

I run a wildlife shelter in St Andrews which is in the Peri-urban Shire of Nillumbik. I would like to relate the work I do, as a volunteer, to aspects of the Wildlife Act.

What is it like to be a rescuer? As in many other typical days, the phone rings early in a school morning, big male kangaroo hit by a car in the middle of St Andrews-Panton Hill Rd, a couple of cars stopped and they are helping to direct the traffic, warning people. I arrive and this is a very big kangaroo with two broken legs, he can't stand up but is good with his claws, growling in fear. You need to know what you are doing to come close to him. He is terrified, in pain, needs urgent help. That's why we need trained rescuers. Nobody can shoot in the middle of the road, and whoever is going to move the poor kangaroo needs to think of their own safety first. It is definitely not an easy job. It is not a police job, not a vet's job. Wildlife rescuers are volunteers who provide a community service that is essential both to the animals and the people in the community that care about them. A Wildlife Act should ensure there is enough support for rescuers so they can continue with their task. Rescuers and carers are volunteers who also have jobs, families, etc. They rescue and care because they know our wildlife is not supported and we are losing way too many precious lives. This support should include veterinary assistance. At the moment, carers need to pay for xrays and blood tests out of their own pockets most of the time; and it is extremely difficult to get access to the vet medications needed on a daily basis. A Wildlife Act that really protects wildlife should consider these issues as important cogs in the whole wheel.

With respect to your issues list I have the following input:

1.1 Does the Act Reflect Contemporary Attitudes Towards Wildlife

Since the original Act in 1975 I believe attitudes towards wildlife have changed immeasurably. Many people are now aware of the rapid species decline in Australia, more so than any other country in the world. There is also more awareness of how this imbalance of species will impact the lives of the human species and how the ecosystem is a fragile web on which all of our lives depend on.

We see many cases of community uproar when there are culls or cases of animal cruelty, the latest example is the Heritage Golf Club and the Kinley case. In both instances, the general public, rescuers, vets and the media have come together and proposed solutions to the issues with those animals. DELWP has failed to protect them, too. The Wildlife Act should regulate these instances and provide clear guidelines about protection for animals and hearing the community. There was a working group of professionals, vets and rescuers that put a lot of work and submitted a proposal to DELWP with a solution, completely self-funded. It was rejected on unfounded grounds, claiming relocation doesn't work. There is no scientific basis for such claim. As a researcher myself, it frustrates me to see how facts are 'invented' to suit an agenda. As a shelter operator, I have relocated kangaroos myself and I can assure it works, as many other shelters can prove. We have soft released animals coming from other areas and they are still around our property. The Wildlife Act should ensure that wildlife carers' experience is taken into account, those shelters and the researchers should be working together.

Another serious issue is the non-existence of kangaroo counts. The "Authority ..." claims that there is an overpopulation of kangaroos. I have phoned DELWP myself and had a

conversation about this. I asked for the data, the officer confirmed there was only one count in 2018 and was never repeated. Current research on kangaroo counting methods are very clear: one count does not work due to the volatile nature of the species. That means we have NO CURRENT counts in Victoria. It is really concerning that our own government misuses research.

Another example of how we do not support wildlife research in Australia is the case of the echidnas. The team of researchers working on Kangaroo Island get all their funding from overseas. They have personally confirmed to me that they have never received funding from Australia. I propose that a Wildlife Act should provide some guidelines to the national government so that research is funded.

We see the impact of urbanization in our region and shelter - with the neighbouring growth corridors in Hume and Whittlesea pushing wildlife away from their established environments and into areas unfamiliar to them and at a rate far too fast for them to be able to adapt to naturally.

Conversely some/may people are becoming more detached from the natural environment with the digital world blurring real life. We see the outpouring of compassion for our shelter animals on our social media but also deal with the animals hit and left in the road by people who can't relate to their suffering.

1.2 Is the intent of the Act clear

I do not support the term "use" of wildlife in context of a Wildlife Act. The use wildlife plays in our lives is not for sale, negotiation or destruction. I believe the Act should be about conservation and protection. Also stipulating acceptable behaviour towards wildlife and penalties for non compliance.

The Act needs to be clear enough to prosecute miss use of wildlife by individuals or corporations. In our Shire there are instances of illegal shooting of wildlife - which rarely goes reported as nothing is done other than causing animosity between neighbours (neighbours with guns).

1.3 Traditional Owners

I support the inclusion and recognition of the cultural significance of wildlife to the Traditional Owners of the land.

2.3 Protecting Habitat on Private Land

Much of our Shire is in private ownership but there are many conflicting pressures on landowners. Particularly related to fire prevention and agriculture. Removal of habitat is the obvious answer to both - as wildlife has no monetary value and would not be prioritised over human safety. Offsets are not sufficient - removing established habitat can not just be compensated with an offset somewhere else. That is a bureaucratic answer to a real problem.

The Act must provide clear guidance on the maintenance of habitat on private land - including the recognition of wildlife corridors and the impact of destroying them. There must be policed and enforced penalties for non compliance. The penalties should reflect the impact destruction of established habitat has on the whole community/society.

Thanks you for the opportunity to input to this review. I sincerely hope the outcomes is better protection for the venerable and voiceless in our community.