

Testamentary Statement

Dr. Patrick McSweeney, DVM

Regarding Kangaroos, Wallabies, and Wallaroos (Macropods)

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dr. Patrick McSweeney. I am a practicing veterinarian with 42 years of clinical experience. I am a member of the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Louisiana Veterinary Medical Association, the Southeast Louisiana Veterinary Association, the Zoological Association of America, the American Association of Zoo Veterinarians, and the Florida Parishes Veterinary Medical Association.

I am commissioned by the state of Louisiana to represent animals in court, where I evaluate and determine cases involving animal welfare and abuse. I am an animal rights veterinarian.

I am writing to provide professional testimony regarding kangaroos, wallabies, and wallaroos, collectively known as macropods, and to address whether these animals should be considered dangerous animals from a public safety standpoint.

I am a frontline veterinarian who works directly with kangaroos and other macropods. My opinions are based on hands-on clinical treatment, anesthesia, surgery, medical management, and daily husbandry of these animals. I also teach kangaroo medicine, husbandry, nutrition, handling, restraint, and general care to animal owners and caretakers. My perspective is based on real-world experience working with these animals, not theory or anecdotal reports.

In addition to my veterinary background, I have also been involved in legal matters affecting veterinary medicine and animal welfare. In the case **McSweeney v Louisiana Board of Veterinary Medicine**, I put my veterinary license on the line to ensure that animal shelters could legally operate veterinary hospitals and provide medical care to animals in need, and I ultimately prevailed before the Louisiana Supreme Court., and that legal precedent stands to this day. I mention this to demonstrate that I am willing to stand behind my professional opinions and accept responsibility for them when animal welfare and public policy are involved.

From a behavioral and biological standpoint, kangaroos are prey animals, not predators. Their natural instinct is to flee, not attack. In my professional experience, the rare instances of aggression that do occur are almost always associated with fear, improper handling, territorial behavior in intact males, or animals that have been abused or mishandled. This is true of many species, including horses, cattle, deer, and dogs.

It is important to evaluate risk based on actual behavior patterns and documented injury statistics, not perception or unfamiliarity. Many animals that are commonly owned or encountered in everyday life pose a far greater statistical risk of injury than kangaroos. Dogs are responsible for thousands of injuries and multiple human fatalities every year in the United States. Yet dogs are not banned.

People often say that their pit bull is the nicest dog they have ever owned. What they are really saying is that sometimes you find a good one within a group that may have a reputation for aggression. With kangaroos, the opposite is true. Most kangaroos are calm, predictable, non-aggressive animals with very few exceptions. The overwhelming majority of properly raised and properly managed kangaroos are not aggressive animals and do not pose a threat to the public.

It is also important to keep animal behavior in perspective by comparing kangaroos to other animals that are commonly owned or legally maintained. Many horses bite and kick, and horses are responsible for thousands of emergency room visits every year in the United States. Despite this, horses are not considered dangerous animals under the law.

Zebras, which are closely related to horses, are significantly more aggressive than domestic horses. Anyone who has worked with zebras knows that zebras bite and kick and are extremely difficult to handle. Zebras are essentially untamed horses and are far more dangerous to handle than domestic horses. Interestingly, zebras are actually black animals with white stripes, not white animals with black stripes, which is simply a reminder that perception is often different from reality.

Similarly, mustang horses are wild horses. They are not domesticated in the traditional sense, and they can be unpredictable and dangerous until properly trained. However, mustangs are not banned animals. The law recognizes that behavior depends largely on handling, training, and management rather than simply the species itself.

This comparison is important because it demonstrates that the law traditionally regulates ownership based on management and responsibility, not simply the species of the animal. If we classified animals as dangerous based solely on size, strength, or the ability to injure someone, then horses, cattle, zebras, bison, elk, and many other animals would all be classified as dangerous animals. That is not how animal regulation has historically been handled, and for good reason.

The comparison can be summarized simply:

Dogs injure people every year, yet they are not banned.

Horses injure people every year, yet they are not banned.

Zebras are more aggressive than horses, yet they are not banned.

Mustangs are wild and unpredictable, yet they are not banned.

Kangaroos are prey animals and are typically calm and non-aggressive, and therefore should not be classified as dangerous animals.

Public policy and legislation should be based on actual risk, not unfamiliarity with an animal or hypothetical risk. The legislative intent of any law regulating animals should be to protect public health, safety, and welfare. In my professional opinion, responsible ownership and proper management of kangaroos does not conflict with that legislative intent.

Properly managed macropods are typically kept in fenced enclosures, are not roaming animals, are not predators, and do not seek out human interaction in a harmful way. Most injuries

involving kangaroos occur in Australia with wild animals, not captive, human-raised animals under controlled conditions. That distinction is very important. **On the continent of Australia, where macropods outnumber humans, 3 to 1, there have been 2 reported deaths from direct interaction with macropods, exclusive of vehicular wrecks, in 100 years.**

In my professional opinion, classifying kangaroos as dangerous animals is not supported by veterinary science, animal behavior, injury statistics, or practical experience working with these animals. Laws should address irresponsible ownership and improper containment, not classify an entire species as dangerous when the overwhelming majority of those animals are not.

I respectfully ask that you consider the difference between perceived danger and actual risk, and that you consider input from professionals who work directly with these animals.

I appreciate your time and your consideration in this matter. I would be happy to answer any questions regarding kangaroos, wallabies, or wallaroos, including their behavior, medical care, husbandry, and public safety considerations.

One final point: macropods are victims of *Toxoplasma gondii*, not a source of environmental spread. The only way they could spread it is if something eats the macropod. They are an intermediate host. Only cats, large and small, can spread *Toxoplasma gondii* in the environment. This is a well-established scientific fact. Cats are the definitive host of this organism.

Take a moment and click on these hyper-links. You'll learn some fascinating things that you didn't know.

www.facebook.com/share/r/17FJo1P9Sy/

www.facebook.com/share/r/1HDoxZwiVB/

Respectfully,

Dr. Patrick McSweeney, DVM

Animal Medical and Surgical Hospital

3001 N. Causeway Blvd.

Metairie, Louisiana 70002

LSU-SVM 1984

Louisiana license # 1548

504-296-1232 clr