

Open letter from ACT medical specialists to ACT MLAs and Canberra Citizens.

Kangaroo killing in Canberra Nature Reserves.

Canberra has long celebrated its title as the "Bush Capital." Among its many attractions are the nature reserves and their native inhabitants - including eastern grey kangaroos.

What many of us have vaguely known for the last few years is that the ACT has legislation in place that mandates an annual slaughter of kangaroos.

Also killed are any at-foot and in-pouch joeys whose mothers have been shot.

This is one of the most repugnant parts of an entirely brutal and cruel process. In the ACT Legislative Assembly last year, Minister Rebecca Vassarotti was asked if these joeys were 'bludgeoned' to death. Staff from the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) subsequently provided information that the joeys were killed with 'a wooden mallet.'

Very small pouch joeys are decapitated using a thumb and finger technique. On Red Hill nature reserve in 2022, two older, fully-furred joeys were found decapitated.

In the past five years, 4,302 joeys have been killed.

The pouch joeys are not counted in the cull statistics and numbers killed have not always been recorded, nor released for public information. Since 'culling' began in 2009, it is estimated that over 9,000 joeys have been killed.

This killing is legislated to occur annually.

Last year was a particularly confronting year for many Canberrans as for the first time the ACT Government shot on the Red Hill Reserve. This reserve is home to many small mobs; they are an attraction on the Federal Golf course and quietly keep the vegetation to a manageable level.

In the catastrophic summer of 2019/20 their numbers dwindled due to the drought conditions.

A number of medical colleagues walk on Red Hill often. In 2022, the Kangaroos were heavily targeted by the government contract shooters to the point where many mobs have been entirely wiped out. When the reserve re-opened to the public at 7am, the pools of fresh blood were frequent and distressing sights. Some were outside the reserve, where shooting shouldn't have occurred. There were scratch marks where animals appeared to have been dragged out of the pool of blood and back onto the reserve to be killed. Rangers were seen shovelling dirt over large pools of blood before the walkers saw it.

Gun shots and the sound of quad bikes moving methodically across the hills from dark till dawn would happen night after night for 8 weeks. A large truck would be parked inside the reserve the night before, signalling that the killing was about to continue that night.

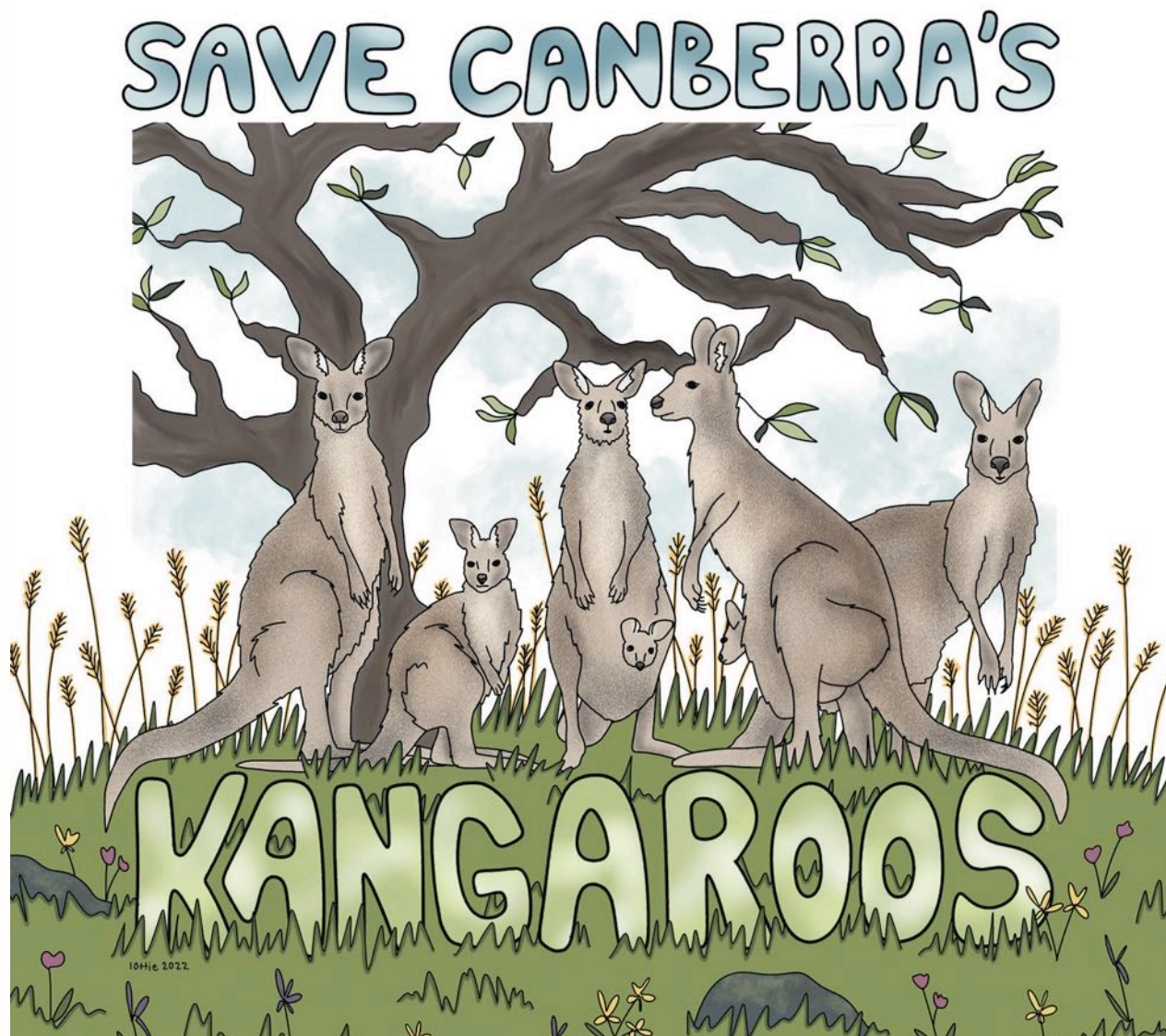
Five hundred kangaroos and 217 joeys were killed on Red Hill last year, according to statistics released by the EPSDD.

The ACT government pays approximately \$176,000 for an 8-10 week period to the shooting contractors to carry out this cull. No funds are committed to construct wildlife corridors or crossings to assist wildlife, including kangaroos, to safely cross busy roads and access other feeding grounds.

There is a strict one shot per kangaroo ratio. If the animal is wounded soon after the shooting starts, it must lie in pain, terrified, for many hours when the clean-up crews move around to collect the carcasses. Injured kangaroos will then be 'finished off.' Witnesses present at Isaacs Ridge during one cull heard many 'euthanasia shots' required. Mis-shots are inevitable and cast serious doubt on the government's claims that culling is 'humane.'

Members of Save Canberra's Kangaroos and others who regularly walk the reserves are greatly concerned that the population estimates are grossly over-stated, resulting in massacres reducing the populations to unviable levels in various reserves.

In 2021 the target set on Farrer Ridge resulted in 296 kangaroos and 120 joeys being slaughtered. The reserve was searched for many hours following this massacre and searchers could find only 40 kangaroos (including six at-foot joeys) remaining, whereas the Environment Directorate claims there are over 150. Eighteen of the remaining kangaroos have been treated with the Gona Con contraceptive. The Directorate had planned to treat 53. Ongoing shooting and fertility control will result in local extinction at Farrer Ridge.



The CSIRO, in a report commissioned by the ACT Government in 2014 concluded that there was no evidence to support the claim that kangaroo grazing threatens grassland species.

The status of the grassland earless dragon, one of the species allegedly threatened by the "over-grazing of kangaroos" was recently re-classified to "critically endangered," suggesting that after 14 years of shooting the lives of 29,595 healthy kangaroos and thousands of joeys have been sacrificed for this entirely unsatisfactory outcome. The report on ABC News 1st May stated that human development was the cause of the near extinction of the dragons. Kangaroos were not mentioned.

The Government has never acknowledged that the so-called 'science' behind this cull must be carried out within the context of ethical and humanitarian considerations. Instead, they consistently claim that killing kangaroos in their native habitat is 'humane,' when the evidence suggests otherwise.

As doctors, we are trained in the methods of scientific evaluation, critical thinking, empathy, viewing health as a community-wide right and responsibility. Treatments and management of diseases are constantly being evaluated and refined. If a certain test or treatment doesn't have sufficient evidence to support it or current knowledge brings its efficacy into question, then we analyse, and adopt new best practice techniques.

If medicine remained static and practitioners refused to take notice of new research and be prepared to challenge old beliefs, if we ignored scientific discoveries, many people would have much poorer quality of life or have a life considerably shortened.

As Medical Specialists we believe that the annual kangaroo cull undertaken by the ACT Government is barbaric, cruel and not supported by scientific evidence. What may have seemed like a good idea in 2008 is not the best management now.

As a group of highly trained, analytical and compassionate humans, we call on the ACT Chief Minister, Andrew Barr and the Minister for the Environment, Rebecca Vassarotti to

- Halt the cull,
- Repeal the legislation and
- Hold an independent inquiry to look at the entire process to assess its suitability and appropriateness in 2023 and beyond.

This is our community, and our trauma, knowing what happens for 8 weeks in the dark of winter to these gentle, sentient native beings.

There is no science, no compassion, no accountability and no transparency in this annual kill - and it is time the ACT government and the Environment, Planning, Sustainable Development Directorate were called to account.

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