

© 2016 Universities Federation for Animal Welfare  
 The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead,  
 Hertfordshire AL4 8AN, UK  
[www.ufaw.org.uk](http://www.ufaw.org.uk)

*Animal Welfare* 2016, 25: 39-54  
 ISSN 0962-7286  
 doi: 10.7120/09627286.25.1.039

## **Kangaroo harvesters and the euthanasia of orphaned young-at-foot: applying the theory of planned behaviour to an animal welfare issue**

TM Sharp<sup>\*†‡</sup> and SR McLeod<sup>§</sup>

<sup>†</sup> Fowlers Gap Arid Zone Research Station, Centre of Ecosystem Science, School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of New South Wales, Kensington, NSW 2052, Australia

<sup>‡</sup> School of Biological Sciences, University of Wollongong, NSW 2522, Australia

<sup>§</sup> Vertebrate Pest Research Unit, Forest Road, NSW Department of Primary Industries, Orange NSW 2800, Australia

\* Contact for correspondence and requests for reprints: [trudy.sharp@student.unsw.edu.au](mailto:trudy.sharp@student.unsw.edu.au)

### **Abstract**

When female kangaroos are shot during commercial harvesting, it is a requirement that dependent young-at-foot are euthanased. However, there are anecdotal reports that harvesters either cannot euthanase young-at-foot (eg they do not see them or they flee) or will not (eg they do not think it is necessary). In this study we used the theory of planned behaviour to understand the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of kangaroo harvesters with regards to the euthanasia of young-at-foot. We firstly conducted a survey of a small number of kangaroo harvesters ( $n = 21$ ) to gather information to develop the main questionnaire. Recruitment of participants was conducted using a number of approaches including a mail out of over 600 pen-and-paper questionnaires to harvesters in NSW, QLD and SA, Australia. We received completed questionnaires from 65 harvesters. Behaviour was directly observed in only 14 harvesters. The results indicated that those kangaroo harvesters with a more favourable attitude towards euthanasing young-at-foot and who feel more social pressure to do so are more likely to intend to euthanase young-at-foot. However, intention to euthanase orphaned young-at-foot only rarely translated into actual behaviour. The participating harvesters believe that euthanasing young-at-foot reduces joey suffering; that government kangaroo management agencies and farmers and graziers approve of them doing it (but animal protection groups do not); and that the greatest limiting factor preventing them from euthanasing young at-foot is that they escape. This research revealed deficiencies in knowledge and training of kangaroo harvesters with regard to humane harvesting practices. We conclude that the use of social psychology methodology and frameworks, such as the theory of planned behaviour, can provide a detailed insight into human attitudes and behaviours that affect animal welfare. This approach can reveal the most important specific factors to consider when training and educating personnel who have direct responsibility for the humane treatment of animals.

**Keywords:** animal welfare, attitudes, commercial harvesting, kangaroo, social psychology, theory of planned behaviour