

Wednesday 30th June 2021

Submission to the Wildlife Act 1975 review panel.

I welcome the review of the current Wildlife Act 1975. Much has changed in the past 46 years, such as: urban sprawl; loss of native habitat; increase of wildlife predators; global warming; extensive bushfires; commodification of just about everything, including wildlife; greater education and technology to share knowledge; scientific proof of species and habitat decline; changing public expectations and ideologies.

Wording

“The Wildlife Act sets the rules around how we protect, conserve, sustainably manage and use wildlife in Victoria.”

Use of language sets the tone for the intention of such an influential and important document. In response to the above wording used in the Wildlife Act review, ‘how we ...use wildlife’ does not sit well. While unlikely the intention, the phrasing has connotations of wildlife as commodities which then easily leads to exploitation. It would be wonderful to instead have the focus on **protecting, conserving** and **fostering** the diversity of native animals, fauna and associated eco-systems, supported by active **enforcement** to discourage blatant breaches.

Limitations

It is unfortunate to see the limitations on the panel to make decisions around change to current range of activities permitted under the Act, including issues around cruelty. While beyond the scope of this review, I would like to make explicit my concerns around inappropriate exemptions and non-enforcement of current laws. Namely, the destruction of native forests by Vic Forest. Also, the issue of permits to kill kangaroo’s because property holders find them inconvenient. Particularly, the inhumane, cruel, and unconscionable behaviour of some individuals who think it fun to terrorise, mutilate and annihilate native animals for fun and sport. Worse, is that Government departments are negligent of ‘duty of care’ by condoning this behaviour through issuing permits, not checking or enforcing suitable compliance and turning a blind eye. There are no excuses for the carnage being allowed to occur in Victoria. The Heritage Golf Course mass killing of roos, very well publicised, is a perfect example of lack of duty of care by the very departments that are meant to protect our valuable native species. Much needs to change.

Contemporary values and expectations

In the early 1980’s while I was a primary school student, it was clear to me we were living unsustainably. The growing population, expanding clearing of native vegetation and demise of animal species would become problematic very quickly. It caused me great angst, still does. We now have extensive data, research, scientific knowledge and even physical consequences of climate change visible to us all.

Everyone knows we need to act urgently, decisively and effectively to protect our earth. The natural environment, with the great diversity of animals and plants are the greatest assets we have.

I am an administrator of 'St Andrews Nature' Facebook page. St Andrews is a semi-rural township located in the Green Wedge Shire of Nillumbik. During Covid lockdowns local people received a great deal of comfort, connection and inspiration from nature. Sharing photos of interesting natural finds, discovering fungi, orchids, insects and then collaborating to work out the species. Awareness and appreciation of the natural environment comes with the responsibility to honour and protect it.

Contemporary values align with acknowledgement and respect for the rights of people and animals to live harmoniously. In the 21st century, we have a moral and ethical duty to tread more lightly. By implementing good built design that honours the needs of all is possible, economically viable, practical and best practice. The holistic health and wellbeing of the natural environment has a positive flow on effect to humans. It is a win/win situation when law, government departments, community and indigenous custodians of the land can work together for contemporary, intelligent outcomes. Even greedy developers can still benefit from suitable, mindful development. The public expect legislation and enforcement of such so we (people and animals) can live harmoniously, each benefiting from the natural environment.

Culture

While not identifying as an Indigenous Australian personally, I strongly believe the Indigenous custodians of this land should have much more direct input into the management of the land and it's animals. Lets embrace traditional knowledge and wisdom in combination with modern scientific knowledge in real and respectful ways (not tokenistic lip service as some organisations tend to do). It is necessary to make explicit within the Act, autonomy of Indigenous Australians. We must all work together for equity and ensure human greed cannot trump legislation.

Education

It seems most of society have some appreciation of our unique natural environment in Victoria. Education is needed to support public to understand behaviours, patterns and needs of local wildlife. People are busy and desensitised as they race around in their cars. I live on a busy main road where the traffic roar up and down [REDACTED] It is well known that roos, wallabies, wombats and various other native animals cross the road, particularly at dawn and dusk. Yet the overwhelming majority of traffic continue to speed. It is heart breaking to see the dead bodies along the roadside EVERY day. If an animal is not marked as deceased I will stop and check it. It is even more heartbreaking when you are pulling dead joey's out of the pouch. People continue to fly by, not wanting to be inconvenienced by the death of an innocent mother and baby. We all know they cross, to look out, to take care, but many choose not to. I would argue that quality education to sensitise people to the value of life for these animals has a positive flow on effect to humans own lives.

Law

It sickens me to know some individuals deliberately take pleasure in running over wildlife. It is well known that gratification for torturing animals is only a step away from harming humans. These individuals must be dealt with promptly and effectively to rehabilitate and disincentivise such unacceptable behaviour in society. It still makes me sick to the stomach when I recall a ute hit a roo and kept driving. The roo was trying to get off the road. I can still hear the bone on asphalt as the roo somehow scrambled over the road with both legs badly broken. This is not acceptable, such behaviour should be shamed through education as are other destructive social behaviours.

Any reports of cruel, inhumane or behaviour that breaches the 'reasonable person' test should be rectified in a timely manner. For those severe breaches such as the farmer who slaughtered 406 wedge tailed eagles and the managers of Heritage Golf Course, their actions are totally out of touch with a civil society and should undergo jail time, there is no excuse for such appalling behaviour.

I also strongly oppose loopholes that allow 'special exemptions' to the rules. Vic Forest being able to trash old growth forests for pulp at the expense of our natural habitat and native endangered species will go down in history as a shameful event.

Wildlife rescuers

These amazing people who devote their time, energy and emotional wellbeing to go out daily and attend horrific scenes of carnage and distress MUST be treated as the assets they are to society. While writing this, a Facebook notification came up of yet another traumatic scene of a female roo and her joey being hit by a car and left to suffer and die. In addition, carers pay out of their own pockets to do this unpleasant work. We need training for more people, funding of medications, x-rays, kangaroo nets, bandages, feeders, etc. In the 21st century where everyone seems to expect government handouts, it is shameful carers are not reimbursed for supplies.

In conclusion

While I remain distressed about how we treat our natural environment, I feel encouraged by the opportunity revision of the Act allows. Reading details of the independent panel to make recommendations for the review, gives me hope. I suspect sensible, wise and evidence based solutions will be put forward. I sincerely hope the final decision makers will take on board the need to overhaul the Act and bring it into the 21st century.

Thank you for the opportunity for my concerns to be heard.

