

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Melbourne—Thursday, 11 March 2021

MEMBERS

Ms Sonja Terpstra—Chair

Mr Clifford Hayes—Deputy Chair

Dr Matthew Bach

Ms Melina Bath

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Stuart Grimley

Mr Andy Meddick

Mr Cesar Melhem

Dr Samantha Ratnam

Ms Nina Taylor

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Ms Georgie Crozier

Mr David Davis

Dr Tien Kieu

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr Tim Quilty

WITNESSES

Ms Tina Lawrence, Co-founder, Victorian Wildlife Shelters Coalition (*via videoconference*).

The CHAIR: I declare open the Environment and Planning Committee public hearing for the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the traditional custodians of the various lands which each of us are gathered on today and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings.

I would also like to welcome any members of the public who may be watching these proceedings via the live broadcast.

At this point in time I will introduce members of the committee who are here at the moment, who are present. My name is Sonja Terpstra. I am the Chair of the Environment and Planning Committee. Appearing with me in the room is Mr Andy Meddick. Appearing via Zoom is Mr Stuart Grimley, and just entering the room right now is Dr Sam Ratnam. There will be other members joining us momentarily as well.

In regard to the evidence that you will be giving today, I will just let you know that all evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website. For the Hansard record, if you could please state your name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

Ms LAWRENCE: My name is Tina Lawrence, and I am a co-founder of the Victorian Wildlife Shelters Coalition.

The CHAIR: Great, welcome. All right. At this point if I could ask you to commence by giving your opening statement which, if you could, just please keep to a maximum of 10 minutes. I will give you a prompt 2 minutes before we get to the end of that session just so that you are aware that your time is coming to an end, and then that will also allow committee members who are present plenty of opportunity to ask you questions. With that, I will hand over to you to give your presentation. Thank you.

Ms LAWRENCE: Thank you. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to give evidence at this inquiry. I am giving evidence as a wildlife rescuer and as a licensed wildlife shelter operator. While no doubt you will have many other people give evidence to this inquiry about the need to protect endangered species and ecosystems, I would like to highlight the position of the common species of wildlife in Victoria under the Authority to Control Wildlife destruction permit system that is currently in place under the *Wildlife Act*.

According to the permit data I have provided you with along with the submission, over the 10 years between 2009 and in 2019 the permit system authorised the killing of over 1.7 million wild animals and birds, including hundreds of thousands of kangaroos and tens of thousands of wombats. We say that the reason for these industrial levels of wildlife destruction is that DELWP is subject to a significant level of industry capture, where landholders and their lobby groups, the kangaroo industry and shooters have a disproportionate influence on government policymaking in wildlife management. This influence has resulted in the economic interests and demands of landholders being prioritised over all other interests, including the broader interests of the Victorian community. It has also resulted in weak regulation and an absence of proper oversight of the permit system, which treats lethal control as the default position rather than the last resort in human-wildlife conflicts. Even so, as we speak, DELWP are currently seeking to weaken this system even further by streamlining the application

and assessment process in the name of easing the administrative “burden on landholders”, and this is something we hear time after time. It is the equivalent of cutting red tape, “easing the burden on landholders”.

There are a number of reasons why the Victorian community should be very concerned about how this system is being managed and what it means in terms of the health of ecosystems across Victoria. Firstly, the Victorian community is entitled to expect that its government enacts laws and policies that ensure wildlife is protected and managed for the diversity of interests represented by the broader community and not just for an influential minority. In its current form section 28A, which is the section of the *Wildlife Act* which creates the authority to control wildlife permit system, does not meet those expectations. It is not even close. The destruction permit system effectively operates as a free service to landholders to enable them to destroy unwanted wild animals and birds on their properties. The permit system and the *Wildlife Act* more broadly do not even contemplate the interests of the broader community.

Secondly, the Victorian community should be concerned that there is no conservation benefit whatsoever in the industrial-scale removal of wildlife from the landscape. The science has well and truly moved on from the designation of certain species like kangaroos, dingoes, wombats and possums as vermin or pest animals requiring lethal management. Instead of making this clear, I am sorry to say that DELWP continues to rely on these debunked and out-of-date pest-control narratives to justify its support for the permit system and more broadly for the commercial kangaroo meat and skins industry, which was established just recently in 2019.

The third reason the Victorian community should be concerned about this permit system and the way that it is managed is that there is no effective oversight or enforcement of the system. DELWP like to talk a big game when it comes to oversight, compliance and enforcement activities. It is only when you break it down that it becomes clear how little oversight there actually is, and we have put that in our submission. We have broken down that in our submission, and I am happy to give you more details if required.

We have described the woeful inadequacy of the application process in the submission. We have also described how there is no oversight of shooter activities in the field. If there is no oversight of shooter activities, there is no way that DELWP can claim to have any idea—I mean, none—about how many animals are actually being killed under these permits. This is a huge concern, because we do not know what the impact of constantly removing hundreds of thousands of wild animals and birds has on the long-term functioning of already vulnerable ecosystems in Victoria.

The fourth reason that the community should be concerned about this permit system is that they are footing the bill for all of this destruction. Wealthy landowners in this state do not pay anything for destruction permits to kill the wildlife on their properties. The entire permit system is fully funded by the Victorian taxpayers to the tune of around \$2 million to \$2.5 million per year, and I can let you have the details of how that has been calculated if you would like that.

In addition, standing up, administering and regulating the kangaroo pet food trial for five years and then establishing a permanent commercial kangaroo industry in October 2019 involved substantial costs in developing the two kangaroo management plans that we have had already and in decentralising oversight of the commercial industry across four government agencies as well as in giving oversight responsibilities to the Game Management Authority, which obtained an increase in its budget last year of around \$6 million to manage those responsibilities. The cost of estimating kangaroo population and setting quotas for the kangaroo industry is also a major expenditure. Aerial surveys are very expensive. The three that we have had so far in this state are estimated to have cost around \$200 000 to \$250 000 per survey.

So what needs to happen? We have had report after report after report from global agencies and from scientists overseas and here over the past five years that have sounded the alarm on the dire and declining state of biodiversity and our ecosystems. We need to take action. In our submission we have identified significant issues in the structure, governance and implementation of the *Wildlife Act*. Essentially our position is that the *Wildlife Act* is not working to protect wildlife because it prioritises economic interests over the interests of the broader Victorian community, and this needs to change. Reform of the *Wildlife Act* by strengthening legal protections and oversight is a good place to start, and we have made a number of suggestions about how to do that in our submission. Ultimately, though, we need to transition away from this model of managing human-wildlife conflicts to something that relies less on lethal control and more on tolerance and coexistence.

At this point I would just like to say that in the submission we have talked about the lack of independence of the OCR, and I just want to make a few more comments that are not in the submission about that. While we do not doubt the commitment of the conservation regulator to compliance and enforcement, the fact is that DELWP and its many predecessors have demonstrated time after time over the past 45 years that they are incapable of properly managing human-wildlife conflict and wildlife crime or meeting the critical moment we are in in terms of biodiversity loss. DELWP policing DELWP via the OCR is not going to fix that.

The lack of independence is just one of the issues, but so is the fact that the OCR is completely overloaded with responsibility for oversight of 20 different laws, many of them as complex, if not more complex, than the *Wildlife Act*. Given this workload, we have no doubt that wildlife management will remain, as it always has been, the lowest of low priorities. Other people have given evidence that the OCR could be uplifted to become a statutory authority, but we do not believe that that will resolve these core problems. Instead, we suggest that the OCR remain as it is and retain its authority over its other responsibilities for forestry and all those other things but that there be a carve-out, so that responsibility for human-wildlife conflicts, such as the permit system, section 7, section 28A, wildlife crime and wildlife welfare issues, are managed by an independent statutory office of wildlife protection which would sit within the *Wildlife Act* but be completely independent of DELWP.

We also need to look at other changes, like the development perhaps of a statewide wildlife action plan based on the model that they use in India, which has been highly successful over a number of decades. We also need massive cultural change in the value we place on our wildlife and habitats through public education and engagement. Critical to this will be removing provisions relating to game and hunting that are currently in the *Wildlife Act*—they do not belong there—and putting an end to this pest control narrative in wildlife management that the current system perpetuates and which encourages contempt and cruelty towards these animals.

The CHAIR: Ms Lawrence, you have 2 minutes.

Ms LAWRENCE: Cultural change has to start with getting landholders to see themselves as having shared responsibility for these issues and encouraging the protection of our wildlife and their habitats by developing a toolbox of tax and other incentive mechanisms, like stewardship payments as well as education and technical assistance, to encourage and support them in moving away from the current default opposition of lethal control and towards tolerance, coexistence and the benefits of conservation of biodiversity.

This is not about resources. If the government can spend tens of millions of dollars on supporting the authority to control a wildlife permit system and standing up a permanent kangaroo meat and skins industry in Victoria, it can absolutely afford to fund these types of reforms and innovations. Ultimately, whether we are able to prevent the current declines we are experiencing depends largely on political will. Given the federal government has not demonstrated any commitment to making the changes that are needed, it seems like it is up to the state governments like the Victorian government, as a last line of defence, to step up.

And just to complete my statement I would just like to refer to the American influence and how American politicians have actually stood up for wildlife over the years. I do not know whether people are aware, but the only reason koalas are not extinct in Australia is that in 1927 Herbert Hoover, who had actually been in Australia for much of his youth, banned the import of koala pelts. At that point about 8 million koalas had been slaughtered for the fur trade, and President Hoover—who is not remembered well for other things, but he is definitely remembered well for this particular action that he took—effectively ended the fur trade in koalas in 1927.

I would also like to refer to what is currently happening in their House of Representatives, where we have two congressmen—one a Democrat, one a Republican—who have introduced the Kangaroo Protection Bill into the House of Representatives. They did that a couple of weeks ago. That Act seeks to stop the import of all kangaroo products. That Act is currently with the House Judiciary Committee, and at some point after the committee has dealt with more pressing matters like the insurrection, hopefully it will consider this Bill. So the rest of the world is looking at us, and we need to respond in the same strong terms that the world has, in terms of their support for our wildlife and their concern about what is happening in terms of the destruction of wildlife in this state and across Australia.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you, Ms Lawrence. Mr Meddick.

Mr MEDDICK: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Ms Lawrence, for your presentation and your submission. You raise an enormous amount of issues in this, and I have to say I do not disagree with anything that I have read in your submission. In particular I want to make mention of the fact that there is this massive conflict of interest in that we have a department that is responsible for the life and the welfare and the livelihood of our native animals, and it is the same department that issues the permit to kill them. I think that is an enormous conflict of interest, and I have personally seen just how easy it is for a landowner to gain an ATCW. I have sat in a council meeting where a DELWP officer has told a developer, 'I can have for those kangaroos, a permit for you to kill them within the next 2 to 3 hours if you just tick this box', and yet they told them that if they wanted to translocate them, it could take anywhere up to two years and possibly longer. I have also had farmers that I have spoken to tell me that even though they wanted to get an ATCW on their property, they were quite shocked at the fact that they had been told by DELWP officers that they could have that authority to kill those animals within an extremely short space of time, when they thought that they would have to adhere to what is actually on the application form, where there is a box that says: 'You must have explored all non-lethal methods before undertaking lethal methods'. It seems to be a real problem within that department.

Look, I want to explore with you and ask you a question. It has long been the proposition of the party that I represent that there should be established an independent office of animal protection. So with what you are saying about wildlife and having an independent office there, do you feel that those two could be part of the same department, or do you feel that they should be separate?

Ms LAWRENCE: Thank you for that question. First of all, you are absolutely right. I think Michelle Thomas a couple of weeks ago gave evidence to this inquiry about how easy it is to get a permit, and that is absolutely true. Any wildlife shelter across Victoria will tell you of the many stories, and interactions with farmers will tell you how easy it is. I mean, really they hand them out like lollies.

In terms of the other part of your question, look, I have really seriously thought about whether or not wildlife could sit within an office of animal protection, a more general office, but I do not think that that is appropriate. Wildlife are very different animals. They are not domestic or farm animals, they are in a different category and, frankly, they have been at the absolute bottom of the pile in terms of priorities and resourcing and attention for the last 45 years. I actually think it is really important that there be a separate office of wildlife protection just focusing on the many, many complex issues that are facing our wildlife. In my statement I went through that, dealing with the section 7 unprotected issues, dealing with the permit system, dealing with wildlife crime and wildlife welfare, dealing with the health issues, and the kinds of innovations we need to start encouraging our landowners to place value on our wildlife—not a commercial value; a value for their own sake on wildlife. So no, I do not think it should be incorporated into a broader office.

Mr MEDDICK: Thank you so much. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Ms Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you for your submission, very detailed, and for your passion for animals as well. I was just wondering, because it seems almost overwhelming: how does your organisation calculate species like kangaroos et cetera and their viability, for want of a better word—because obviously each animal matters—into the future?

Ms LAWRENCE: Our organisation and many, many other wildlife organisations have serious concerns about the viability of kangaroo populations in the future. If we look at the kangaroo management plan that is in place currently, if you go through it, issues like climate change—there is no mainstreaming of climate change in either the *Wildlife Act* or in the kangaroo management plan. There is about a paragraph, I think, on climate change. Kangaroos are obviously, like every other species, going to be impacted by climate change and the fact that that is not being taken seriously in planning forward and in looking at the long-term viability of kangaroo populations under the kangaroo management plan is really hard to understand. So yes, we have got concerns about the common species like kangaroos and wombats and emus and all the rest—possums. They get very much overlooked in discussions about biodiversity. People tend to concentrate all their efforts on threatened species, but it is like a conveyor belt. When we are concentrating all our effort on threatened species and getting them to the point where they can recover, we are missing what is happening in the background. In the submission, I talked about the two huge surveys of global populations of common species by Ceballos—and it is a massive joint effort obviously—that really discussed the fact that we are missing the wood for the trees. We

are missing the declines in common species across the globe, very significant declines, because we are so focused on threatened species and heading off the peril that they are in. I am not saying that we should not be concentrating on threatened species, but we need to be looking at what is happening to our common species as well in the background.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Ms Bath.

Ms BATH: Thanks, Chair, and thank you for your presentation, Ms Lawrence. I will pick up probably where you left off. This committee has certainly been tasked through the Parliament to look at the decline in biodiversity, and much of our discussion has been around threatened species. One of the key problems, the key issues, the key impacts in Victoria is fire. I notice in your heading you are co-founder of the Victorian Wildlife Shelters Coalition. What do you do in response to fire on the landscape and in wildlife shelters?

Ms LAWRENCE: When there is an emergency, I am not really involved with that part of it. I really operate as a shelter. I am not trained to do bushfire work, but I can give you a rough outline of what the responsibilities are. Essentially bushfire response to wildlife is directed by DELWP. I think there have been some recent discussions and there has been a plan organised to involve Zoos Victoria vets and some wildlife volunteers to be available to go into those kinds of situations, but look, it is not really my area. I was not involved in those discussions. We do have a role. There is definitely a role for rescuers, there is definitely a role for wildlife shelters, but it obviously needs to be managed and coordinated at some level. What we have been looking at and a number of wildlife groups have been looking at is making sure that the expertise and the experience that we have in the wildlife sector through rescuers and shelters is used to the best effect in those emergency situations. I just do not want to step over into other areas that I am not 100 per cent familiar with.

Ms BATH: Thank you very much for your response, and in the nicest way to play the devil's advocate: our committee really is looking at threatened species, and I am just interested in how you have focused a great deal of attention on the ATCW. In my assumption, looking at our terms of reference, this comes in under '(f) any other related matters'. I appreciate you have the floor, but can you outline and help the committee understand what animals are attached to that, what animals, kangaroos et cetera, are in that program?

Ms LAWRENCE: With the submission, I gave you the data that has been put out by DELWP for the number of permits and the number of animals for the period 2009 to 2019, so you should have access to that. It shows that, if you add them all up, it is a total of 1.7 million wild animals and birds over that period. There are around 65 species that are covered by that. They include a wide range of birds; wombats; obviously kangaroos, and the three species of kangaroos we have in Victoria, which are eastern grey, western grey and red kangaroos—there is a very small population of red kangaroos up in the north-west corner of Victoria; long-billed corellas; lots of ducks; there are the two kinds of wallabies we have in Victoria; common brushtails; we have got long-necked tortoises; Cape Barren geese. There are about 65 different species.

Included in some of these years there are records for permits given to disturb grey-headed flying foxes. We do not have the 2020 data, but I can tell you that—I am up in the Otways—there was a massive permit issued to the Colac Botanic Gardens to shift, I think it could be, between 6000 and 7000 flying foxes that were taking refuge in the botanical gardens down there, and obviously that is a vulnerable species. So permits are issued from time to time for some vulnerable species, but generally speaking the permits are issued for most of the common species across the board—except of course koalas.

Ms BATH: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Dr Bach.

Dr BACH: Thank you very much, Chair. And thanks, Ms Lawrence, for being with us and for your presentation and also your submission. As Mr Meddick said, I think, in particular, we have covered a really significant amount of ground. Something that we have not covered yet in much detail is the impact of invasive species. So I wonder, could I get your views about the threat of ecosystem decline from invasive species, and then also get your expert opinion about what we are doing right now in Victoria and if we should be doing things differently in your view?

Ms LAWRENCE: Look, I am not qualified to talk about invasive species, but as a wildlife shelter operator and rescuer I can certainly talk about cats and dogs, which pose a massive threat to our wildlife. And look, again, I am not an expert. I cannot give you data on that. All I can say from my experience and from the experience of every other shelter that I have had contact with, is just a massive number of animals are affected by predation by cats, many in an urban setting but also in a country setting. There is no requirement to contain cats in country areas. Again, that is another exception that is made for farm cats to control mice and that kind of thing, but basically there are a lot of cats out there, and they are doing a lot of damage.

In terms of dogs—because a lot of people do focus on cats as the main cause of predation, particularly for the smaller wild animals that we have and birds—I have to say dogs are also a major issue. I myself am between Lorne and Aireys Inlet in the Otways, and I have attended lots and lots of rescues and had to get treatment for a lot of animals, a lot of koalas, that have suffered from not dog attacks but from being bitten, from being harassed by dogs. So I cannot talk about other species, but as a rescuer and as a wildlife shelter that is what I have seen—that a huge number of wildlife, particularly the smaller wildlife, are impacted by dogs and cats.

Dr BACH: Thanks so much, Ms Lawrence. I understand what you say—that you cannot necessarily present us with data—but certainly I think that that sort of anecdotal evidence from your experience in the field is nonetheless very valuable to us. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr Grimley.

Mr GRIMLEY: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Ms Lawrence, for your submission and the information you provided. I have just got a question around the submission. We speak about DELWP having discretionary decision-making powers, and there are suggestions that these have been used to favour the interests of agriculture over community preference for wildlife conservation. Just in relation to that comment, are you able to elaborate on this statement at all? And can you provide to the inquiry specific examples of such bias?

Ms LAWRENCE: I mean, we see it every day. I am in regional Victoria and I have conversations all the time with local farmers and people who live around here. This system absolutely 100 per cent prioritises the interests of landholders over any other interests. I think I gave some evidence earlier that the discretion is inevitably almost exclusively exercised in favour of that influential minority in Victoria. I think another wildlife group, the Australian Wildlife Protection Council, asked DELWP a couple of years ago, ‘Well, can you give us any examples of when an application has been rejected?’, and they could not. As I have described, they are handed out very freely. I know that they talk about regulation and the criteria that they use and that kind of thing, but from my experience in talking to local farmers and checking online forums from time to time—farmers and shooters—they just give each other hints about how to get them and how to have no trouble. ‘Just make sure that you mention that they’re coming up to the house and threatening your kids’—that is how you get an ACTW permit. So I would describe the system as absolutely favouring the interests of one very small minority of the community over everybody else.

Mr GRIMLEY: Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Dr Ratnam.

Dr RATNAM: Thanks very much, Ms Lawrence, for your presentation and the work that you do. I have kind of a double-barrelled question. Firstly, your submission contains some very concerning experiences that you have had over 30 years as a wildlife carer. Can you share both your experiences and those of the people and groups you represent working in the field of the impact of native forest logging on wildlife? That is the first question—the impact of native forest logging on wildlife. And connected to that, yesterday we heard that despite many breaches the Office of the Conservation Regulator has not imposed any penalties on VicForests. So if logging remains regulated by the OCR and we have wildlife carved out, what is your view on whether wildlife protection can be adequately regulated?

Ms LAWRENCE: I think that you might have the wrong submission there. I think you might have Michelle Thomas’s submission there.

Dr RATNAM: Oh, right.

Ms LAWRENCE: We were supposed to give evidence together couple of weeks ago, so there might have been a bit of a mix-up, but she definitely dealt with those issues. She has been a carer for 30 years. I have not.

Dr RATNAM: Oh, apologies.

Ms LAWRENCE: Her submission and her evidence was much more related to those kinds of issues—forestry and logging and impact on wildlife—so that is not something that I can really speak about.

Dr RATNAM: Do you have any further views on the OCR and its ability to regulate wildlife conservation with the powers that it has at the moment?

Ms LAWRENCE: In my statement I made it clear that I did not think that DELWP policing DELWP would work. It has not worked over 45 years, and I think that the issues relating to human-wildlife conflict and the fact that that is resulting in removing industrial levels of wildlife from the landscape every year needs to be dealt with and managed by another authority. I do not think that they are up to it. I really do not doubt the conservation regulator's commitment to all of these things, but, as I said in my statement, they are completely overcommitted. Their workload is just absolutely enormous, and I really fear that what will happen is wildlife, which has always been the lowest of low priorities within DELWP, will remain at that level. Look, frankly, I listened to the conservation regulator's evidence yesterday. A lot of time was spent on forestry and camp fires and vehicles and forests and that kind of thing, and other than trafficking, wild life crime and welfare and the licensing system barely rated a mention. It just really concerns me that, with the level of responsibility they have and the breadth of responsibility they have, wildlife will not be a priority. And I think it deserves to be, because wildlife and their habitats are exactly what we are talking about when we are talking about ecosystem decline.

Dr RATNAM: Great. Thank you.

The CHAIR: I might just ask a question if I can, and please correct me if I am wrong because I just want to make sure I am understanding what you are saying in your submission. I am looking at page 5, and you make some comments where you say:

In our view, it is critical that any reform of the Wildlife Act must include:

- The end of ... the ATCW permit system;
- The end of the commercial kangaroo meat and skins industry—

and—

...

- The establishment of a new and INDEPENDENT statutory authority to oversee governance, compliance and enforcement of ... the FFG Act and the Wildlife Act.

I think this is what you have been saying: is it your contention that the commercial kangaroo meat and skins industry is, I guess, the reason why so many permits are being issued for the culling of kangaroos? Is that your contention, or have I got that wrong?

Ms LAWRENCE: No. It was under the kangaroo pet food trial, under that five-year program—from 2014, when it started, to 2019, when the government established a permanent kangaroo industry—that the number of permits and the number of kangaroos for which the permits were issued increased by 250 per cent. That is all in the evaluation summary that DELWP published in about 2018, I think. So the huge rise in the number of permits, the huge rise in the number of animals being killed under those permits, DELWP themselves actually directly attributed to introducing a profit incentive. They realised that there was a really big problem there, and they have made some adjustment in the way that they have established the permanent commercial kangaroo industry. But it has also resulted in some softening of regulations. For example, there is now no need to go and apply for an ATCW permit to get the kangaroos on your property removed. So a landowner does not even need to go to the trouble of getting a permit. You just get onto Service Victoria, you put in your details and they will supply you with a list of the names of a number of shooters that will come to your property and remove the kangaroos. These are commercial shooters, and of course they regulate it from the back end, in terms of tags—they are issued with tags and that kind of thing. But I think it is a serious concern that landholders who want to participate no longer even need get a permit or justify the need to remove those animals from their properties.

The CHAIR: Well, that is what I want to ask you a bit more about in a bit more depth, because other witnesses have given evidence to say that when you apply for a permit you need to demonstrate or you should demonstrate what other measures you have taken to try and address the problem that you are saying you have got rather than as a first preference saying, 'I need someone to come and cull these kangaroos'. Are you able to provide any insight into your understanding of what landholders or others might need to demonstrate to DELWP or any other agency and what they need to show that they have tried before getting issued a permit, or are you saying that as far as you are aware there is now no requirement to demonstrate any other mitigation measures?

Ms LAWRENCE: Okay, so we are talking about two different things. Landholders who want to shoot the kangaroos themselves still apply for a permit and still need to go through that process and fill out that application form. It is only when landholders want to use commercial shooters who are participating in the commercial industry that they no longer have to apply for a permit. So if we are just talking about permits issued for landholders who want to shoot their own wildlife on their properties, there is a form. It is easily accessible. You can find it on the DELWP website. If you have a look at the form, it really is just a tick-the-box kind of form. DELWP do have criteria that they say they use, but in terms of providing evidence—and I put this in the submission—they do not have to provide any evidence. All they have to do is provide best estimates, their own estimates, of the numbers of animals that are on their property that they need to remove from their property. They do not need to provide evidence.

Certainly being used in a lot of wildlife settings we have wildlife cameras. Why are they not required to provide evidence of both the numbers and the type of damage and that the damage is actually being caused by that particular species? A lot of big farms also use drones. Why is that technology not being used? There is really no requirement to provide evidence apart from just running through what is really just a process of ticking through the boxes. As far as I am aware and in my conversations with farmers around this region, you are really not required to provide too much information at all.

The CHAIR: Okay. I have got more questions, but I will put them on notice, I am guessing. I will go to Mrs McArthur, because she has not had a question yet.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: And we are very short on time as well. Sorry.

Mrs McARTHUR: Of course we are. Can I just confirm that you are not a carer of wildlife, for a start? Is that what you said—you are not a wildlife carer?

Ms LAWRENCE: Yes, I am. I operate a shelter here in the Otways.

Mrs McARTHUR: Good. So then you would be aware of the number of animals that are killed on the roadside, particularly kangaroos, wallabies and so on. Do you agree that this is a serious problem? We not only have roadsides now that are conservation areas and biodiversity breeding grounds, but we have also got wire rope barriers that actually catch kangaroos all the time. Do you focus on that as an issue as well? And do all animals that are in the wild come under your jurisdiction, or should we eradicate all cats, dogs, foxes? Even horses are considered by some to be vermin and a pest. Where do you go with the extermination of those animals that are not native, or do all wild animals come under your care and jurisdiction?

Ms LAWRENCE: Yes, so as a licensed wildlife shelter, I am able to provide care and rehabilitation to most species. What we do in the wildlife rescue and shelter community is we have got particular experts for particular species, and it may be that a difficult species might need to be passed on to someone with more experience or to particular enclosures and that kind of thing. But basically yes, most regional wildlife shelters are able to deal with most animals or should be able to, and if not, they have got the support of the rest of the wildlife community to make sure that they get appropriate care for that particular animal, that particular species. I am not talking about exterminating cats and dogs; I am talking about taking sensible measures to make sure that they are contained and public messaging that this is really important to conserve many of our small wildlife species and also our bird species. I like cats. I do not have them, or dogs. I do not have them, because it is just not appropriate up here, but I am not talking—

Mrs McARTHUR: So how would you go about reducing the numbers in the wild?

The CHAIR: Sorry, Mrs McArthur, we are going to have to wrap it up, because we are now over time, so again I encourage you to put questions on notice to this witness, if you have any. Thank you very much, Ms Lawrence, for your contribution today. We really appreciate you helping the committee understand this important issue from your perspective.

Witness withdrew.