

Walk for Justice for ACT Kangaroos

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Animal Defenders
Office

Using the law to protect animals

We are here today because the ACT Government has once again declared war on thousands of our local native animals here in the so-called Bush Capital. The Government tries to justify its deeply unethical decision by science. I am not here to quibble with the science. I will leave that to the scientists. But our lawmakers and decisionmakers need to remember that science can only ever indicate or suggest that there is a problem. It is up to us to choose the solution. Science does not mandate that we adopt this inherently violent, lethal response of shooting local native wild animals and bashing their young to death, as an answer to what is ultimately a human-made problem. Like it or not, kangaroos are part of the environment, this landscape that we humans have all but destroyed, and then we turn around and blame a non-human animal for the mess we have created. It is extraordinary. And frankly unconscionable in the only jurisdiction in Australia that has acknowledged in law not only that kangaroos are sentient—that is, they feel pain and suffer—but also that they ‘deserve to be treated with compassion’, and I quote from the objects clause section 4A in the ACT’s Animal Welfare Act. Blowing the brains out of 3,000 kangaroos is not treating them, or the surviving members of their shattered mobs, with compassion. It is an ethical disgrace.

And this ethical disgrace is compounded by the fact that the ACT Government has taken away the right that we the people had to seek review of the bureaucratic decisions to kill thousands of these healthy local native animals. ACT politicians of every persuasion, from across the political spectrum, banded together to declare the Eastern Grey Kangaroo to be a pest animal. This animal should be the Bush Capital’s totem, our local hero, our icon, an animal we revere and cherish. Instead, our elected representatives have declared war on this animal, declaring them to be a pest and exempting them from the usual nominal legal protections that apply to native animals in the ACT. Overnight, with the stroke of a pen, the ACT Government declared the Eastern Grey Kangaroo to be a ‘controlled native species’, which is just a sneaky way of saying ‘pest’ animal without using that loaded term on an iconic native species. And in so doing, these politicians, who on any other day would champion open and accountable government and transparent government decision-making, took away what had been a right enshrined in nature conservation legislation to seek review by an independent tribunal of a government decision to shoot and kill thousands of these animals. Review by an independent tribunal of government decisions is a fundamental part of an open and accountable government and bureaucracy. And yet none, not a single one, of our politicians from any political party or persuasion, stood up to oppose these Orwellian laws or to defend the right of we the people to challenge these government decisions to

turn our precious nature reserves into killing zones. So now the bureaucrats make these decisions behind tightly closed doors, unscrutinised.

What sane ethical decision-maker could ever think that violent lethal control methods are justified for any sentient creature, let alone our precious native Eastern Grey Kangaroos. As the great author and professor of science Isaac Asimov once said, 'violence is the last refuge of the incompetent'. Well, by choosing to inflict these violent lethal control methods on gentle local native animals, our lawmakers and decisionmakers in the ACT have proven themselves to be staggeringly incompetent.

It is up to each of us to keep speaking out, to remind our government and decisionmakers that violence should never be chosen over compassion.

Thank you for speaking out by being here today.