significant for this inquiry. You have been heard. Your words have had a very big impact on me and I am sure on the other members. Thank you for travelling here today. I hope that we will be able to make some recommendations that do your evidence today justice. Thank you so much for appearing.

(The witnesses withdrew.)