5 August, 2007

Questions for Media regarding Defence(less) Kangaroos

The ACT Government and RSPCA ACT have been putting pressure on the Commonwealth Department of Defence to slaughter 3200 kangaroos and their joeys grazing on Commonwealth land, not ACT land, at Belconnen and Majura. In May this argument was initially based on the supposition that after the worst drought in 100 years these kangaroos might starve during winter. No credible evidence of this condition was ever produced.

Now that this excuse has dissolved with the advent of good winter rains and grass growth, the new excuse offered by the Chief Minister and RSPCA ACT is that kangaroo grazing is destroying the habitat of threatened grasses and other fauna such as the striped legless lizard, the earless dragon and the golden sun moth. However, again no credible causal relationship has been demonstrated, despite having months to bring such research forward.

Wildcare is a voluntary organisation that works to alleviate the distress of all native animals; mammals, birds and reptiles. Wildcare has been providing this service to South East NSW residents and many ACT residents for 15 years at no cost. Because of its knowledge and experience, Wildcare was invited by Defence to put forward an alternative, whole-of-ecosystem proposal to manage the kangaroo population at the Belconnen Naval Transmission Station (BNTS) – an alternative that did not involve mass slaughter. Wildcare is the only local wildlife caring and rescue organisation that works with kangaroos of all ages on a daily basis.

The Wildcare plan provides for the management of the Belconnen site grasslands and the preservation of threatened and endangered species.

We invite all people with an interest in the welfare of Australian native animals, and the preservation of their habitats, to read a summary of the very reasonable proposal provided to Defence and make up their own mind rather than depend on the false information circulated by organisations that should know better.

The summary of Wildcare's proposal is available in the Media Area of the Wildcare website @ www.wildcare.com.au/mediareleases.html

Below is a list of questions that Wildcare believes Media should be asking some of the other "stakeholders" in this matter.

Questions for Chief Minister Stanhope and his local government

1. On 13 May in the *Canberra Times*, ACT Municipal Services made the following statement: "The ACT restricts kangaroo culling to the months of March to July to avoid leaving vulnerable young orphaned. During these months, the pouched young are mostly at a very early stage of development and are too difficult for carers to deal with". Chief Minister Stanhope now says he will extend the killing season to include Spring when there is the maximum number of joeys emerging from the pouch. These at-heel joeys are totally dependent on their mothers for nutrition and protection. They will be left to die from starvation, predation or distress. How can the Chief Minister and RSPCA ACT justify this cruelty?

2. Why is Chief Minister Stanhope so keen to slaughter the kangaroos on Defence Force lands in the ACT when their numbers can easily be managed using proven methods of translocation and reproductive intervention? Will these non-harm methods of management interrupt Chief Minister Stanhope's longer-term plans to turn the Belconnen grasslands into another housing estate?
3. Why is Chief Minister Stanhope and his local government so keen on kangaroo slaughter when translocation is the preferred option in other Australian states?
4. Despite a number of requests by Wildcare, why has Chief Minister Stanhope and his local government rejected any call for reasonable discussions on this matter?
5. Is there a common connection between Chief Minister Stanhope's derogatory and threatening comments about Wildcare on this matter and his similar behaviour towards other voluntary organisations such as Revolve? Can this be taken to reflect his dismissive and arrogant attitude generally to volunteers and their organisations?
6. Is there any truth to the rumour that the reason Chief Minister Stanhope and his local government is so keen to kill these native animals at Belconnen is that he has plans to make a lot of money out of developing part of the site for more housing?
7. Who are you going to believe on this issue? A voluntary organisation with charitable status that rescues, cares and releases back to the wild all native animals in distress, and which has specialist knowledge of kangaroos behaviour and handling, or Chief Minister Stanhope and his local government who has form in bullying voluntary organisations and a long history of advocating the killing of kangaroos?
8. Is there an extraordinary hypocrisy in Chief Minister Stanhope's support for endangered grasslands on Commonwealth land at Belconnen and his plans for a massive new residential estate on the Molonglo grasslands?

Questions for the ACT Government

9. How many kangaroos will you allow to remain on the Belconnen Naval Transmitter Site when you approve it for residential development?
10. What scientific basis do you have for claiming that it is more humane to shoot a kangaroo than it is to translocate it?
11. Can you confirm that about 99.5 per cent of the ACT's natural temperate grasslands have disappeared since European settlement?
12. Why do you continue to approve residential development applications over what remains of the ACT's natural temperate grasslands?
13. Apart from calling for the slaughter of thousands of kangaroos, what have you done to improve the quantity and quality of the ACT's natural temperate grasslands?
14. Is there anybody in the ACT Government who has any experience at all of translocating eastern grey kangaroos?
15. If kangaroos are over abundant within the ACT, why did the ACT Government contact Wildcare in July 2007 to ask if Wildcare could provide kangaroos from NSW for the National Zoo and Aquarium?

Questions for ACT-based scientists

16. Why after two months of waiting are ACT scientists supporting the killing of kangaroos still unable to put forward credible peer reviewed research that

conclusively shows a causal relationship between kangaroo grazing and any detrimental impact to threatened species of grass and fauna at the Belconnen site?

17. Is it likely that the reason ACT-based scientists are so keen to support Chief Minister Stanhope's call for the killing of kangaroos is that they fear the loss of their grants and consultancy dollars if they do not?

Questions for RSPCA (ACT)

18. Where is RSPCA (ACT)'s evidence that slaughtering a large number of kangaroos with a rifle over three days is humane? Why are they opposed to the use of proven methods of translocation?
19. Why did Mr Linke of RSPCA (ACT) support the Wildcare non-harm proposal in private discussions, but opts for a mass slaughter in his public comments?
20. What has happened to the RSPCA's motto of protecting "All creatures great and small"? Or has it changed to "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others"?
21. Where is the transparency and accountability to the 'fertility trial' experiments ACT Government personnel are carrying out on kangaroos at the Belconnen site?
22. Doesn't the RSPCA have an interest and concern for the harm being perpetrated there in the name of 'science'? Why does the RSPCA not care about this cruelty to animals - or don't kangaroos count as animals?
23. Why did you threaten to take legal action against the Defence Department under the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*, alleging that the eastern grey kangaroos at Belconnen and Majura were at risk of starvation, <u>before</u> you had visited either site to determine the condition of the animals?
24. How much funding do you get from the ACT Government?
25. Why should the ACT Government not revoke your powers under the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* in respect of these animals, given that:

    a. while your organisation has considerable experience of domestic cats and dogs, you have no experience of caring for eastern grey kangaroos;

    b. your inspectors have to rely on Wildcare to tell them how to go about assessing the health of the animals; and

    c. your several public comments calling for the animals to be slaughtered demonstrates that you lack the objectivity to be able to make a reliable assessment of their ongoing health?
26. On what scientific basis, or body of experience, do you conclude that a mass slaughter of kangaroos is more humane than translocation?
27. Has anybody in RSPCA (ACT) ever been involved in the translocation of an eastern grey kangaroo?
28. Under what section of the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*, or any other legislation, does the RSPCA derive power to mandate that kangaroos be slaughtered in order to protect another species?

Questions for the ACT Grassland Ecologists

29. Why, despite repeated requests, have you not been able to produce even one peer reviewed scientific paper establishing a causal link between kangaroo grazing and the viability of any other species?
30. What research have you done that investigates the impact on endangered species in the ACT (e.g., the earless dragon, the striped legless lizard and the golden sun moth) of magpies, crows, eagles, foxes, cats, fire, drought, pesticides, herbicides, ploughing, cropping, sheep and cattle grazing, pasture improvement, effluent disposal or weeds?
31. Why do you consider it better to slaughter eastern grey kangaroos than to translocate them to areas of low grazing pressure with no endangered species?
32. Other than calling for the slaughter of thousands of kangaroos, are you developing any strategies for ensuring that endangered species like the earless dragon and the striped legless lizard have shelter from predators?

Questions for the ACT Media

33. The kangaroo translocation cost figures published by the *Canberra Times* on 3 August are not Wildcare figures. Where did these numbers come from when a tender to undertake such work has not yet been undertaken?
34. What will the moral worth of Canberra be in the eyes of the world if Chief Minister Stanhope is allowed to have his way in killing these kangaroos and leaving many vulnerable orphan joeys exposed to the elements?
35. Tourist information in Australia and overseas lists Canberra's attractions as Parliament House and kangaroos. When Chief Minister Stanhope has succeeded in killing the kangaroos will these tourist agencies be revising their information packs about Canberra?
36. The ACT Government has determined that a sustainable population of kangaroos is one per hectare – have you asked them how many sheep or cattle they consider to be a sustainable population on the same site?
37. Why has Wildcare and some of its members been abused and denigrated, both as individuals and as an organisation when all they have done is provide Defence, at its invitation, with an alternative non-harm approach to managing the kangaroo population and the grasslands on its Belconnen land? Are there not issues of honesty, integrity, ethics, transparency and democracy at stake here?
38. The media in the ACT refer to a 'secret report' mentioning some extraordinary inflated costs for moving kangaroos. As far as Wildcare is concerned no definitive costs for the translocation of a small number of kangaroos has been made to Defence. No proposal has ever been made by Wildcare to Defence to move kangaroos from Commonwealth land at Majura. Could the ACT media distribute the 'secret report' to Wildcare and others with an interest in this matter so its credibility can be examined?

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