

NILLUMBIK KANGAROOS – AN OVERVIEW



ABUNDANCE

The true abundance of kangaroos in Nillumbik is unknown. Expert biostatistician, Clare Galea, has recently analysed the methodology used to count kangaroos in Victoria and found it so flawed that it threatens the ongoing viability of Victorian kangaroo populations.¹

The Victorian Kangaroo Survey estimated there was 5100 kangaroos in Nillumbik in 2018. In 2020 the Victorian Kangaroo Survey estimated there was 12,200 kangaroos in Nillumbik. This is a 139% increase. The biology of the Eastern Grey Kangaroo allows for a ~10% population increase per annum under ideal conditions.² So, if the 2018 survey was correct then over two years at the most we could expect ~20% increase in population by the 2020 survey. This means the 2020 survey is showing an increase that is roughly five times the biologically possible rate of increase. This is even less plausible given the harsh conditions from 2018-2020. The 2022 survey did not specify Nillumbik populations, but again showed overall biologically impossible population leaps and entirely disregarded the devastating impacts of the 2022 floods.³

These incongruous figures mirror those in the Mornington Peninsula where the 2020 Victorian Kangaroo Survey estimated 7000 kangaroos, yet a rigorous citizen science project run by Dr Greg Holland found only 2200 in the region.

GRAZING PRESSURE

Kangaroos contribute minimally to the overall grazing pressure and prefer different foraging situations to livestock with minimal competition except in times of drought.⁴ One cow has the grazing pressure of sixty kangaroos, and one sheep has the grazing pressure of five kangaroos.⁵ Kangaroos are a keystone species, aerating the soil with their long claws whilst fertilising with nutrient rich dung.

Commercial incentive more than TRIPLED average quotas for PROFIT

KANGAROOS 'APPROVED FOR CONTROL'			
PRE-COMMERCIAL		POST-COMMERCIAL	
Year	Quota	Year	Quota
no earlier data		2015	135,887
		2016	169,544
		2017	189,086
		2018	168,992
2009	64,152	2019	136,502
2010	39,559	2020	137,800
2011	34,721	2021	191,200
2012	45,717	2022	185,850
2013	75,139	2023	236,350
Average	51,858	Average	172,357

*excludes 2014 (quota 84,100) as commercial system started in April

vic kangas .org

REDUCING WASTE?

The Victorian commercial kangaroo industry was sold as preventing waste from 'culling', but since then average quotas have **more than tripled**.⁶ This demonstrates the dangers of a financial incentive. The government's own review of the commercial pet food trial acknowledged the commercial industry had increased the rate of killing, may have increased waste, and was a lawless sustainability risk.⁷ It was approved and expanded regardless.

SOLICITING BY SHOOTERS

Commercial shooters have been soliciting widely for kangaroos to kill throughout Nillumbik via doorknocking, leafletting, and advertising on Facebook community groups. This demonstrates increasing desperation to find kangaroos.

¹ <https://au.news.yahoo.com/shot-to-extinction-concern-for-kangaroos-after-damning-report-released-045546980.html>

² Mjadwesch, R. (2011). *Nomination to List the Large Macropods as Threatened Species under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*. MESS, Bathurst. www.kangaroosatrisk.net.

³ <https://vickangas.org/blog/f/wildlife-community-betrayed-again---kill-quotas-increase>; <https://vickangas.org/blog/f/labor-slammed-for-cruel-kill-quotas>

⁴ Mjadwesch, R. (2011).

⁵ Grigg, G. C. (2002). Conservation benefit from harvesting kangaroos: status report at the start of a new millennium, a paper to stimulate discussion and research. *A Zoological Revolution. Using native fauna to assist in its own survival*. D. Lunney and C. Dickman. Mosman, Royal Zoological Society of NSW: 53-76.; Mjadwesch, (2011).

⁶ <https://vickangas.org/blog/f/damning-truth-back-online>

⁷ Kangaroo Pet Food Trial Evaluation Report, 2018. <https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/a5643baa-d4d8-4ba8-988b-7006e9477449/downloads/KPFT-Evaluation-Report-Dec-2018.pdf?ver=1652104574304>.

LOCAL ABORIGINAL ELDER CALLS FOR KANGAROO PROTECTION

Aunty Janet Turpie-Johnstone, an Aboriginal Elder, academic and researcher based in the outer east has condemned kangaroo slaughter as an ongoing facet of colonialism that undermines Aboriginal stewardship with a culture of exploitation and profiteering. She says, “never forget the colonial invasion was an invasion that saw everything in this Country up for grabs... It was cruel, it has harmed this Country, and it has put so much of our biodiversity at serious risk... The indiscriminate slaughter must stop.”⁸

CRUELTY



Three examples of non-fatal wounding from many such cases documented by local wildlife rescuers. The kangaroos that are inevitably mis-shot suffer horrifically sometimes for weeks, dying slowly from infection and starvation. In-pouch joeys are bashed to death whilst dependent young at-foot usually escape to wither without maternal care.

IMPACT ON RESCUERS

Stringybark Wildlife Shelter

“I have been rescuing kangaroos in Nillumbik for almost four years now. In that time myself and other rescuers have come across dozens of kangaroos that have been shot and wounded and left to die. We’ve seen kangaroos with half their face missing, kangaroos with bullet holes in their rump or legs, and even bullet holes in their abdomen. They are called in by concerned residents who find them suffering and slowly dying of infection. The pain and fear they must feel is unimaginable. As wildlife rescuers we deal with suffering every day - road trauma, dog attacks, fence hangers etc - but seeing these kangaroos being deliberately slaughtered and maimed is absolutely soul destroying. We dedicate our lives to helping wildlife while our neighbours call in shooters to needlessly kill them. There is no justification needed, no reason. Studies have shown time and time again that kangaroos do not compete with livestock in any measurable fashion, and that damage to fences can be avoided with some very simple and cost-effective modifications. And yet our government continues to encourage the persecution of our beautiful native fauna. I live in what should be kangaroo heaven but I will not release my hand-raised joeys here because I often hear shooters in nearby properties. I hope that Nillumbik will take a stand against this needless cruelty and protect our precious kangaroos.”

Narelle Trippett, Nillumbik rescuer and carer

“Pouch checks leave you with lots of unanswered questions, did you die instantly? did you lie here terrified? Where is your Joey? Alone or with the mob? Will it be old enough to survive? The distress, anger and sadness to find the kangaroo has also been shot in the back as well as run over is devastating. Sadly it’s not uncommon in the outskirts of Melbourne and I’m no longer surprised by it.”

⁸ <https://vickangas.org/blog/f/victorian-aboriginal-elder-condemns-colonial-kangaroo-industry>

“It is difficult to put in words the impact this has had on me. I know kangaroo harvesting occurs in the Shire of Nillumbik, but it is even more distressing to discover it has occurred next door to a property that I have spent countless hours/weekends rescuing sick and malnourished orphaned joeys from. I guess I now have my answer as to why there are so many orphaned joeys at the one location. Sadly not many of the joeys have survived because they have not coped physically or mentally with what has occurred to their mob. My heart also breaks for the children who found the evidence of the harvesting - the heads, intestines and all the other body parts the harvesters did not want, discarded in the paddock where they were slaughtered. All occurring in a rural conservation area, which apparently offers no protection for kangaroos.”

IMPACT ON RESIDENTS

Robyn Dahl, Kangaroo Ground resident

“I live in Kangaroo Ground, Nillumbik, the heart of the Green Wedge. That means most residents choose to live here because of our love of wildlife and nature. We love our kangaroos which already contend with increasing urbanisation, carnage on our roads, unsuitable fencing and now SHOOTERS! We feel let down by our state government. Please stop killing our kangaroos. They deserve better.”

DISENFRANCHISEMENT OF COUNCIL

Kangaroo shooters operating in a Local Government Area (LGA) are not obliged to seek approval from that authority to operate a commercial interest. A commercial operator would ordinarily face statutory obligations, requiring permits or financial contributions to Council. There would be health, safety and biosecurity requirements in dealing with bulk animal slaughter, butchering and storage, as well as waste and hygiene. None of these are applicable for commercial kangaroo slaughter, with shooters essentially operating pop-up abattoirs near homes and businesses with no requirement to hygienically dispose of fluids and offcuts (body parts) left behind.

There is virtually no compliance monitoring in the field at time of shooting. Residents therefore have unmonitored shooting activity near their homes potentially leading to frightening and confrontational interactions with shooters. Any complaints by residents of safety concerns, spotlighting, excessive noise, non-compliance or reports of carcass offcuts dumped in public places are dealt with by local police and council, adding more pressure to both agencies.

Whilst shooters create an administrative burden and contribute to wear and tear on roads, they are operating at night when most local service providers are closed, therefore not spending their money within the LGA to benefit local businesses. Moreover, their activities undermine local ecotourism businesses.

WHAT CAN COUNCIL DO?

We acknowledge that Council is not responsible for the management of wildlife. However, we believe it would send a strong message if the Nillumbik Shire Council formally requested to be removed from the ‘Central Harvest Zone’. If respected by government, this would improve peace and safety for Nillumbik residents, promote the ecological values of the ‘Green Wedge Shire’ and ensure kangaroos are safe for locals and tourists to enjoy.



Eastern Grey Kangaroos,
Heritage Golf & Country Club.
Katja Gutwein, Wild Wombat
Photography