

Submission to the Independent Review of the Wildlife Act 1975 – April 2021

My name is [REDACTED] reside in country Victoria, and I have been a wildlife carer since 2008. My husband and I farm beef cattle on [REDACTED]. We are both passionate conservationists, Landcarers and we care for the area's wildlife by providing shelter and habitat, a safe refuge and rehabilitation when they are orphaned or injured. We seek every opportunity to combine all of these passions without needing to exclude or kill the resident population of wildlife. We strive to improve our knowledge of farming, conservation and wildlife care by attending any training that is relevant to these pursuits.

In question 1.1.1 it asks in what ways does the Act succeed or fail in representing contemporary expectations for and values relating to wildlife in Victoria?

The Act is more than 45 years old. It has not kept pace with the changes in community expectations about how we treat and interact with wildlife especially along rapidly growing communities that encroach into wildlife habitat. These pressure points which occur at the interface between community and bush are where wildlife struggles to survive through starvation, predation by pet dogs and cats, vehicle strikes and the death of juveniles who are unable to find somewhere to live when they leave their parents. Habitat is destroyed as houses and shopping centres/golf courses etc spring up and there is no tolerance for the displaced wildlife. There is no plan on how this interface should be managed until it is too late, and the only alternative is to kill those animals that are caught in the middle, relocation rarely works, and developers are not required to include wildlife corridors in their subdivisions, the shires response when challenged is the animals will find a way around. The Acts punishments for those who are non-compliant are weak and biased they do not deter offences against the act. Many major businesses would consider the economic gain of their business to far outweigh the fine imposed on them for breaching the act. An example of this Was the killing of the Portland Koala's in 2020. More than 140 acres of plantation trees were bulldozed with hundreds of koalas starving to death. A second example was the killing of over a hundred wedge tailed eagles at Tubbut in East Gippsland. The penalties were woeful with only 14 days spent in jail and a \$2,500 fine. The owner of the property did not serve a prison sentence. The outcry from the community surrounding these stories was immense both from the large loss of wildlife and the penalties that were handed out.

The penalties are discriminatory. With one rule for duck hunters and another for those who are trying to rescue the birds that are wounded. Duck shooters can be out shooting from dawn to dusk while wildlife rescuers are not allowed on the water until 10:00am. Someone who harms wildlife receives 20 penalty units whereas duck rescuers receive 60 penalty units if they enter the water before 10 am.

1.1.2 Are there conflicts between the interests or expectations of different stakeholders or community members regarding wildlife in Victoria?

With respect to this topic I would like to bring in the conflict of agriculture and the need by some farmers to cull wildlife (ATCW – Authority to control wildlife permits). It is couched in the terms of the impact of wildlife on agriculture but should also be considered the impact of agriculture on wildlife.

The application process for obtaining a cull wildlife permit is basically a tick and flick exercise. It asks the question if the wildlife is harmful to their farm but does not require them to provide proof of that harm. There is no need to describe the type of damage, no need for an accurate count of the

numbers of wildlife doing the harming. There are no checks and balances. Wildlife counts should be done by an independent group not by the person applying for the permit or the person who is going to do the shooting. There should be evidence of the impact, assessment of the damage being done by an independent arbitrator. The farmer should have to provide evidence of all non-lethal methods that have been used to scare the animals off. They should have to justify the need to cull. It is preferable to use non-lethal methods of management such as contraception. Shooting should not be the easy option.

As I stated before my husband and I farm [REDACTED] with beef cattle. We have never needed to cull the resident kangaroos on this property. We do not seek to block their traditional access routes with impenetrable fences that trap them, We have set aside areas for them to seek shelter. In 2016 we attended a native grasses field day run by the Trust for nature, Landcare, and the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority. It was well attended by many other beef producers throughout the area. They promoted the versatility and reliability of native grasses but also said that farmers should make an allowance to incorporate kangaroos into their stocking rates. Their argument was that the kangaroos were soft footed, would not damage the soils and were experts at cleaning up the dead dry matter that falls between the tussocks of grass and as such were excellent companion animals for their beef cattle. The way forward is not killing but education. Educating farmers that they can live with wildlife by thinking smarter and incorporating them into their farming practices.

My other issue with the permits to cull is the secrecy surrounding the issuing of these permits. If my neighbour is given a permit to cull kangaroos on his property that also affects my property. Yet I am not consulted or allowed to submit an impact statement on how this permit to cull will affect myself or my property. All property owners should be required or encouraged to incorporate wildlife corridors into their farms, and this should apply to any new subdivisions. If a farmer is so short of feed that he can not afford to set some aside for the wildlife, then I would suggest as part of the permit to cull their stocking rates should be looked at as to their ongoing viability.

It is also concerning that agricultural companies such as vegetable producers are allowed to set up new ventures on greenfield sites which usually adjoin water ways (for irrigation purposes) but in turn block all access to the water for wildlife through their property. They then apply for a permit to cull because the wildlife are roaming through their venture. I am not aware of any requirements for them to submit a management plan on how they are going to manage these issues in the future.

I have seen the issues above play out on many levels in the community I live and work in. Subdivisions with no allocation for wildlife habitat and movement, Grey headed flying foxes who have lost all their habitat because of subdivision and tree felling move closer into people's gardens and parks, then succumb when the temperatures rise in summer because they have no protection. Raymond Island where subdivision and tree felling for houses has pushed the koala population to smaller and smaller areas with little or no food. Dogs and cats in towns that attack and maim the local possums and koalas. Unfortunately, the act has failed to do what it should have done, protect the wildlife.