

**Submission
No 363**

**INQUIRY INTO HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF
KANGAROOS AND OTHER MACROPODS IN NEW SOUTH
WALES**

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A stronger kangaroo industry leads to better welfare outcomes.

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The terms of the current inquiry refers to the health and welfare of pouch young and joeys.

They expresses concern about mortality rates and accuracy of records, suggesting that the kangaroo industry is deficient.

My submission is that a stronger kangaroo industry with landholder engagement will reduce the suffering of pouch young. The alternative is a further decline in the industry, kangaroos continuing to be pests in eyes of landholders, more activity by amateurs and more uncontrolled and unmonitored killing. It would also lead to wider fluctuations in kangaroo numbers, and increased suffering due to starvation brought on by drought.

Kangaroos are abundant

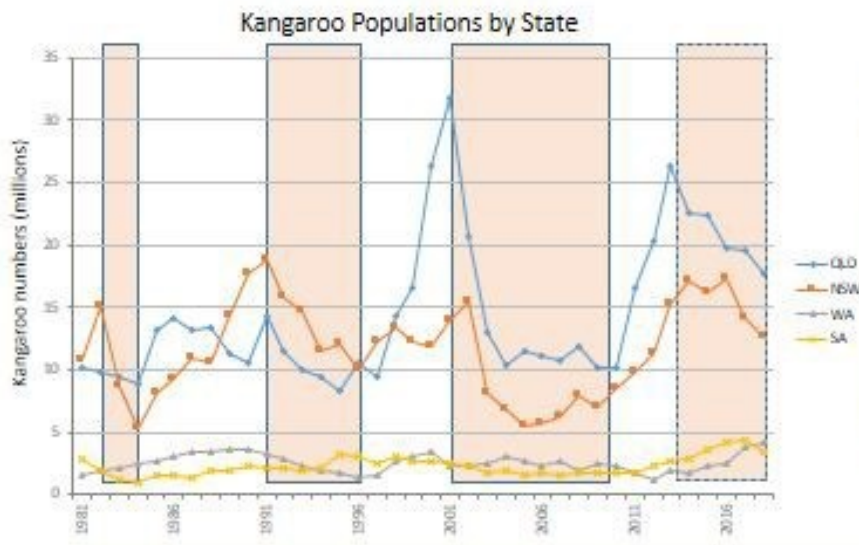
Kangaroos are widely dispersed and abundant on the temperate Australian rangelands where cattle and sheep are raised. Surveys show their numbers have increased steadily over the past 200 years to more than 40 million due to greater availability of pasture, increased watering points, dingo control and less Indigenous hunting. (Frith and Calaby 1969) They roam from property to property, and into and out of national parks, seeking best pastures in response to local rainfall.

Commercial harvesting of kangaroos in Australia is controlled by state and federal governments through regulations and by quotas set to ensure that the industry takes only a sustainable proportion of the population. While the number of kangaroos killed each year is large, it reflects abundance.

Kangaroos for commercial use are shot in the field at night using high- powered spotlights and rifles by accredited, licensed shooters. A Code of Practice reinforced by inspections of carcasses requires head shots and instantaneous death. Most carcasses are processed to human-consumption standard and kangaroo meat is currently exported and sold in Australia to the food service industry, retail outlets and also as pet food. Kangaroo products are exported to over 60 countries (Barnard 2015) including the 28 EU states as well as the US.

Under current arrangements, it is rare for landholders to benefit from the kangaroos on their lands, or to play a role in their management. Kangaroo harvesters are paid per kilogram for the kangaroo carcasses they supply to processors.

Kangaroo numbers respond to seasonal conditions and fluctuate widely. They decline in droughts followed by rises in good seasons.



Starve during droughts (shaded boxes) and degrade land

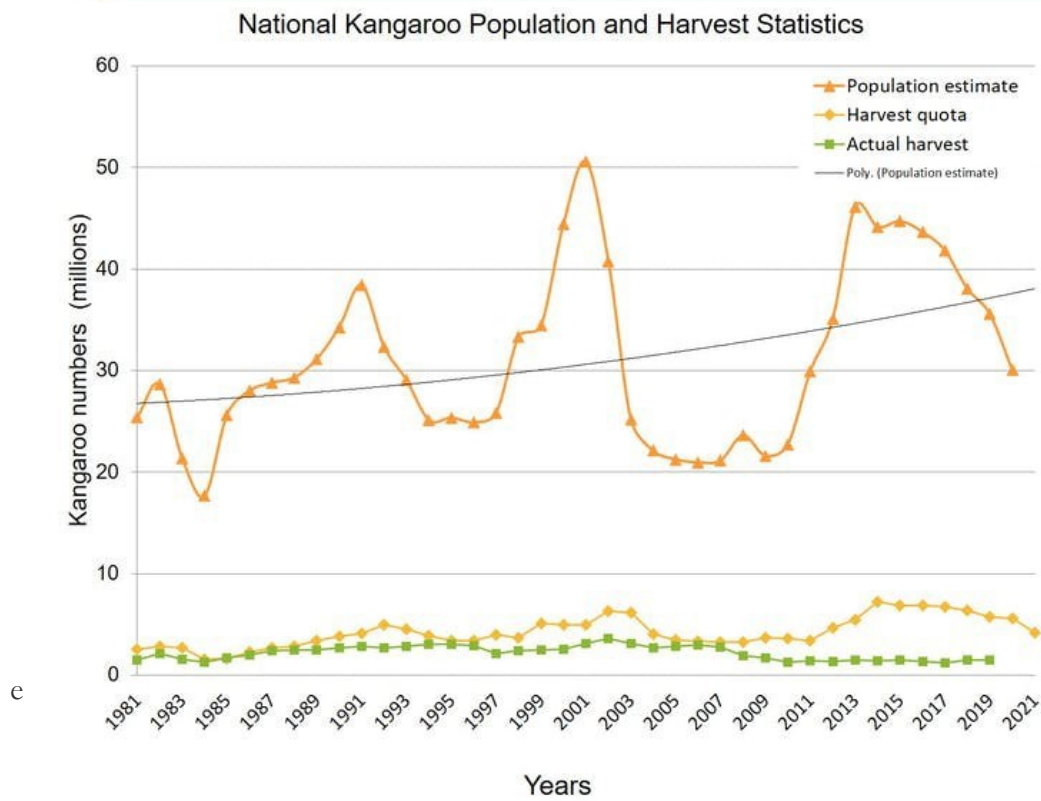


Figure 1:

National kangaroo population estimates, harvest quotas and actual harvest. Data from Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) (2020)

When overabundant, kangaroos are one of the most serious issues for threatened plants and animals and revegetation programs. They also compromise landholders ability to adjust total grazing pressure.

Landholders who reduced their livestock numbers in the recent drought could not get needed support from the kangaroo industry to reduce kangaroo numbers. They believe overabundant kangaroos brought forward the onset of the drought on their properties by six months.

As a consequence, landholders are taking extra steps to prevent damage from kangaroos. They are erecting fences around clusters of properties, often with government support, to exclude kangaroos from pastures and watering points. They use amateur shooters and even illegal poisons, to reduce kangaroo numbers on their properties. The number of permits for non-commercial culling of kangaroos is increasing and recently exceeded the commercial harvest. (Wilson and Edwards 2019).

As the recent drought has shown, over abundance can also affect the welfare of the animals themselves. The population decline of 16 million kangaroos between 2013 and 2019 was caused by suppression of breeding and horrific mass-starvation, including in parks and reserves, once their food resources had been exhausted.

Ideological opposition to using kangaroos in agricultural production.

Many people believe that killing and eating kangaroos, or using their parts in products, is unethical and distasteful. They are particularly concerned, and rightly so, that young kangaroos suffer after losing their mothers.

They argue that to prevent this commercial kangaroo killing should cease. In doing so they disregard the difference between commercial hunters and amateurs, and the importance of incentives that would encourage landholders to husband young kangaroos.

Along with my ecological and animal welfare colleagues, I believe that professional marksmen, operating within a commercial industry, are the most humane way to manage kangaroo populations. (Sinclair *et al.* 2019) and (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) 2019). I have more than 50 years experience in kangaroo management. My research shows that the kangaroo industry leads to better kangaroo welfare, more stable populations and improved conservation outcomes. Wilson and Edwards 2019. When kangaroo carcasses are brought in for processing, regulators can monitor the industry's compliance with welfare codes. Such monitoring is non-existent with amateur culling.

A further decline in the kangaroo industry will lead to more amateur culling, and a repeat of the mass-starvation at the onset of the next inevitable drought, with devastating animal welfare outcomes.

Where to now?

I welcome the NSW Inquiry in the hope it will identify and recommend solutions to policy issues that lead to improved kangaroo management. It will need consider broad questions such as what is the status of so many state-owned kangaroos on land given to agricultural production and what should Australia's kangaroo industry look like in say 30 years?

Key to both effective management and animal welfare is an alternative vision in which kangaroos are considered by farmers and conservation managers to be valuable, not pests.

If kangaroos were more, not less, valuable, landholders would have a vested interest in the safety of both the species, and in particular of young kangaroos, rather than seeing them as pests to be dispatched.

One suggestion for policy reform would be a form of custodianship of kangaroos on landholders properties. (Wilson and Edwards in press) It would create an incentive to invest in increasing kangaroo value, and to graze them alongside other red meat livestock. A kangaroo is currently worth as little as A\$15 - compared to a goat (A\$100) a sheep (A\$120) and cattle (A\$1000) Wilson and Edward 2019. Kangaroo meat currently makes up less than 0.5 per cent of total red meat consumed in 2011 (Boronyak et al. 2013).

Other benefits from integrated kangaroo management are numerous. Kangaroos evolved in Australia's highly variable climate and are adapted to it. Their soft feet cause less damage to soils than hard-hooved introduced livestock.

Increased value could come from regional differentiation of products, promotion of the positive health attributes of kangaroo meat, and ethical advantages of field harvesting. Weight-for-weight, kangaroo is the strongest leather available. (Looney *et al.* 2002) Through better management of grazing pressures and substituting high emission meat and leather for kangaroo meat and leather farmers could earn carbon credits.

I urge the NSW and Federal governments to show leadership and work with the other states to improve kangaroo management. Doing so would seem to be a great project for the Future Drought Fund, (DAWE 2021) supported by philanthropists, and maybe crowdfunders.

A stronger kangaroo industry delivering higher valued products and populations integrated with the other red meat industries is possible. A further collapse of the kangaroo industry will lead to significant waste, smaller kangaroo populations and poorer animal welfare.

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