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11/11/07.
MHW

To Dr. Maxine Cooper
Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.

30/10/07

Dear Dr. Cooper,

I am writing to you on behalf of Animal Liberation ACT concerning the inquiry, which the Chief Minister has asked you to undertake, into the measures that need to be taken by the ACT and Commonwealth Governments to preserve the ecosystems of the ACT grasslands.

The state of these grasslands, and the plight of the population of Eastern Grey Kangaroos which live there has been under discussion in various venues for most of this year, as no doubt you are aware. As one of a number of concerned animal welfare groups, we are anxious to avoid another wholesale, brutal slaughter of kangaroos, such as that which took place at the Googong Dam in July 2004.

It is obvious that a cohesive assessment and management plan for these areas is necessary. Interested environmental and animal welfare groups have been stating this for a long time. However the assumption that kangaroos contribute to the degradation of these grasslands and the possible extinction of some species of rare wildlife is very debateable. Kangaroos are a part of their environment, they do not destroy it.

The problem is human activity, particularly in the areas under the control of the Defence Force. At a meeting convened by the RSPCA in May this year, participants were informed that the now defunct Defence force site at Lawson is scheduled for development as a new suburb in 2009. Likewise the Majura Defence force firing range seems likely to be opened up to new traffic in the future. In fact, these so-called native grasslands are primarily areas of human activity and development, thus all species within them should be treated with equal consideration.

A meeting was convened by the Defence force on 5th July 2007 attended by interested environmental and animal welfare organisations. Some excellent solutions to the problems were proposed by the Queanbeyan Wildcare Group, and these recommendations were accepted by the Defence force. These included the translocation of kangaroos, in which Wildcare have extensive experience, and the erection of temporary moveable fencing around the habitat of the threatened species. These proposals seem to offer the best solution to the problem so far.

We wish you well in your inquiry, and we will await the results of your findings with great interest,

Yours faithfully,

Mary Hayes, President, Animal Liberation ACT
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Mary L. Hayes

Animal Liberation ACT submission, investigation into the ACT's Lowland Native Grasslands

Animal Liberation ACT (AL ACT) is a not-for-profit organisation that campaigns to prevent all forms of animal cruelty and suffering. AL ACT is pleased to provide comment on the investigation into the ACT's Lowland Native Grasslands. AL ACT's submission relates only to the aspects of the investigation that may impact on animals. Those aspects are:

The impact of kangaroos on the ACT's Lowland Native Grasslands

Terms of Reference for the enquiry 'number 2' states:

Identify the causes of the deterioration of lowland native grasslands. In doing this, the impact of eastern grey kangaroos, both in the long and short term, is to be explicitly addressed.

Animal Liberation ACT is concerned that this enquiry has pre-established bias against kangaroos as an assumption has already been made that kangaroos are responsible for the 'deterioration' of the lowland native grasslands with no scientific evidence being provided. What *has* caused damage to the grasslands is 200 years of mismanagement, land clearing, overgrazing of animals which are not suited to the fragile impoverished land, grassland fragmentation and extended drought.

The kangaroo has co-evolved with Australian plant communities for up to 16 million years and is an essential part of the Australian environment. Kangaroos are soft footed animals, who unlike the hard-hoofed animals that have been introduced into Australia do not damage the fragile Australian soil. The soft padded feet and long tail of the kangaroo are essential for the ecological health of the land as regenerators of native grasses (D Ramp). Any seedling that falls into the long-tapering footprint of the kangaroo is buried into the hole left by the toenail. Covered and with moisture concentrated at one point, the germinated seedling has a chance of survival. Their tail drags along behind them while they are grazing, pressing the ground, rolling seeds into the earth. Kangaroos play an undeniable role in biological diversity and ecological integrity. Their urine and faeces is a natural fertiliser, essential to the health of the land and biodiversity. As a result, removing kangaroos also removes needed nutrients that the kangaroos put back into the biomass.

History has shown that sudden crashes of wildlife populations have over taken other species once populous, to the brink of extinction. *Our 'Common' Wildlife May Be the Next 'sleeping' Threatened Species*, a research paper written by Dr Dan Ramp of the University of New South Wales in collaboration Erin Roger examines this issue:

Considerable conservation effort has been invested to protecting threatened species, including large-scale endeavors to quantify the roles threatened species play in ecosystems functioning and resilience. Focusing on the present, declared threatened species warrant this attention because of the more immediate risk of their contribution to biodiversity loss; however, it is also important to quantify the roles that common species play in maintaining ecosystem integrity, particularly in light of threatening drivers like rapid climate change, we argue that conservation efforts must increase their scope to include both threatened and species typically considered common; focusing on those species that contribute to functional roles in ecosystems. *This includes many native herbivores, such as kangaroos and wombats, that play vital roles in ecosystem functioning but are often victimised and treated with a lack of concern because of socio-political factors and historical value judgments, rather than heeding biological and ecological factors.*

Attacking a single species, let alone a native species, has never yet solved an ecological problem anywhere in the world (although it has caused a few). But even if the cruelty of culling could be supported on ecological grounds, it will never be ethically supportable. We urge Environment ACT to find genuinely humane and rationale solutions to alleged "problems" involving kangaroos.

Animal Liberation repeats its position that killing healthy animals is never humane, even if it could be done without causing pain and distress. Kangaroo culling can never and has never been done without causing pain and distress. There are always some animals that are not killed instantly and the shock and distress caused to the survivors is horrific.

Animal Liberation ACT supports:

- The Totemic value of the Kangaroo to the local Aboriginal Community
- Restoring grasslands and providing green corridors
- Wildcare's expertise in kangaroo management
- A 'Whole of ecosystem' approach
- Translocation of kangaroos where possible
- Erection of exclusion fencing where required
- Fertility control including vasectomies for Alpha males

Yours sincerely

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14th Decemember 2007

Bibilography

Ramp D, *Dispersion of Eatsern Grey Kangaroos and their Impacts on Vegetation in Semi-Rural Environemnts*, PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2002.

Ramp D, Coulson G, 'Density dependence in forgaing habitat preference of eastern grey kangaroos', *Oikos* 98, pp 393-402, 2002.



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Investigation into the ACT's Lowland Native Grasslands Additional information in support of December 2007 submission

Since Animal Liberation ACT's (ALACT) original submission, the Department of Defence, with assistance from the ACT Government, slaughtered 500 healthy kangaroos at the former Belconnen Naval Transmission Station (BNTS). The slaughter of these 500 kangaroos confirms ALACT's previous contention that the Terms of Reference for the Investigation into the ACT's Lowland Native Grasslands demonstrated a pre-existing bias against kangaroos. We were correct in our assumption that kangaroos were to be deemed responsible for the 'deterioration' of the lowland native grasslands, despite the failure to produce scientific evidence to support this assertion. The assertion that kangaroos are responsible for damaging the ACT's lowland native grasslands is still NOT supported by any evidence.

The BNTS kangaroo slaughter did not comply with the *Code of practice for the humane destruction of kangaroos in the ACT* (the Code). In particular, section 2 of the Code notes that:

Kangaroos cannot easily be driven like sheep or cattle and for the larger species there is a high risk of injury to the animal and handler.

Trapping of the larger kangaroos, such as the Eastern Grey, is impractical even for small confined populations. Trapping is stressful for these kangaroos and includes the risk of leg breakages and capture myopathy causing death.

Indeed, the Code specifically provides that 'trapping to enable destruction is not recommended'.

The kangaroos at BTNS were herded into the pens by motor vehicle. In addition to causing great distress to the animals, this resulted in the motor vehicles being driven repeatedly over the grassland that was ostensibly being protected by the kangaroo 'cull'.

The herding and trapping of the kangaroos, undertaken despite the risks outlined in the Code, resulted in many instances of cruelty, including:

- kangaroos colliding with fences at speed, resulting in broken bones and other injuries
- kangaroos collapsing from injuries and exhaustion
- kangaroos dying from injuries and stress whilst in the holding area
- many 'at foot' joeys, who are incapable of surviving independently, becoming separated from their mothers
- kangaroos being left in the holding area for extended periods with no shade, food or water
- inappropriate actions by security guards, who performed services unrelated to security, for which they were apparently unqualified. These actions, which included using cars and loud noise to herd the kangaroos, impacted adversely on the kangaroos
- a kangaroo was run over and killed by security staff
- kangaroos injured themselves escaping over and under the holding fence, only to be herded into the pens again, and

- the kangaroos appeared to be permanently agitated and confused, due to the round the clock presence of security patrols and Environment ACT staff.

Documentary evidence of each of these incidents can be provided on request.

ALACT is concerned that in the weeks leading up to slaughter, vehicles were continually driven on the BNTS grasslands, rather than remaining on the service roads. Once the herding process began, the traffic increased dramatically. Numerous vehicles, including those of the security company and Environment ACT, were seen continually traversing the grasslands, destroying what the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment was charged with protecting. The damage inflicted by this incompetence was far greater than any damage ever caused by kangaroos. Currently, bulldozers and trucks are on the BNTS protected grasslands, causing further damage.

Kangaroos are not responsible for the state of our grasslands. What has caused the damage is 200 years of mismanagement, land clearing and overgrazing of hard-hoofed animals unsuited to the fragile environment.

The slaughter of the BNTS kangaroos was a missed scientific opportunity. Valuable experience in translocation could have been gained. It is likely that instances of land-locked wildlife will become more common, due to expanding cities and short-term town planning. In the end, the exorbitant cost (both financially and morally) incurred by the public in killing the BNTS kangaroos was much greater than any translocation cost ever could have been.

We understand that a license to kill another 30 of the BNTS kangaroos has been issued. ALACT calls for this licence to be revoked immediately. We strongly oppose lethal 'management' of kangaroo populations, whether confined or free roaming. A more humane, and evidenced-based, approach is long overdue. In this regard, ALACT submits that the only truly 'humane' method of management is the use of exclusion fencing in areas of concern and the establishment of corridors to enable native wildlife to travel between suitable areas.

Bernard L Brennan
President
Animal Liberation ACT
21 January 2009