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What's all the fuss about?

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Wildcare, a community-based, non-profit organisation which rescues, cares for and releases orphaned and injured wild life, has developed a non-harm proposal to move kangaroos off enclosed Defence site grasslands in Belconnen.

Three months ago on May 13, The Canberra Times printed the item "3200 kangaroos to be shot and buried in Canberra cull". Wildcare believes there were more humane ways of achieving ecological balance on the Defence site grasslands and has put together a no-harm proposal. A summary can be viewed on the Wildcare web site (www.wildcare.com.au).

Wildcare members are highly professional and hold responsible positions in key areas of our community. The organisation has considerable and acknowledged expertise in the behaviour, handling and management of all native animals, of all ages and sizes including kangaroos. There is a strong commitment to making a community contribution through the work undertaken to help distressed native animals.

The Defence Department accepted the Wildcare proposal as being consistent with its whole-of-ecosystem environmental strategy, and invited a wide cross-section of relevant interests to discuss it in a planning forum. Wildcare believes this is the way such matters should be approached.

Statements in the media however have channelled debate in a more confrontational way. Articles have appeared pandering to various prejudices and vested interests. Some items have carried personal and organisational invective, and some statements could be perceived as possible threats or bullying, and with intent for misinformation. These responses project a community that has lost its sense of proportion and reasonableness towards the welfare of our native animals.

There are all kinds of worrying messages in the disconnection between society and the environment in such behaviour. It has certainly been a new experience for a voluntary charity that goes about its daily task quietly helping thousands of distressed native animals each year at no cost to the public. Judging by the private approaches we have had since this saga began, thankfully we can be confident most of the more vitriolic statements involve a noisy minority with little actual interest in the welfare of our unique native animals.

Wildcare's proposal was for the translocation of around 100 and the sterilisation of up to 200 animals. The Wildcare proposal related only to the Defence site at Belconnen where the kangaroos are retained behind a high fence on 130ha of chemically compromised grassland.

It did not propose any translocation or any other strategy for the Majura site.

So why has there been such a tirade of opposition to what ought to be a very simple matter of moving, by veterinarian supported and proven methods, a small number of

kangaroos from a site away from which they cannot move themselves? What is behind all of this frenzied opposition?

Wildcare has 38 questions on its web site yet to be answered by opponents to our approach. Readers should take the time to read these on our web site and make up their own minds.

No credible evidence has been presented proving a causal relationship between kangaroo grazing and impact on grassland flora and fauna. Even if local scientists were able to provide rigorous evidence of an overgrazing impact on threatened grasses and fauna, does it justify these kangaroos being killed rather than simply being moved?

The Wildcare no-harm approach costs ACT residents virtually nothing.

Extraordinary statements have been made in the media about estimated kangaroo translocation costs. These have been mischievous and way off the mark. In our view, the total marginal cost (compared to darting and lethal injection) would amount to something less than the cost of laying only around 300 metres of the total kilometres of single lane sealed roadway that will service the suburb of Lawson when the ACT Government eventually takes control of the land from Defence.

The 'kill the kangaroos' attitude of ACT politicians is bewildering. Is the political concern about grasslands? If this is so, what about the impact on ACT grasslands of housing estate developments, and the proposed Molonglo grasslands development in particular? And what about the housing estate planned for the Defence site itself at Belconnen? Is this hypocrisy or have we missed something? Are the kangaroos in the Molonglo grasslands the next target of the ACT Government?

The RSPCA ACT argued the kangaroos were starving and needed to be shot. However, the RSPCA ACT has no experience whatsoever with kangaroos because the ACT Government does not allow orphaned and injured kangaroos to be cared for in the ACT. Kangaroos are naturally lean creatures. Our inspection in early June indicated these kangaroos were indeed very healthy and no different in condition to others elsewhere in the district – despite the effects on grasslands of a severe drought. Of course, since that time, there has been good rain to promote winter grass growth. There is certainly no longer any basis for such an argument by the RSPCA ACT.

So Wildcare remains wondering what all the fuss is really about in what should be a humane and simple matter. Is there a hidden agenda we have missed? Does the approach of some ACT politicians arise from pressure to generate land development sales for a budget surplus?

As with all of our native animal welfare activity, Wildcare's objective is to relieve the suffering and improve the already tough life of our native animals.