



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES
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Submission Cover Sheet

Nature in Our City

Submission Number: 69

Date Authorised for Publication: 8 August 2018

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24 July 2018

**Nature in Our City enquiry
Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
Post GPO Box 1020 CANBERRA ACT 2601**

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Nature in Our City enquiry. I'm writing as a concerned resident of the ACT. Recently, I've been volunteering with ACT Wildlife (ACTW) on the Wombat Mange program (2017/18) and the Phone Hotline (2018), and many of my observations are based on this experience, as well as broader consultation with the community.

My view is, we have an unaddressed nature crisis in the ACT (as well as other parts of Australia) and we are causing major suffering for our wildlife. If we continue with our current ignorant approach to living with nature, Canberra will soon be bereft of native animals and plants like most other developed countries. The point about the importance of our nature is summarised well, by the Threatened Species Commission:

"Australia is a country rich in unique plants and animals. They are core to our identity, culturally significant to indigenous peoples, important to the health of our environment and a strong contributor to our economy. Our distinctive plants and animals are a gift and ours to protect."
(<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/strategy-home>)

Habitat loss and degradation

The consequences of our recent building boom have been loss of native vegetation and animal habitat. Wildlife have been pushed out by new suburbs and forced onto our streets and verges. The visible increase in roadkill on our roads is a consequence of spreading suburbia.

This is particularly seen, as a consequence of the landscape-wide desertification that takes place prior to building and street-scaping with non-indigenous flora. An example of this landscape desertification may be seen along the Molonglo River corridor where few of the hollow-bearing resources which existed on the land have been retained and all top soil has been removed and then redistributed, resulting essentially in the destruction of any native flora and ground-frequenting animals, such as reptiles and small mammals.

I remember when the presence of Christmas Beetles heralded the start of the festive season in Canberra, but I haven't heard them in Weston in the last few years and it's likely this is at least in part associated with alteration of their preferred habitat.

It seems wasteful that new suburbs are being established, whilst older suburbs and hubs like Woden have become run-down and are in obvious need of urban renewal.

Road planning and wildlife crossings

Planners seem to take a “cars first, people second, wildlife last” approach to traffic management.

Roads now fragment many of our nature reserves and parks. Wildlife pushed into the city by land clearing can't move from one area to another without being hit by cars. In just 2 months this year, members of the public reported to ACTW, 360 kangaroos hit by cars.

The image on the right shows how much roadkill has become part of life in the ACT.

This fragmentation becomes an even bigger problem given the likely increase in fire frequency and intensity ahead of us. Given we are in a phase where animal extinction rates are accelerating, establishing wildlife corridors across the ACT need much greater consideration.

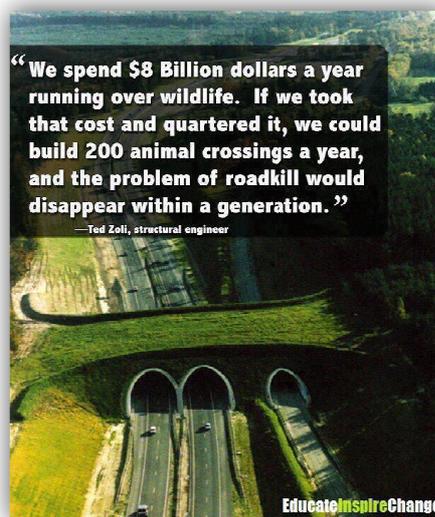
A solution would be to make wildlife crossings a zero cost option as proposed by US Engineer, Ted Zoli (right)

Though the figures relate to the US, they may also apply here. I often wonder why our big car insurers don't embrace these structures.

Another solution is to better persuade households to accept higher density in established suburbs. There's a better quality of life in walkable, mid-density communities supporting a good mix of services. Instead Canberra continues to spread, with increased reliance on cars and longer commutes.



This insightful cake was a finalist in the Pandsi Fundraiser “Canberra Themed Cakes” at the Albert Hall in 2016.



The case for wildlife crossings.

Funding for Nature Volunteers

Act Wildlife (the NGO) is entirely run by volunteers. These people are mostly women who often spend their own money on basic feed and medicine for sick wildlife. Their Hotline is run 24/7 at negligible cost to the public or government. And yet they are mopping up the consequences of people's car based lifestyle in Canberra.

I've written to the ACT government about this apparent exploitation of volunteers.

The reply I received proudly stated "*...volunteers contribute over \$1.5 billion to the ACT economy every year*". The letter continues to explain that, in relation to ACT Wildlife, the Government have recently provided premises and "*\$65,000 in grants over 3 financial years*".

From what I've seen, this is nowhere near enough towards mitigating the effects of Canberra's expansion. To think that even the head of this group works all week for free!

ACT Landcare is another volunteer group which is struggling to keep up with the workload. In this new era of habitat degradation and climate warming, the problems in our natural environment will not be addressed adequately by volunteers.

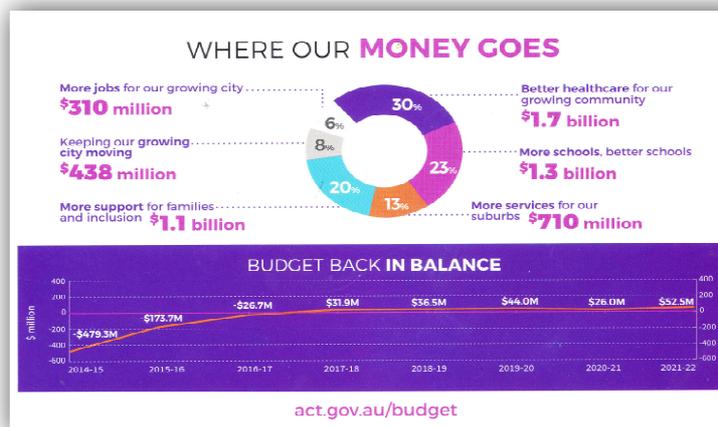
One solution- ACT Nature lottery

If the ACT Government can't afford to allocate money for combating the problems outlined in this enquiry, they could consider starting an ACT Lottery Fund for Nature. There's an excellent example with LotteryWest in WA. (<http://www.lotterywest.wa.gov.au/>). Each year they donate \$100 million to community programs. Such extra funds could go a long way to professionalising the business of nature care in the ACT. It could create new jobs, improve tourists' outdoor experience and help arrest the decline of nature in our city.

Wombat mange epidemic

The mange mite is infecting populations of stressed wombats across south-eastern Australia, including the ACT. I've volunteered in areas around Tharwa and Lanyon where wombats are crowded into diminished habitat near the rivers. The burrows are surrounded by land further degraded by weeds and rubbish. Our local wombats suffer appallingly with this mange. They itch and scratch, till wounds become infected and then they die.

Last year, the ACT Government contributed \$20,000 dollars to our first wombat mange trial in this state. The treatment is a dose of sheep dip, re-dispensed over a few months.



This Budget summary came from the ACT Government. I'm wondering where Nature funding fits in?

(Wombat Mange continued)



MOP says she's walking her dogs around Lake Tuggeranong and someone told her there was a wombat nearby that didn't look well, maybe not much fur.

Just one of the many entries about wombat mange from the ACT Wildlife logs this year.

The image (above) shows a wombat, dead from mange. Current sheep dip treatments are only successful short term.

The volunteer mange treatment program is now over and was deemed to work – short term. Wombats will simply re-infect each other, unless funding is allocated for on-going and widespread programs.

Perhaps the ACT Government is not aware of the scale of the problems? I am aware that ACT rangers reported euthanizing only 17 wombats last year. A check of the ACTW logs show 20 manged wombats reported to the Hotline in the last 2 months. *Sleepy Burrows Wombat Sanctuary* in Sutton has been traumatised with ongoing euthanizing. They have reported putting down 25, across all ages, in just one week.

It's an epidemic. The University of Tasmania reports a 94% decrease in wombat populations in one national park over a 7 year period. And we can assume there, habitats are quite good. We may be experiencing similar declines in the ACT- but who's counting?

Despite reports of Dr Scott Carver (USYD) making progress with a wombat mange vaccine, this area of research is pitifully funded. When I contacted the CSIRO about a vaccine, they said they *"unfortunately did not have resources to take on ad hoc projects"*. A letter to the Australian Museum in Sydney also drew a blank



Tweet by the University of Tasmania, April 2018
It quantifies the loss of wombats due to mange. I would have thought it would be a priority for all skilled Australian institutions to be working on a cure.

Kangaroo policy in the ACT

It seems to me that there's a nationwide vendetta on our iconic kangaroos, which has recently been explored in *Kangaroo the Movie*. This is also happening in the ACT. According to the ACT Animal Justice Party (leaflet attached) kangaroos are slow breeders, having one Joey per year. Yet, they are shot annually by the thousands. Will they go the way of the Brolgas in the ACT?

It is evident that Canberra has expanded into natural rangelands and the ACT Government must now deal with the consequences of more displaced kangaroos roaming into urban areas. Although the shooting of kangaroos is widely practiced as a method of control, another method being used is one of callous neglect. ***Official Government policy in the national capital bans caring for injured kangaroos.*** This is achieved by refusing to issue Licences to potential kangaroos carers.

Kangaroos hit by cars will often stagger off, injured, into adjacent areas where they are sometimes found in terrible agony. Yes, they die and that's one less kangaroo in Canberra, but what a cruel way to die! Current policy means they will die slowly or if they're lucky a ranger will get a call and come and shoot them.

The illustrations here show a few very typical logs from the ACTW Hotline call centre.

[REDACTED] called (very upset) to report an injured, brown kangaroo in Deakin. It has an injured back leg; is trying to eat grass and is able to tolerate her nearby. I tried to reassure her and she said she could wait while I contact a Ranger. [REDACTED] at the ACT ranger section took the details from me and explained there are no services for injured wild kangaroos in the ACT, so the Ranger attendance may not be a happy ending for the kangaroo. I messaged [REDACTED] to say the Ranger would attend the site and she should continue on with her day.

[REDACTED] daughter found a joey beside dead mother. Has it in the car and seems to be doing all the right things keeping it snug and warm. Advised to call wildcare

[REDACTED] went out to the block in Burra and he saw a large male kangaroo dragging it's leg along the ground, it was with a mob of kangaroos. Advised to ring wildcare.

(Kangaroo policy cont)

These tweets are about the National Capital's kangaroo policy. As it's so controversial, The ACT government should open its files so we better understand the problems.

Top Latest People Photos Videos

maria bradley @tilly64 · 7/5/18
 Replying to @Kitten35912741 and @actgovernment
 The CSIRO also say there is no justification for the cull. So why is ACT GOVT SLAUGHTERING 3200 KANGAROOS?? @canberratimes @TurnbullMalcolm @billshortenmp @GENTLEMANMick



CSIRO independent analysis: no support for kangaroo research...
 districtbulletin.com.au

Nature of Australia @beewt · 56s
 Replying to @KangarooMovie and @abcnews
 Yes- @actgovernment won't issue Licenses to rehabilitate kangaroos. Wounds become infected and they die in agony or are found & shot. How shameful for the national capital :(#roadkill #Canberra #kangaroos



Possums

Brushtail Possums are increasingly utilising suburban garages and roofs because they've lost hollow-bearing tree resources. Sadly, residents often label these possums as pests without thought to how they got to be homeless.

As a solution, all mature trees with hollows in both existing suburbs and new developments should be retained. If this can't be done, equivalent artificial hollows which are proving popular with possums (see image, right) should be installed.

Appears to be an injured young possum- maybe hit by car, a couple of months ago. Appeared then disappeared, dragging it's back legs but otherwise managing. [REDACTED] says it likes their cat's food and even knocks on his backdoor for a feed.

@TSCommissioner
 11.3K Tweets

Tweets Tweets & replies Media Lik

5 42 103

@TSCommissioner @... · 21/7/18
 Artificial tree hollows are providing new homes for rainbow lorikeets, sugar gliders, cockatoos & microbats! Since 2015, the @cityofgoldcoast has built more than 400 artificial hollows. There has been an 85% uptake by native wildlife! Read more bit.ly/2uSF6bp



6 80 230

Tweet about the success of 400 artificial possum hollows on the Gold Coast.

Log from ACTW Hotline July 2018

Weed trees and plants

In the 30 town-house complex where I live, I have counted Chinese elms in 50% of backyards and removed countless saplings (they self-seed prolifically). I doubt any of these were actually planted. I asked my local member to enquire in the Assembly about its common use as a bird attracting street tree and was told by Mr Gentleman that “*whilst the Chinese elm has naturalised in places, it has not displayed characteristics of a serious invasive plant*”. He also added there are good alternatives for birds “*local wattles, eucalypts, kurrajongs, river she-oaks and native cypress pines*”. Though the Chinese Elm does eventually lose its leaves in winter, it happens so late there is little benefit using it as a deciduous tree. It would be great to see this plant declared a pest. I also wonder if the use of deciduous trees in public parks and spaces contributes deleteriously to our health issues (such as sinus-related allergies).

Other weeds like English Ivy, Hawthorn, Privet and African Lovegrass are plentiful in the Weston Creek area. What’s lacking is public awareness and the time, resources and funding to manage them. Another problem is the continuing supply of sleeper weeds by our local horticulture industry and even our own Parks people (for example Chinese Elm above).

In conclusion

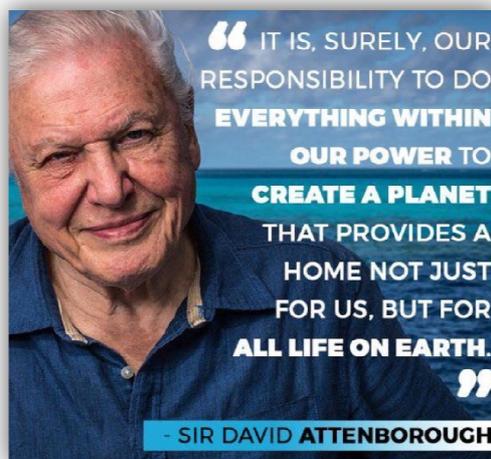
We have a shared responsibility to relieve the harm we’ve caused to our urban wildlife. It’s also in the public interest to be able to enjoy life within the bush capital and maintain biodiversity more generally.

A better awareness and political commitment to the issues might begin to address current suffering and decline of nature in the ACT.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make this submission.

Sincerely

Barbara Mabbott



The words of Sir Richard Attenborough sum up our moral duty, to ensure there’s space for all life on earth, not just our own.-

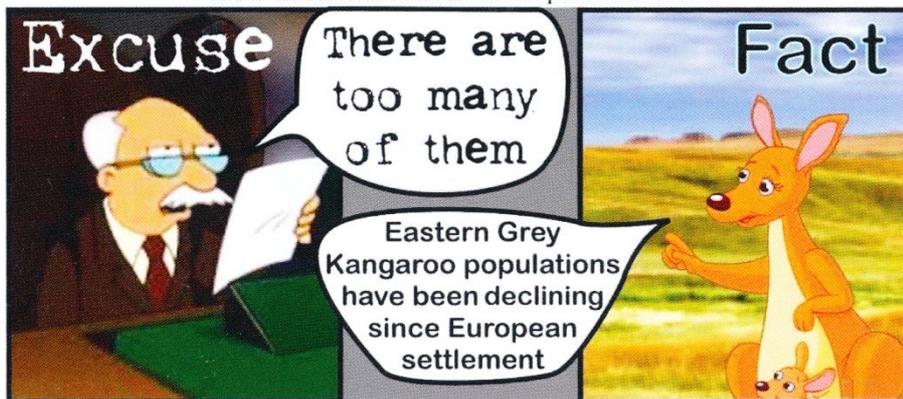
Killing Kangaroos in the A.C.T.



This birth rate maintains their population in equilibrium with their environment



Kangaroos, at natural (ie uncultured) densities, are critical to the health of the environment and to the survival of all the native species that share it



Some wildlife experts estimate that there may be only 10% left

The ACT kangaroo slaughter is cruel



- * Under ACT law, animal welfare codes of practice exist purely to permit acts of cruelty that would otherwise be prohibited.
- * The ACT code of practice for killing kangaroos allows the killing of females with young, orphaning thousands of unweaned young-at-foot.
- * The code requires pouch young to be bashed to death or decapitated.
- * The "cull" is conducted annually at a time when many, if not most females have both pouch young and an unweaned young-at-foot.
- * Kangaroo families are terrorised night after night, for months, year in, year out. Stress is often fatal to kangaroos and the level of stress caused by recurrent large-scale shooting is extreme.
- * ACT contract shooters do not always adhere to the very limited protections in the code of practice. In 2012, an autopsy by a wildlife veterinarian, confirmed that one kangaroo found in a government burial pit, had been shot, stabbed and bludgeoned before dying of blood loss or suffocation.

So why is the ACT Government killing kangaroos?

- * The escalating consumption of kangaroo habitat for urban development would seem to be the main reason.
- * FOI material from the ACT Government's slaughter at Googong in 2004 suggests that pressure from farmers is a major driver.

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KANGAROOS IN THE A.C.T.

'Culling' kangaroos is unnecessary and harms the environment



- * Kangaroos are a keystone species. This means that, at natural (i.e. not "culled") densities, they are critical to maintaining all the other native plants and animals (such as the threatened Earless Dragon and Golden Sun Moth) that share their habitat.
- * Therefore, killing kangaroos is NOT protecting threatened species. It is actually further endangering them.
- * Kangaroos do not overpopulate. At natural (i.e. not "culled") densities, their death rate equals their birth rate.
- * When food is scarce (which is rare in this region) kangaroos simply stop breeding.
- * Female kangaroos give birth only once a year. They also suffer a high (50% to 100%) level of infant mortality.
- * This means that when kangaroo populations are reduced (e.g. by "culling"), they cannot grow back faster than about 10% per year. The ACT Government kills them at 30% per year. 10% less 30% = extinction within a few years.
- * When urban kangaroo populations are made homeless by development, large scale translocation is now well-proven as an entirely humane and effective alternative to mass slaughter.

For further information, including full citations for source material, see the Animal Protectors Alliance website at <http://animalprotectors.com.au>. Follow the links though: Issues > Native Animals > Kangaroos