

CULLING KANGAROOS FOR PET FOOD?

Some Thoughts

SECRETARY: EAST GIPPSLAND WILDLIFE REHABILITATORS INC.

May 2016

The Kangaroo Pet Food Trial has opened a new dimension, another avenue to justify the slaughter and destruction of kangaroos. The kill, cull permits, euphemistically known as Authority To Control Wildlife [ATCW] permits being issued almost with alacrity and promotion, by some in the department [DELWP] responsible for wildlife care, as secondary, and destruction primarily it seems?

The real question is, should the government have jurisdiction over the wildlife of the state, or should a citizen committee of various people have this responsibility and authority?

CONTENTS

- 1 The Problem: 1
- 2 The Pet Food Trial 2
- 3 The increase in kill cull requests. 3

1 THE PROBLEM:

The problem has always been that kangaroos have been killed with virtual impunity, all over Australia, though Victorian law, which has never been vigorously, seriously or diligently enforced by officers who actually care about our wildlife rather than just hold down a job. States that wildlife cannot be killed without being granted a permit to do so by the state government agency responsible for such, the DELWP now so named. This creates a two fold problem, one that the authority which permits the killing of kangaroos under the auspices of culling for whatever reason, has been very secretive about who they hand these permits to, and the reasons they deem fit to do so. Also that the personnel who inspect, if any inspection is carried out, are not trained to note all the conditions that has caused the kangaroos to move into what is perceived as a worry by the landholder. This manifests in cull permits always being too easy to acquire. Worse still now that money can be made from the carcasses of kangaroos who are culled.

Maybe there is a theory that if kangaroos can be killed and then money made from their dead bodies, they will be seen as valuable by those who only know value if it has a monetary price placed upon it. This is flawed, because there is no monitoring of numbers nor is there any monitoring of the joeys that are killed in the process and so the numbers are skewed in favour of many more animals killed than represented by the figures. It is not a system of trust that exists, but a system of opportunism, which in this instance is in error absolutely.

Another element that cannot be quantified, is the amount of kangaroos and other wildlife that are killed without a permit ever being issued. Illegally slaughtered, but without the authorities who are both responsible and blasé about this, being informed, or wanting the complication of being informed. In effect, no one taking any but a casual notice.

Add to this the wildlife, kangaroos making up a large portion of these, being killed on the roads, and we have a killing spree far greater than anyone can imagine. Certainly much greater than are shown on the figures of the documents procured through the FOI system.

Those who shoot kangaroos for a living for human consumption in South Australia were being paid 0.90 cents a kilogram for the carcass, and for that kind of money a shooter is out to kill as many as possible to make it worth their while. Low prices increase the number of kangaroos being killed. I have no idea what landholders who have kangaroos killed are being paid by the pet food people.

2 THE PET FOOD TRIAL

The pet food trial was extended for another two years in Victoria in 2016. This was seen as madness, The increased ATCW's and kangaroos on those kill, cull permits increased exponentially with the promise of money being made. The Minister for the Environment, Land and Water responsible for wildlife in Victoria, the Hon Lisa Neville stated on television, that she didn't believe this increase in ATCW's and the number of kangaroos to be killed, was due to the Kangaroo Pet Food Trial? Yet the huge increases of the kill permits and the numbers of kangaroos permitted to be killed on these was almost, but not exclusively in the local government areas [LGA's] where the kangaroo meat trial was being conducted.

From documentation on the DELWP website:

[quote]

The trial is open for landowners in the following local government areas: Ararat, Benalla, Horsham, Mansfield, Mitchell, Murrindindi, Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, Southern Grampians, Strathbogie, Wangaratta and Yarriambiack. Additional areas may be added in 2016 after consultation with local governments and other key stakeholders.

[end quote]

The areas where the kill, cull permits [ATCW] allow harvesting of kangaroos that are marked for death by this authority. Ostensibly under the auspices of ***not*** wasting the flesh of animals that have been targeted as a nuisance or an impediment to a landholders opportunity of maximising profit from their property or enterprise is where the opportunist increases are recorded. The flesh of the kangaroos would not be wasted if they were left alive to maintain the forest equilibrium and improve the pasture they occasionally visit.

One wonders where the Minister might be getting her misinformation, or was she just in denial?

These areas according to the weather details, which are general at best, may have suggested drier seasons. If this is the reason that more kangaroos visited the pasture lands of those who are zealous, about their ownership and not know the actual benefit the native animals bestow upon it.

However, that doesn't absolve the responsibility of the DELWP officers from ensuring they know what is happening in the local area weather wise, events and incidences that have increased the number of kangaroos periodically frequenting an area. Nor does it allow DELWP officers who do not know the habits and culture of native animals to make a judgement about whether or not they are an actual or perceived nuisance or whether or not they should be killed.

In fact it places greater responsibility on these officers to err on the side of the wildlife they are supposed to protect to disallow kangaroos that are actually dispossessed by these differing conditions to be given every chance to survive and disperse again when conditions improve.

So was the increase in requests for ATCW's and the number of kangaroos they allow to be killed, because of opportunism to make some money? Because if the kangaroos came onto private property to drink or feed because of dry weather conditions, they should not have been killed. The DELWP staff should have been aware and factored in these elements and informed the landholders why the permits they requested were not going to be granted. That didn't happen. The permits fell like autumn leaves around the heads of those who requested them.

What prompted me to ask for these records through the Freedom of Information [FOI] system, was to discover if there was a trend to numbers of kangaroos killed in 2015 to do with the pet food industry buying the carcasses.

The following information caused query.

According to Annual ATCW data 2009 - 2015 from the DELWP website. In 2013 the amount of Eastern Kangaroos that were permitted to be killed was 65,579 kangaroos.

In 2014 the amount of Eastern Kangaroos that were permitted to be killed was 62,570 kangaroos.

In 2015, when the meat for pet food trial was on, the amount of Eastern Kangaroos that were permitted to be killed was 130,963 kangaroos.

There is no record kept by any part or agency of ATCW's that are requested but refused. It can be safely assumed, this is due to the number of permits allowed would be so much greater in number than the permits refused, that it would be obvious the DELWP were on the side of kangaroo slaughter.

As well it would expose another phenomenon. That being, some refused ATCW's would be granted on a following application and that could be questioned, why not before and why now? Without any reasonable answer possibly concoct and just to balance the books, to use a common phrase. It's a concern then, that the refusals and their reasons for being refused are not recorded.

Ignoring for a moment that it is morally wrong for a government to cut its people out of the decision making process of something as important as harvesting the natural resources that belong to everyone, not government alone, and the mass killing of any wildlife species by proxy especially. The government that we have voted into power in this state cares nothing at all about our natural resources, except to make money from them. This is also obvious in the federal sphere. But how much can our natural resources sustain before there is a total collapse? Total collapse is not a complete extinction of a species by the foolish actions of government and individuals. It is the reduction in number of animals to a point where the gene pool is too small to maintain enough diversity to allow their offspring to survive without defect and with the ability to evolve with the conditions that are being created by the changes humans are inflicting on the planet. There are no wise heads in the state government who can work this out or accept accurate advice, so over exploitation is inevitable.

3 THE INCREASE IN KILL CULL REQUESTS.

The increases in the kangaroo pet food trial local government areas:

Town	2013	2014	Increase	2015	Increase	Increase from 2014
Ararat	1317	1678	361	3063		1385
Benalla	3250	1652	minus - 1598	4930		3278
Horsham	1294	1123	minus - 171	1505		382
Mansfield	3940	4245	305	9572		5327
Mitchell	9387	5130	4257	24105		18975
Murrindindi	2865	4185	1320	6284		2099
North Grampians	2224	3413	1189	7138		3725
Pyrenees	2322	2311	minus - 11	5337		3026
Southern Grampians	3429	2663	minus -766	8390		5727
Strathbogie	3222	3800	578	9925		6125
Wangaratta	2840	2182	minus - 655	4298		2116
Yarriambiack	64	62	minus - 2	192		130

The Mitchell shire is in the Broadford area - many farmers¹

The dry years, finally driving more kangaroos onto farmland and their dams for food and water, might fit in with the weather conditions over those three years in many of the LGA's where more permits to kill were erroneously or frivolously issued.

However, if that were the case, the supposedly trained and observant officers if the DELWP would have informed the landholders that kangaroos feeling the stress of warmer than normal conditions and finding food and water difficult to access were now in areas where the landholder considered a mass trespass had been committed. Then these officers should have refused the kill permits.

If one was cynical, it could be imagined this increase in numbers of kangaroos slaughtered seems to suggest there might have been some insider trading happening. Where the district DELWP offices of the pet meat trial knowing it was mooted by the minister, encouraged landholders to hold off taking out ATCW's and wait another year to take advantage of the kangaroo meat trial?

So either way, the DELWP were in the wrong, and not only morally wrong, but professionally wrong. Not protecting our wildlife as is part of their brief, albeit that they see it as a small part, manifest in both instances and therefore not doing their job. It's been an ongoing contention between those who care for wildlife, in a nurturing or just knowing their value capacity. that the DELWP is not looking after Victoria's most important resource.

¹ The Shire of Mitchell is a local government area in the Hume region of Victoria, Australia, located North of Melbourne. It covers an area of 2,864 square kilometres and, at the 2011 Census, had a population of 34,637. Wikipedia Area: 2,864 km² Founded: 1994 Council seat: Broadford Gazetted: November 18, 1994 Region: Hume Federal divisions: Division of Bendigo, Division of McEwen

The question is then, should the protection and well being of our wildlife be in the hands of a government department that hands out slaughter permits, allows logging and development of habitat and generally works to assist industries that are extractive and destructive?

There are definitely questions that require answers from the Minister, who appears not to be on top of this situation and has left the portfolio to another. The absolute certainty is, kangaroos have only one Joey every year and what is happening is not sustainable slaughter and not conservation or reasonable care for our wildlife.