

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Melbourne—Wednesday, 16 June 2021

(via videoconference)

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

WITNESS

Ms Jane Gibb, Secretary, Gariwerd Animal Protection Alliance.

The CHAIR: I declare open the Legislative Council 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 as well.

At this point I will take the opportunity just to introduce committee members to you. I am Sonja Terpstra; I am the Chair of the Environment and Planning Committee. We also have attending via Zoom Mr Clifford Hayes, who is the Deputy Chair; Mr Cesar Melhem; Mr Andy Meddick; and Ms Bev McArthur.

All evidence that is taken during the hearing today 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 the 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.

If I could just have you state your name and any organisation you are appearing on behalf of for the Hansard record, please.

Ms GIBB: Jane Gibb. I am appearing on behalf of Gariwerd Animal Biodiversity Alliance.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you very much for that. With that I will hand over to you to make your opening remarks. If you could please just keep your comments to about 5 or a maximum of 10 minutes—I will give you a bit of a hint as we get closer to that time—and that way that will then leave the rest of the session for members to ask questions. If I could also ask members on this call to please keep your microphones on mute, which will alleviate any background noise. Thank you, Jane. Over to you.

Ms GIBB: Thank you.

Visual presentation.

Ms GIBB: Okay. This is what I am going to be looking at today: Dunkeld, an overview; shooting wildlife; case studies one and two; Dunkeld, the state of play; the aftermath; exclusion fences; and recommendations.

Dunkeld is currently spending \$30 million on a walking trail connecting Dunkeld to Mount Zero. In 2019, 18.8 million visitors, or 19 per cent of visitors to Victoria, participated in nature-based experiences. That equals 22 per cent of all visitors to regional Victoria. In 2007, 71.1 per cent of international visitors had taken a trip to encounter wildlife.

The perimeter of Dunkeld is now a shooting zone for the commercial killing of kangaroos. These red dots indicate the places where the shooting is occurring. Frequent shooting near businesses and residents within the Dunkeld tourism precinct reduces livability and tourism potential. The impact of shooting is creating community trauma, mental harm and terrorised residents.

So here is the first case study, and that is Griffins Hill retreat, which is located within the Dunkeld township boundary. Griffins Hill hosts international and national yoga guests. Griffins Hill is worth tens of thousands of dollars annually to the local economy. Frequent shooting has resulted in spotlights flashing through the

buildings, gunshots, kangaroo body parts dumped, spotlights shone on residents. The shooting is occurring on land that is not farmed and is approximately 30 hectares in size. Between 2017 and 2021 we estimate 120 kangaroos have been killed on the property. That equals \$586.50 before costs in earnings per year for the shooter. That is very low. Peter Hylands estimated the value for the total trade—dressed meat—to shooters in 2020 was \$1 060 000. In 2020 there were 86 licenced shooters in the state. So that was an average value to shooters, before costs, of around \$12 300. What are the operating costs to the Victorian taxpayers? We do not know, but comparative costs of the kangaroo killing industry to taxpayers: the kangaroo trial program costs Victorian taxpayers \$2.5 million and the ACT government just paid \$880 000 to shooters to kill 1568 kangaroos on nature reserves. Take out of the economy one or two tourism businesses, and the whole \$1 060 000 is negated.

So now we are just looking more locally. Of the 27 153 kangaroos commercially killed, 1.2 per cent of those occurred in areas around Dunkeld, which equals 325 kangaroos. All these figures I am about to give you are between January 2021 and 8 June 2021, so in the last five months. The total value of those kangaroos, based on about \$1.15 per kilo, is \$6353.70 before-cost meat value to the shooter. Of the 1682 incidents of commercial shooting, 0.8 per cent occurred in the Dunkeld area, so that equals 13 incidents of shooting in Dunkeld. On average shooting occurred 2.6 times per month. Four commercial shooters are operating in Dunkeld with a before-cost income of \$1588 each. Conclusion: the commercial killing of kangaroos in and around Dunkeld is not economically worthwhile, especially as it is driving out tourism operators that contribute tens of thousands of dollars to the local economy and limiting ecotourism development.

This is case number 2. Samantha purchased an established B & B with a view to renovating and continuing to operate the business into her retirement. The B & B is located 500 metres from the Dunkeld town boundary on 2.27 hectares. Wildlife—kangaroos—strongly influenced Samantha's decision to purchase the property. Because of shooter intimidation and violence, Samantha has been unable to open her B & B and is now leaving the district. The adjoining landowner has a permit to shoot kangaroos on 9 hectares of land that is not farmed. Why? Now Samantha rarely sees a kangaroo on her property—they have all gone.

Three independent landowners own approximately 566 hectares opposite Samantha's property. For the past 2½ years a commercial shooter has had permission to shoot on the properties. In May 2021 the farmers wrote:

Currently there are large numbers of kangaroos entering these properties and are impacting on our businesses in a major way. To us kangaroos seem to be in plague proportions.

So the haul of small kangaroos on that ute—that photo was taken in April 2021 as I was exiting one of those properties—shows no evidence of the presence of large numbers of kangaroos. The farmers' perception does not match on-ground lived experience. Why in Victoria is there no size limit on kangaroos being killed for commercial purposes?

So our on-ground observations indicate very few older males are left now. The remaining females and young at foot are being slaughtered. Orphaned joeys are dying from starvation and exposure. Without a doubt before our eyes kangaroo numbers are plummeting, yet in Victoria in 2021 the number of kangaroos to be killed for commercial purposes has increased. So here is a typical scene from the aftermath of shooting. We see four joeys lined up there at the top that have got no mothers now. We were unable to save any of them. They all died a slow death over about two weeks, and the four joeys only represent a small sample. And this happens every time the shooters come through.

The second thing that is impacting this region is exclusion fences. So now cropping to the edge of Gariwerd Grampians National Park represents a change in land use. There are many kilometres of kangaroo exclusion fencing in Victoria Valley, Mirranatwa and Dunkeld. Within the fences all macropods are killed. The first four wires of the fences are electrified. Even echidnas are excluded. The total area of exclusion fencing is unknown, but it represents a huge loss of macropod rangelands and vital habitat adjacent to Gariwerd Grampians National Park. With the increase in exclusion fencing, our observation of kangaroo numbers decreasing and the mass killing of kangaroos for commercial purposes, we wonder why the total number of kangaroos killed commercially is increasing.

And here are the recommendations: halt the commercial killing of kangaroos, set up a new authority to protect wildlife, establish a national and international expert panel to develop a system allowing peaceful coexistence between landholders and kangaroos, remove exclusion fences, strengthen the wildlife protection Act and prohibit the commercial killing of kangaroos.

And just a little word from the kangaroo on the screen. He is saying, 'Gone: a place for me to grow tall; a place'—for me—'to live a full life; a place to live in peace and my family group'. And that is the end.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you so much, Jane, for that presentation. We will now go to questions from committee members. So I will go to Mr Meddick first.

Mr MEDDICK: Thank you, Chair. And thank you, Jane, for the work that you are doing and for the group overall as well. Look, I have quite a number of questions. I will try to get through them as quickly as I possibly can. We had a witness this morning from a First Nations group who stated that common species of native animals such as the kangaroo in western Victoria, for instance, are actually quite healthy in numbers, but claims from your group say that that is actually not the case. How do you account for the discrepancy there, first of all? Then I will come to the other questions in a moment.

Ms GIBB: I think that when people are talking about healthy in numbers, they might be looking at small regional areas—for example, where there is cropping, and there are large areas of cropping now. Around this area there are no kangaroos. So there would be possibly healthy populations—and we hope there are healthy populations—in and around the national parks and around Gariwerd, but these populations are now targeted for the commercial killing of kangaroos. So you go, you know, a kilometre or so out from the national park, and there are very few numbers.

Mr MEDDICK: Great. Thank you so much. That clarifies that a great deal for me. Thank you.

Look, I want to come back to the commercial industry for a moment. There are two situations at play of course. We have authorities to cull wildlife, which is the ATCW system, where a landowner can apply for X amount and DELWP will assess the situation and give them a licence to cull X amount. And it might be the total amount they are looking for, but it might be not the case. And an example numerically might be they apply for 200 and are given a licence for 100.

But the commercial aspect is a completely different scenario, isn't it—where an individual shooter who is part of that system is only allowed to shoot, by comparison, a relatively small amount in total, and they are issued with tags that they have to tag. I am curious about, first of all, your experience. Have you noticed or heard of any discrepancies in that, whether they have been overshooting and simply leaving those animals to rot? I come back to DELWP's own report before the industry was authorised. DELWP's own report actually said that this was a problem, that shooters in the trial were actually killing more numbers of kangaroos than they were authorised to shoot. The recommendation says that a commercial industry should not be established, partly on those grounds but also partly due to the threat of violence to their officers by shooters when they were out conducting the trial, so much so that they were not allowed to actually interact with shooters without a police escort. Because you are very close by—you have talked about what is going on around Dunkeld—have there been any threats of violence towards you from shooters or to any people that you know that live in the area?

Ms GIBB: Yes. There has. Just to also let you know that in 2017, before the introduction of the commercial killing, permits were not given to shoot on this land because there is no farming on the land. So there were conditions that did actually prevent us being impacted by the shooting. But in our region I personally have had a spotlight shone on me inside my property from one of these shooters for an extended period of time, and another resident has opened her rear door one night to see a commercial shooter killing a kangaroo approximately 40 metres from her back deck, and that has been very traumatising for her. She has also had a kangaroo penis placed on her front step—she has gone out in the morning and found that penis—and she has also had decapitated kangaroos dumped on her property.

Mr MEDDICK: I am terribly sorry to hear that. All those things sound like they are in contravention of any of the regulations and indeed laws that you would expect police to enforce, for instance. Have any complaints been made, and if they have what has the reaction to those complaints been like, and have they been taken seriously or indeed have there been any prosecutions that you know of?

Ms GIBB: No. There have been multiple complaints to the police from various members or people in the town. At least four people in the town on separate occasions have complained to the police, and there have been no offences committed, apparently. We have not been able to get the police—or anyone else, for that matter—to help stop the impact of the shooting on our own wellbeing and mental health at all. In fact today I got a letter from the Minister for Agriculture dismissing our concerns and saying that there were no offences committed so

therefore this is all right. But what we have are people shooting, in our case, on a regular basis 40 to 60 metres from our buildings and shining spotlights through our businesses. There are multiple people in the town running businesses that are experiencing this.

Mr MEDDICK: I am terribly sorry to hear that. I think that is the extent of my questions, though, Chair. I am conscious of time. I would like to hand over to anyone else.

Ms GIBB: It is very frightening to live here.

The CHAIR: Sure. Thank you. Mr Hayes.

Mr HAYES: Thanks, Chair. Thanks very much. Thanks, Jane. I just wanted to ask you: what do you think would happen if we banned shooting kangaroos? Maybe take these as two separate questions: commercially, for one, if we banned the commercial shooting, or even if we went as far as shooting for controlling the population. Would there be a population explosion of kangaroos, and what damage would that do, in your eyes?

Ms GIBB: Well, for me, all we have to do to actually answer those questions is look back to what was here before the commercial shooting started, and what was here was a peaceful coexistence between people and kangaroos. And, no, the kangaroo population does not explode. Kangaroos only breed very slowly, so they have one baby, it takes 18 months for that baby to become independent and they say only 30 per cent of joeys born in the wild survive. So any increase in population is very slow, and they do tend to regulate their populations, so the older females tend to stop breeding or tend to have less joeys. I think if we ban the commercial killing of kangaroos, we would not need to have population control.

Mr HAYES: Can I just ask one further question on that? Farmers often say that kangaroos eat pasture grass or they compete with the stock for pasture grasses. The story is, I have heard, that they prefer pasture grasses to the native grasses. Could you enlighten us on that?

Ms GIBB: I cannot really say what grasses kangaroos prefer, but I am sure there are experts who can. But what I recommended in my recommendations is that you establish an expert panel. We have solved this problem between whales and fishing, so now we have got fishing and whales. Establish an expert panel to solve these problems that allow farmers and kangaroos to coexist, because the threats to kangaroos now are, as I have pointed out, all the exclusion fencing, bushfires and commercial shooting.

Mr HAYES: Thanks very much. Thanks for your answer, Jane.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Hayes. Jane, I might ask a question at this juncture. What do you think, though, in the wake of the devastating bushfires in East Gippsland? What do you make of kangaroo numbers over there at the moment? Do you think, even though the bushfires happened in East Gippsland, that had an impact on kangaroo numbers in a much broader sense as well—beyond just East Gippsland? Are you able to expand on that a bit?

Ms GIBB: Yes. Because while the kangaroos were being killed in the fires—and it is estimated, I think, something like 200 000 kangaroos were killed in the Victorian bushfires—they were shooting the kangaroos down here. Our populations were under attack. So that will have a broad influence on kangaroo numbers in Victoria.

The CHAIR: So do you think that there should be some kind of pause, for example, until more in-depth research can be done about the true extent that that species has been impacted?

Ms GIBB: Definitely, yes. I also think we need to be looking at: why are we shooting kangaroos in these places that are not farmed? Why are we shooting kangaroos along the perimeter of the national park? Where is the safe place for kangaroos? We do not have one anymore. I think the kangaroo industry should be halted now until we get on top of these problems, because if we do not, it will be too late.

The CHAIR: I understand from what you were saying, in response to some of Mr Hayes's questioning and also Mr Meddick's, that there does seem to be extinction in terms of the usage of kangaroos. You have got the pet meat industry, as I understand, or the commercial side of it, but then you also have people who are hunting kangaroos and farmers who might shoot kangaroos because they think they are pests on their property. There is a range of different reasons why someone might shoot a kangaroo. Then you were saying earlier—I think in

your response to Mr Meddick or it might have been to Mr Hayes—about how kangaroos do not reproduce that successfully actually. Do you think shooting is a proper basis for keeping numbers down, or is that kind of a misnomer?

Ms GIBB: I think that we would have to question—really find out—what level of kangaroos the farmers are trying to achieve. Some people are on record as saying that they see kangaroos as a pest and they want them hunted to extinction. Well, that is not a reason to be shooting kangaroos. We need to really be careful about what the motive is for these farmers to be killing kangaroos. Is that your question answered?

The CHAIR: Well, I guess I could ask it a different way: do you think that shooting is the best way for birth control purposes, in keeping numbers down, or are there other ways? I know there is conjecture. Some people are saying that kangaroo numbers have exploded, but we have also mixed evidence about the impact of bushfires and other natural disasters on kangaroo populations. It also seems that there is probably a question around which numbers are right, I would say. It is really a question of: do you agree that kangaroo numbers need to be brought down? And I think you might have answered that earlier. You said that in the past people were able to coexist quite peacefully with kangaroos and you did not think the numbers had exploded. Should there be some kind of birth control directed at these animals, or do you think there are other ways of achieving balance, if there is need for a balance?

Ms GIBB: Well, certainly shooting and leaving the joeys, as we are, and shooting out all the male kangaroos is a problem. So I think ultimately we would need to look at other methods, but shooting certainly should not be considered appropriate.

The CHAIR: Sure. Okay. And as you said, it is probably best to have a pause right now on all of these things given the impact of the fires and everything.

Ms GIBB: Well, yes, because at the moment all the older males have been shot first, then now they are down to shooting the females. And as I showed you in those pictures, they are shooting the little joeys now as well. So that is three. And then if you take out the kangaroos in the pouch, that is four generations of kangaroos gone in one hit.

The CHAIR: I am probably going to sound very ignorant about this. But in your work, if mothers or female kangaroos are being shot, what would the likelihood be of perhaps a joey being out of pouch and then being left? Like, are you noticing—

Ms GIBB: Yes.

The CHAIR: As you say, if a mother is shot, then it cannot tend to the babies. So can you give us a little bit more detail about what you are noticing about that?

Ms GIBB: Last week I monitored four of these, and we tried to rescue them, but we could not save any of them. So they all died. And it takes them about two weeks to die. It is quite horrible. So their little tummies become distended, you know, as they begin to starve, and they do not rest. They do not seem to sleep, so they are on their feet all the time. So they get exhausted. And I have witnessed it taking them two weeks to die in the paddock. And over the years we have tried to rescue them, but we have not been able to save any of them. And it is very, very distressing for us and the baby kangaroos. It is cruel. And in a small area last week six joeys were dead. I did not survey the whole place, but there have been many, many more than that.

The CHAIR: And as you are saying, that can have a generational effect on kangaroo populations, where if there are a number of kangaroos taken out it affects the breeding cycle as well.

Ms GIBB: That is right. I am not an expert, but it does seem that the younger joeys, the younger males, take over. The older males tend to have a sort of levelling effect on the breeding, I think. There is some research, I think, that shows that populations of kangaroos after the shooting do tend to breed at a higher level.

The CHAIR: And that is because the older males have a stabilising effect on those populations, right?

Ms GIBB: Right. Yes.

The CHAIR: Got it. Okay. Thanks a lot. That helps me understand the issue a bit in broader terms. Thanks for that. Mrs McArthur, over to you for some questions.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Look, maybe I can help you out with the kangaroos, because we have got them roaming around here having a wonderful time. They generally only breed, also, when there is going to be a good season. And right now we have got very good seasons, and I can tell you they love short, green grass. And in the Indigenous community that is actually how they gathered them into an area to be able to spear them for their food source. So they would slow burn or cool burn an area of the native grasses, and the shorter foliage was attractive to the kangaroos. So they are very adaptive to the environment.

I am just interested in some of the other recommendations you have got in your submission. You want to build community bunkers for residents to flee to. I am presuming you mean the residents of Dunkeld, surely not the native population residents in terms of animals?

Ms GIBB: No. I think that is in relation to bushfire management.

Mrs McARTHUR: Yes. So can you just expand a bit on that recommendation.

Ms GIBB: Well, here in Dunkeld our safe place is a local church, which does not have real protection from fire. And in the US now we are seeing whole cities or whole towns burn down, so populations of like 2000 people, with all houses and things being burnt. At Dunkeld, you know, it is possible that all houses—well, not all of them, but many of the houses—in the town could be burnt in bushfires, and so, you know, just community bunkers would help the population.

Mrs McARTHUR: It is great that you are supportive of regenerative burns—but regenerative burns only. So you want to stop fuel reduction burns, therefore exacerbating the potential impact of a major fire.

Ms GIBB: That is sort of questionable. But the threat to Dunkeld is actually from grassfire around the perimeter of the town, and there is very little mitigation in terms of the grass around the town. That is our threat: grassfire.

Mrs McARTHUR: Well, the lightning strikes have struck in the Grampians park and were left to burn until they escaped out of the park into the grasslands. But you are quite right: the non-Indigenous species like phalaris are a major wick in the case of fires. This complete prohibition of any grazing on roadsides or slashing and burning seems to be an absolute doozy for ending up having a major fire, because that is what happened down in my area, where the fire was a wick through vegetation on roadsides, burning tens of thousands of hectares and thousands of heads of stock purely because of roadside vegetation and electrical elements. So if you want every roadside to be a biodiversity area but not get rid of the phalaris that acts as a wick, you are going to be in trouble.

Ms GIBB: I do not think I have mentioned that, but what has been done around here is the roadsides are being burnt.

Mrs McARTHUR: In some areas they are if there are enough CFA volunteers to do it, and that is really good, but in many areas it is not allowed because of, supposedly, the native vegetation. But instead of burning it you could also graze it.

Ms GIBB: Well, I think people would be concerned where, particularly here, there is a lot of native or indigenous grasses on the roadsides, so the grazing actually has an impact on those grasses. That has been a common problem in the alpine grazing area. The hard-hoofed animals have impacted the grasses. So we really want to encourage softer-footed animals like kangaroos.

Mrs McARTHUR: But then if you have the roadsides as a conservation area there is—as you have pointed to, I think, somewhere else—the problem of roadkill, because everywhere I drive around here I barely would go on a road where I do not see a dead kangaroo. If you are going to encourage them to breed on the roadsides, and we have also got wire rope barriers that they get caught up in as well, you are exacerbating the destruction of the kangaroos in that regard. So it is a catch 22, I guess. You cannot have a biodiversity area and kangaroos.

Ms GIBB: I think what the situation is around here now is that on the farming land there is no remnant vegetation, so a lot of the remnant vegetation is on the side of the road. There are a lot of kangaroos killed, unfortunately, by cars immediately in this tourism precinct, and we are working with the local authorities to try

and change that through various methods. There is community education; there are new posts that might warn kangaroos off the road. So it is a matter of trying some of these things. We know the hotspots where kangaroos tend to cross. So it is a matter of resolving those problems. I do not think shooting kangaroos is ever going to stop kangaroos crossing the road.

Mrs McARTHUR: Just to be clear for everybody: kangaroos flourish on farmland. So they do not just eat native species of grass, and by choice they will eat all short grass that they can get access to. Actually we probably should be farming them, really, and then you would not have your problem with your hard-hoofed animals.

Ms GIBB: Well, there are a lot of papers written about what happens to wild animals once they are—
That is a different argument. I am not entering that.

The CHAIR: Sorry—perhaps if I could ask another question there, just if I could go back to what we were talking about earlier with the impact of fires and that sort of thing. I was reading somewhere about a kangaroo count. Do you have any comment on the robustness of the data around kangaroos? Do you think it is robust, or do you think there is room for improvement in the way data is collected or there needs to be more work done in that area?

Ms GIBB: Well, I have addressed that slightly, because with all the building of areas of kangaroo exclusion fencing, the shooting of them by various methods under the authority to control wildlife and the mass killing of them for commercial killing, it is hard to imagine how kangaroo populations overall are increasing, and in fact our own lived experience shows they are decreasing. So I think there needs to be a more comprehensive method developed to count them. Also when you look at, for example, the property next door to here that is not farmed that is something like 30 hectares, you have to ask why kangaroos are being shot on it. So why are permits being issued to shoot? I think it is just a matter of someone taking a blank piece of paper and saying, 'You know, this is farming land, so let's shoot on it'. The impact on tourism is huge. I mean, we simply cannot operate a tourism business and have shooting like that.

The CHAIR: So do you think there needs to be a different way of assessing permits to shoot?

Ms GIBB: Permits and land use. So, for example, around the national park there would need to be a buffer zone, a place where kangaroo habitat is protected and kangaroos are protected.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you. Now, I have noticed Dr Ratnam has just joined us online, and we have got about 5 more minutes. So, Dr Ratnam, do you have any questions?

Dr RATNAM: No questions from me. Thank you.

The CHAIR: All right. I might just come back around because we have got 5 more minutes, and I note Mr Melhem did not have any questions. Mr Meddick, do you have any other questions? Mr Hayes, any other questions from you?

Mr HAYES: No, thanks, Chair. I am very happy with what I have heard so far.

The CHAIR: Sure. Actually, Jane, I might just ask you a question about kangaroos in urban areas—what we also see—and it is not just kangaroos, it is also things like deer and other animals in those peri-urban areas. I know places like the Nillumbik shire, where you have got developed areas abutting green wedge or these areas. Do you have any comments that could help us understand what might be the challenges for those communities in perhaps dealing with kangaroo populations? Is your organisation hearing that that is a particular problem for communities in those green wedge areas or not?

Ms GIBB: Well, that is the problem we have here. Of course kangaroos always existed in those areas. They were there first, so they always existed there. There are many benefits to communities in seeing wild animals. The mental health benefits are well documented. I think those peri-urban communities, many of them, actually do really like the kangaroos. So they are of benefit to those communities. They are also of benefit along, for example, the Merri Creek. Kangaroos would help keep the grasses down along the Merri Creek. They would help reduce thistles, fennel—all of those sorts of species—so they could be environmentally beneficial to those places.

The CHAIR: We have got a mob of kangaroos that live on the Banyule Flats, which is just down in Heidelberg, along the Yarra River. I would have to say the big old man kangaroo is probably taller than I am. It is wonderful to see them, and we are very fortunate to live in an area that can support native wildlife. I think it is really wonderful. We are very fortunate to have that, and being in a city area it is just fantastic. So look, Jane, I would like to thank you very much for your contribution today. It has been really fantastic. Thank you so much for your evidence.

Witness withdrew.