

Submission to the Review of Victoria's Wildlife Act 1975

I support the Wildlife Act 1975 principles of

- the protection and conservation of wildlife,
- prevention of extinction of wildlife,
- protecting and managing biodiversity

I am a 2nd generation farmer on this farm, a large part of which was cleared in the 1950s and 60s, when State & Federal Governments actively encouraged landowners to clear bushland for agriculture. Encouragements included financial incentives.

My father chose not to clear the last 50 acres of the farm due to his concerns with erosion and the loss of more old growth messmate and stringybark forest, and a tree fern gully. I have maintained that bush paddock by removing weeds. 12 years ago, I erected a new fenceline to permanently exclude livestock from approx. half the area, and I'm currently negotiating a covenant with Trust For Nature for the whole area. I've continued and expanded shade and shelter belts; 1100 native trees were planted in a new shelter belt in July 2019. This is by way of explanation that I'm both a full time farmer and a "green farmer" who cares about the environment.

1.1.2 Polarised attitudes to lethal control of wildlife.

Kangaroos: At all times there is one young joey in the pouch, one on the ground and another in the womb, in continuous production.

In normal biology, kangaroos don't breed in drought times, for survival of the species. However, in southern Australia, there are so many farm dams and troughs that there is no such brake on their breeding.

On my farm alone,

- nearly 1000 metres of fencing and 6 gates have been replaced in the last two years that had been busted by roos.
- As many as 40 roos in one paddock with 30 in another, set stocking (eating continuously), when I'm trying to rotationally graze.(resting paddocks between grazing for pasture regeneration)
- Hot wires that control strip grazing of livestock (for optimum pasture consumption) knocked over by roos in the night, and the cattle grazing all over the paddock.

In addition, the kangaroos are ringbarking the old growth forest trees. We never had a kangaroo on the property until two National Parks were created in the district, and the numbers have exploded since then. Parks Victoria acknowledges that it needs to cull kangaroos at these sites, but says that it doesn't want the publicity because it's too close to Melbourne. So PV encourages DELWP to issue permits to private landowners to cull kangaroos on PV's behalf. (But PV is happy to cull 10,000 kangaroos each year in Hattah-Kulkyne National Park in the Mallee because it's out of sight of Melbourne).

Residents of the townships are completely unaware of these issues and are subject to emotive editorials and letters to the editor that falsely claim that kangaroos are nearly extinct.

The independent analysis by the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research should be more widely disseminated to allay the ignorant concerns of urban communities, and reduce the polarisation.

1.2.1 Purposes of the Act. I think balance is needed. i.e. wildlife numbers need to be able to be supported by the available habitat. In the past, when koalas have eaten out their habitat and become ill and undernourished, authorities have intervened and relocated large numbers of koalas to a new habitat. Both they and the former habitat have recovered. This is a good thing. Similarly, when kangaroo numbers are exceeding their habitat, it is appropriate to cull them.

1.3.3 Traditional 'Custodians' (not owners, as it's my understanding that Aborigines say that the land owns *them*, not vice-versa) I see Aborigines as stakeholders, but I wouldn't elevate them to "Key Partners" in decision making. The community needs the Act to be well received and regarded. For any one stakeholder group to be elevated would undermine the goodwill required for successful implementation of the Act.

1.4.1 Duty of Care: I'm not opposed to this, but fleshing out the concept will be devilishly difficult, as to what is "reasonable"

1.5.2 Exclusions should definitely be wild deer, wild pigs, wild horses. They should not be protected by the Act, as they cause such enormous damage to the environment. Similarly wild dogs, including dingoes, cause massive damage to native fauna and farm livestock and should not be protected by the Act.

2.2.2 As noted above PV is negligent in not tackling plague proportions of kangaroos. The Act should require Crown Land managers to meet statutory obligations to manage numbers. (And the State Government to cease underfunding PV)

2.4.3 Sentience. This is a concept that doesn't have wide support, I submit. A 'can of worms' that would undermine the main thrust of the Act. What would it achieve? – A lawyers' picnic.

3.2.1 Community Consultation is only useful if the community is informed about all the issues upon which it is asked to comment. The level of apathy and ignorance in the community on all issues, is staggering - not just the Wildlife Act. To get meaningful feedback from the community, you would need to have extensive and expensive education first.

3.4.1 There is probably scope to either issue an ATCW for greater than one year, and/or allow culling up to say 20 pa without an ATCW.

4.2.1 Advisory Panel – it could work as long as it has a wide range of stakeholders and appointment by Arthur Rylah Institute officers for example - not by Ministerial (political) appointments of ex parliamentarians and staffers.

5.7.1 Review of decisions: VCAT is time consuming (long wait in the queue) and expensive. Is there another review body that's more accessible?