

Adidas pledges to end kangaroo leather in shoes, a win for wildlife everywhere

BY JIM MARTIN

GUEST COMMENTARY

During these times of great political uncertainty and questionable morality among leadership at the highest levels, a lot of us turn to the world of sports.

This is because on the literal playing field — whether basketball, football, running or soccer — there are clear rules of personal conduct, and a sense of fairness and decency built into the game.

As a veteran marathoner, sports offer a lifeline for respite, health, and assurance that I am doing my best.

Which is why I was shocked to learn that a global giant of sports manufacturing — a leader of influence in popular and sports culture — has been for decades making its high-end soccer cleats out of the skins of kangaroos slaughtered in the wilds of Australia.

Yes, you heard that right.

Adidas has been sourcing skins of wildlife native to Down Under, to make its higher-end athletic shoes.

I am happy to report this past week, Adidas announced it will no longer uphold the inhumane and unnecessary slaughter by buying roo skins.

This is likely the first that you have heard about such ugly business. It's shocking because everyone loves kangaroos. Americans, especially, love kangaroos. We travel to Australia just to see them. We take our kids to the Denver Zoo to be near them.

And yet, in the past 20 years, 90 million kangaroos and wallabies in Australia have been killed for commercial purposes, according to the Animal Legal and Historical Center. It is by far the largest slaughter of land-based wildlife anywhere on the planet.

It's horrifying, for instance, to learn each year, millions of kangaroos are gunned down at night, and the babies called joeys die only after the shooters slay their mothers, and often while still in the pouch. The industry even has a commercial code to "use a blow to the base of the skull." It's legal to slam the joey against the bumper of a car or another hard surface.

It matters because no reputable sports manufacturer ought to ever support such unconscionable cruelty of native wildlife, on such a massive scale, and for no sound reason. We have synthetic fibers that perform.

While Nike, Puma, New Balance, Diadora and U.K.- based Sokito have all announced in recent years to do the right thing and end their ties to this travesty, Germany-based adidas has been the notable holdout among the world's top five sellers of athletic shoes.

We can celebrate that Adidas too will no longer use its massive cultural and economic influence to drive the dark commercial trade in skins from slaughtered native kangaroos born in the wilds of Australia.

The change of heart came as a surprise, explains Wayne Pacelle, who just returned from Fürth, Germany, where he and German citizen wildlife advocates presented their case to Adidas CEO Bjørn Gulden.

"Gulden told me personally, and later in front of a crowd of 250 people, that Adidas will not resume any purchases of kangaroo skins". It's a permanent exit from the cruel and unsustainable trade.

This win was not easy, says Pacelle who is president for the Center for a Humane Economy, a nonprofit that launched its global Kangaroos Are Not Shoes campaign in 2020, with investigations, protests, litigation, and international coalition-building to expose the brutal commercial slaughter of kangaroos in Australia. The kill has dropped from 2 million yearly to 1.3 million, and as these policies go into effect, that kill, driven by foreign demand for kangaroo parts, will decline, he explains.

The successful effort to get Adidas to shift is a very big deal, Pacelle explains. His nonprofit has been working hard each year with U.S. members of Congress to pass legislation to close our American markets to skins and other parts of wildlife, especially to using kangaroos for athletic shoes. Just last year The Kangaroo Protection Act of 2024 was introduced to the U.S. Senate, according to a release posted by Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., one of the bill's sponsors.

Adidas has been stubborn, even once trying to unwind California's ban of selling shoes made of kangaroos (it is the only state in the nation with such a ban).

Louise Ward, International Kangaroo Protection Alliance (IKPA) tells us this victory proves what's possible when international advocacy unites with grassroots activism. Emma Hurst, a member of Australia's Parliament from the Animal Justice Party adds that having Adidas join its competitors in ending the use of kangaroos is a win for transparency, ethics, and global consumer expectations.

It's nice to see a grand example of Americans and global allies working in unison toward something that is good for humans, and wildlife alike. And a win-win for ethical commerce.

Still, apparently there is more work to be done, as Japanese companies ASICS and Mizuno have not yet pledged similarly to end this trade.

But at least for right now, we can go out and lace up our Adidas shoes for running, or perhaps pickleball, knowing that our dollars are not going to wholesale commercial slaughter. And the kangaroos can run wild, too.

Buying our best sporting shoe is not only about fit for hard-working, pounded-for-miles feet, but should be fitting for our collective morality, too.

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