

**Submission
No 103**

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

Organisation: NSW Farmers' Association

Date Received: 10 May 2021



10 May 2021

The Chair
NSW Upper House Portfolio Committee 7 –
Planning and Environment Legislative Council
6 Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Via: PortfolioCommittee7@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Ms Faehrmann,

Re: Submission to the inquiry into the health and wellbeing of kangaroos and other macropods in New South Wales

NSW Farmers Association (NSW Farmers) welcomes the inquiry into the health and wellbeing of kangaroos and other macropods in New South Wales (NSW) and appreciates the opportunity to make comment. We also note the comprehensive submission made to this inquiry by the Kangaroo Management Taskforce on which the Association, through our Western Division Council, has representation.

NSW Farmers is Australia's largest state farming organisation, representing the majority of commercial farm businesses in New South Wales, ranging from broad-acre livestock, dairy, wool and grain producers, to more specialised producers in the horticulture, egg, pork, oyster and goat industries.

Additionally, the NSW Farmers Western Division Council specifically represents the interests of primary producers across the Western region of NSW. This Council comprises members from the length and breadth of the Western Division and places considerable effort on the importance of effective kangaroo management, particularly highlighting the need for improved coordination through the NSW Government. The Western Division Council is also represented on the NSW Kangaroo Management Advisory Panel.

Kangaroos are an iconic Australian species and like all native fauna, have a protected status within the environmental framework. However, it has long been acknowledged by the farming and ecological communities alike, that kangaroo populations can, and do, reach unsustainable levels. Landscape changes post European settlement, such as the presence of crops and dams, provide consistent food and water resources for the species. This has seen populations flourish beyond that which the natural environment would otherwise allow.¹ This overabundance puts strain on farming and our environment, and has made population management necessary.

¹ McLeod, S. R., & Hacker, R. B. (2020). Balancing stakeholder interests in kangaroo management—historical perspectives and future prospects. *The Rangeland Journal*, 41(6), 567.

Decline in population

In June 2018, NSW Farmers wrote to the then Minister for Environment, imploring her to swiftly activate the series of drought measures relating to kangaroo management that had been announced a month prior. At that time, large populations of kangaroos were putting extreme pressure on landholders who were already under very difficult seasonal conditions. In many areas of the state, farmers who could barely keep their own stock fed and watered were also competing against kangaroos. In the west of the state, where drought conditions had already been severe for some time, kangaroos were dying from starvation and dehydration. The drought measures made the humane culling of distressed and dying kangaroos easier, but unfortunately this is unlikely to have made much of an impact due to the scale of the problem. The data from aerial surveys over recent years shows that several million kangaroos were the victims of the severe and prolonged drought.

The decrease in the kangaroo population over these years is attributable to this drought and is consistent with population changes during comparable historical droughts.² This means that the current population level is not of ecological concern and the species can recover quickly after these types of events. However, NSW Farmers believes that more should have been done to prevent the unsustainable numbers that had amassed. Better kangaroo management in the first case could have prevented the situation of mass suffering which followed.

Drought measures

NSW Farmers supports the retention of the drought measures for kangaroo management introduced in 2018. These changes made it easier for landholders to get licences to perform kangaroo management and relaxed 'shoot and let lie' and tagging requirements.

NSW Farmers has consistently opposed the 'shoot and let lie' ethos. This rule prevents the movement or re-use of kangaroo carcasses under the flawed premise that allowing such things would create an 'incentive' to increase kangaroo management activities. Kangaroo management is undertaken to manage impacts on agricultural assets. The rate of management undertaken relates directly to the abundance of kangaroos and pressure on production systems. It is not related to or incentivised by the ability to re-use or move kangaroo carcasses. Where kangaroos need to be managed, farmers should be allowed to move carcasses to more appropriate places or utilise meat for purposes such as baiting pests.

NSW Farmers' also believes the farming community has shown they can perform best practice kangaroo management without onerous tagging requirements and these should also not be reinstated.

Limitations with counting techniques

The aerial surveys which allow us to approximate kangaroo populations only take place over private land. Heavily vegetated areas, for example national parks, are not included in these surveys. As a consequence the figures arrived at are likely to underestimate the numbers of kangaroos present. Used in a longitudinal sense they may provide useful information relating to trends of growth and decline, however as more land is declared as national parks the figures reported on may become increasingly disproportionate.

Commercial harvesting

The red kangaroo, western grey kangaroo and eastern grey kangaroo comprise approximately 97 per cent of the commercial harvest in NSW, and are particularly common over pastoral areas of western NSW.³ These species, along with the common wallaroo, are the only four species approved for

² Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-trade/natives>

³ NSW Commercial Kangaroo Harvest Management Plan 2017 – 2021, page 3.

commercial harvest and export. None of these are listed as threatened species under national environment law, or under state or territory legislation.⁴

In over 30 years of harvesting under commercial management plans across Australia, no adverse impacts on kangaroo populations have been identified. Relevantly, this timeframe has also included several periods of severe drought.⁵ In NSW, populations of the harvested kangaroo species have been maintained across their natural range over more than 40 years of managed commercial harvesting activities. In addition, the distribution of eastern and western grey kangaroos have expanded. Harvesting is therefore not considered a threat to the conservation status of kangaroos.⁶

NSW Farmers supports the role of the commercial kangaroo harvesting industry in the sustainable management of kangaroo populations. In eras where population management is necessary, the commercial harvesting industry performs an important dual function by also utilising kangaroo meat. This industry is already heavily regulated to ensure high standards of animal welfare, food safety and sustainability.

The NSW Commercial Kangaroo Harvest Management Plan sets out annual harvest quotas based on regular population monitoring. NSW Farmers' notes that the maximum take permitted by the commercial industry has never been fully subscribed. The plan also requires that harvest methods comply with the National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Commercial Purposes. In NSW, licenced harvesters are also required to be accredited shooters and undergo competency testing every five years with the NSW Firearms Safety Training and Awareness Council.⁷ This testing ensures that kangaroo harvesters can shoot humanely, consistent with the Code.⁸

However, despite consumer demand for kangaroo meat, the industry continues to struggle with profitability due to the low margins the regulatory environment creates. Although this regulation is important for ensuring best practice, any greater regulatory burden will likely make it unviable for some harvesters to operate. The commercial industry plays an important role during times of unsustainable kangaroo abundance. Decision makers must consider this when regulating during the less abundant times.

Exclusion fencing

NSW Farmers is concerned about references to 'exclusion fencing' alongside threats to kangaroos in the terms of reference for this inquiry and the sentiment that invokes. Exclusion fencing is an extremely important pest management tool, and can double as non-lethal method of protecting agricultural assets from overgrazing by kangaroos.

NSW is home to a range of invasive species that are established to a degree which makes eradication impossible. The goal of pest management in this scenario is to contain and limit further spread. Individual landholders spend a considerable amount of money each year on pest control activities such as baiting, shooting and trapping. In the western areas the average landholder spends \$7647 per annum⁹ on the management of vertebrate pests. The NSW Government also makes a considerable investment in containing invasive species populations as the environmental and economic impacts of

⁴ Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-trade/natives>

⁵ Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-trade/natives>

⁶ NSW Commercial Kangaroo Harvest Management Plan 2017 – 2021, page 9.

⁷ NSW Commercial Kangaroo Harvest Management Plan 2017 – 2021, page 9.

⁸ NSW Commercial Kangaroo Harvest Management Plan 2017 – 2021, page 9.

⁹ ABARES pest animal and weed management land manager survey 2016-2019. (2021). Retrieved 5 May 2021, from https://public.tableau.com/profile/australian.bureau.of.agricultural.and.resource.economics.and.sci#!/vizhome/Pestandweedsurvey2016-2019_16188065225510/Story1

not doing so are well understood. Yet even with this level of expenditure, the loss to production resulting from pest animals is estimated to exceed \$150 million¹⁰ in NSW.

Exclusion fencing is an expensive outlay for many landholders but extremely effective for preventing sock predation by wild dogs and overgrazing from feral deer and pigs and unmanaged goats. The Kerribee Station case study below also illustrates the level of income that can be lost due to kangaroo grazing and the value to agriculture of exclusion fencing. This is not just a problem for individual farm productivity and profitability. It is a problem that if exacerbated will be passed along the supply chain to consumers through price and food security. It also risks making NSW agriculture less competitive nationally and internationally. Farmers need to be able to protect their agricultural assets- the food and fibre Australian's and our economies rely upon.

Case study: Kerribee Station

Kerribee Station is located in the south west of NSW and run by Jim Maynard and family. In 2018, three areas of Kerribee were planted with wheat at a cost of approximately \$400,000.00.

- Area 1 - 400 ha mostly shielded from kangaroos by newly erected fence, yielded \$200,000.
- Area 2 - 800 ha, less protected from kangaroos, yielded \$240,000.
- Area 3 - 800 ha, no protection from kangaroos, yielded nothing. There was nothing to harvest.

All three areas were subject to the same environmental conditions, the only variant was the ability of kangaroos to access and graze on the sites. This example demonstrates the significant impacts to on-farm profitability an overabundance of a species like kangaroos can cause. The full two page case study is attached to this document.

Yours sincerely

Greg Rogers
Western Division Council Chair

Bronwyn Petrie
Conservation & Resource Management Chair

¹⁰ McLeod, R. (2016). Cost of Pest Animals in NSW and Australia, 2013-14. eSYS Development Pty Ltd, 2016. Report prepared for the NSW Natural Resources Commission.

Kerribee Station

Property snapshot

Kerribee Station is located in the south west of NSW, approximately 30km east of Mildura.

Jim Maynard has been on Kerribee all his life and runs the 47,000 hectare property with his wife Maureen, son James and his wife Wendy. James runs the cropping side of the business.

5,000 ha – cropping: wheat and barley

7,000 ha – conservation area

35,000 ha – grazing sheep and a few cattle.

“When you live on a property all your life you really love that land, you know? You want to see it healthy and thriving. So it breaks our hearts to see the crops and pastures decimated by the kangaroos like that, and then you wonder how you can afford to plant again next year, or finish the fences we need to try and control them a bit better.”

Jim Maynard

Case Study



Figure 1: Jim Maynard has farmed at Kerribee Station all his life

Challenge: Understanding and managing the impact of kangaroos

In 2018 three areas of Kerribee were planted with wheat at a cost of approximately \$400,000.00.

Area 1 - 400 ha mostly shielded from kangaroos by newly erected fence, yielded \$200,000.

Area 2 - 800 ha, less protected from kangaroos, yielded \$240,000.

Area 3 - 800 ha, no protection from kangaroos, yielded nothing. There was nothing to harvest.

Note: Rainfall was similar in each of these paddocks, the only variant was kangaroo grazing pressure.

Note: Jim and James also planted 1,000 ha to barley this year but ended up turning it over to their sheep rather than watch it be eaten by kangaroos.



Photo courtesy of “Wildlife” by Gillian Tyler

Living with kangaroos

- Jim has estimated that Kerribee lost around half their crops to kangaroo grazing in 2018 – this equates to approximately \$500,000.
- It is likely that Jim is also losing around 50% of his potential income from the 35,000 grazing area at Kerribee each year.
- The 7,000 ha conservation area on Kerribee hasn't fared any better than the crops or pastures in terms of overgrazing from kangaroos.
- James applied for damage mitigation licences to reduce kangaroo numbers, but doesn't see this as a positive long term solution to this widespread problem.
- Jim and his son have installed 50km of new fencing on Kerribee to manage the impact of kangaroo grazing, but have another 50kms to install.

working together for healthy, sustainable landscapes and kangaroos



Figure 4: Western boundary of Kerribee showing where kangaroos have eaten young wheat plants, impacting growth and preventing harvest.



Figure 3: 90% of this paddock was stripped bare by kangaroos. There was nothing left to harvest.



Figure 2: Semi-exclusion fencing being erected at Kerribee Station to help manage kangaroo impacts

Conservation cropping

Jim's son James manages the cropping at Kerribee and has invested a lot of time and money in implementing conservation approaches to cropping including soil testing, integrated pest management, crop rotation and stubble retention to maintain soil structure rather than exposing it to erosion through ploughing and/or burning.

However, all this technology and innovation can't save the crops from the kangaroos that descend on the paddocks during the night.



Figure 5: Kangaroos have eaten all the growth and stubble and left the soils exposed to wind erosion

Impacts

Social:

Watching their crops and pastures getting eaten by kangaroos every year and the impact this is having on their income is beginning to impact on the mental health of farmers like Jim and James.

Economic:

Jim and James have potentially lost millions of dollars this year and are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on fencing to try and reduce the impact of kangaroos. This is just one farm. If you added up all the farms in NSW and Australia whose incomes are being severely impacted by kangaroo grazing pressure, kangaroo grazing is costing the economy many billions of dollars as well as impacting food costs and food security in the long term.

Environmental:

Grazing pressure from overabundant kangaroos impacts on both the native pastures and crops at Kerribee. Without the protection of pasture groundcover or crop stubble, fragile soils are exposed to wind erosion and the irreversible loss of valuable soil through dust storms.

Fencing works

Jim and his family have erected 50kms of semi-exclusion fencing at Kerribee to try and help manage the impact of kangaroo grazing. They have another 50kms to go but this year's crop losses have impacted their financial capacity to complete the fence. This type of fence costs around \$8,000 per km once you factor in labour, clearing, grading and materials.

"Fencing doesn't completely stop the kangaroos, but it slows down some of their migration and overall impact."

Without decent fencing, kangaroos are making it impossible for Jim and James to manage their pastures and crops, but the financial impact of kangaroo grazing makes it harder to complete the fencing they so desperately need.



The Kangaroo Management Taskforce is funded by Local Land Services and works in partnership with all relevant agencies, stakeholders and industry.