

# ***Under Fire***

**A Viva! Report on The Killing of Kangaroos for Meat and Skin**

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## Introduction

Imagine this. A mother kangaroo, grooming her beautiful joey at night in the vast wild outback, hears the sound of a four-wheel drive and stands transfixed, sensing danger. Searchlights are shone at her. A man takes aim, supposedly to shoot her in the head - but blows a hole in her neck. She falls in pain, helpless to save her joey who retreats into her pouch. But there's no escape. The hunter pulls the joey out of his mother's blood spattered body, tosses him to the ground and stamps on his head. He writhes in agony and is left to die. (Older joeys who frantically hop away when their mothers are shot, have no chance of survival. They die a slow, lonely death from starvation or cold.)

The shot mother does not die instantly. She struggles as the hunter slits her leg open, thrusts a hook through it and hangs her upside down on a truck. She is knifed, gutted, her head, tail and legs tossed aside. Some way to treat Australia's national emblem.

Juliet Gellatley of Viva!, 2001

The killing of Australia's kangaroos constitutes the biggest land wildlife massacre in the world, surpassed only by the decimation of the American bison in the last century. In its investigation, including trips to Australia in 1998 and 2001 by myself at the invitation of wildlife and animal protection groups over there, Viva! has made a series of discoveries which are amongst the most distressing it has ever come across.

## **The Export Trade in Kangaroo Meat and Skin**

The official kill rate for export in 2001 is 5.5 million animals, slaughtered mainly for their skin and meat. Official statistics ignore the millions of joeys (young kangaroos) who also die when their mothers are shot, which vastly increases the true scale of the slaughter. When non-commercial and illegal kills are included, together with the large number of road kills, the figure is in the region of 10 million.

## **Viva! ends the UK trade**

Viva! ran a successful three-year campaign to stop the sale of kangaroo meat from supermarkets in the UK. Sainsbury's was the most determined to keep selling the meat and supplied it nationwide. It vigorously defended the trade but suddenly withdrew one week before Viva! was due to run another Day of Action outside its stores to highlight the suffering caused by the kangaroo killing. The Days of Action involved more than 100 local Viva! groups holding photocalls, demonstrations and talking to the public at any one time at stores all over the nation. Tesco withdrew from the trade after an extensive campaign by Viva!. Somerfield has refrained from introducing kangaroo meat in over 500 stores due to Viva!'s campaign and large contract caterers acknowledged Viva! as the reason they stopped selling the meat. The British public support for Viva!'s campaign was huge, with many people refusing to shop at stores that sold kangaroo meat.

This quote from the Australian newspaper, Northern Territory News, shows the success of Viva!'s campaign:

*'South Australia-based Australian Meats, one of five major exporters of kangaroo, said that the ban on the sale of meat in Britain had destroyed its \$1 million a year export business. The company handed back their export licence and Dennis Grantham, the manager said:*

*"We have stopped production altogether to Britain... we were exporting close to 400 tonnes of kangaroo meat a year. The decision has also affected our exports to other countries including the US." '*

Further, the Australian meat industry complain in the food press (Food Processor, April/May 1998)<sup>(1)</sup>:

*"When Viva! successfully lobbied Tesco in the UK to remove kangaroo meat from sale, the deputy Prime Minister and primary industries minister contacted the chairman of Tesco to plainly state that kangaroo meat production meets every required standard. But despite the intervention Tesco still pulled the meat from sale."*

This illustrates the level of support that the kangaroo industry has in Australia, with politicians at the highest level supporting the killing.

The Australian government failed to persuade the British public to support its massacre of kangaroos for meat and so is actively turning to other markets - eg Asia, the USA, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and EU countries such as Germany, France, Belgium and Holland. Australia exported six million kilograms of kangaroo meat and 2 million kangaroo skins in 1998. In response, Viva! (in cooperation with Australian wildlife groups) will target its campaign to protect Australia's wildlife at the importing countries (and within Australia). Campaigns outside of Australia are essential to stop the sale of 'exotic' meat and skins. As admitted by the above quote, campaigns aimed at the retailers can be effective in protecting the world's wildlife.

Kangaroo meat exports 1998 <sup>(24, 22)</sup>

Destination	Total Kg
Albania	175,230
Austria	493,604
Belgium	466,354
Bulgaria	1,468,947
Brazil	20,302
Switzerland	11,206
China	92,684
Czech Republic	206,244
Germany	407,065
Denmark	1,410
France	303,211
Britain	38,527
Hong Kong	71,193
Indonesia	51,899
Italy	66,931
Japan	98,127
Macau	160,390
Netherlands	505,352
New Zealand	10,510
Papua New Guinea	90,476
Philippines	455,704
Russia	86,130
United States	180,585
Vietnam	21,334
South Africa	364,852
<b>Total Meat Exports 1998</b>	<b>5,975,067</b>

	1997	1998
Total kangaroo <i>meat</i> exports	3,939,169	5,975,067
Total kangaroo <i>skin</i> exports	2,649,191	2,110,963

## **Kangaroo Products and Value**

The use of kangaroo meat for human consumption has only been legal in South Australia since 1980, in other States the sale of kangaroo meat other than for pet food was not allowed until 1993 when it was legalised in New South Wales. At the same time, mutual recognition legislation came into being, under which products permitted for sale in one state cannot be disallowed in another, making the sale of kangaroo meat in all States possible from that time.

As seen above, kangaroos are killed commercially for their meat and skin. In 1998 almost six million kg of kangaroo meat was exported and two million skins. Traditionally, their skin has been used to make football boots and their meat used in pet food. John Kelly of the Kangaroo Industries Association of Australia says:

*"Many people don't realise that most of the goals kicked in world class soccer are kicked with kangaroo leather."*

Viva! wonders why the sports shoe companies have not promoted this fact and aims to promote it for them.

It seems ironic that Australians don't like kangaroo meat and consistently reject it for human consumption. This is partly why the industry is concentrating its efforts on exporting the country's wildlife for meat. The industry boasts it has found new markets in Russia, Romania and Serbia where kangaroos are reduced to salami and sausages. Other parts of the kangaroo are made into such essential items as bottle openers (paws), wall mounts (heads), purses (scrotum) and golf bags (skin).

The industry claims that it employs 4000 people and is worth Australian \$200 million<sup>(26)</sup>. This figure does not account for the government support it has received.

## **Tax Payers Fund the Kangaroo Killing**

In 1999 the Australian government's Ministry of Agriculture launched an initiative to help fund the development of the kangaroo industry. It is administered by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) and over half its funds are from tax payers and the rest from industry. The industry is supposed to competitively bid for funding, however information provided to Animals Australia and the Australian Wildlife Protection Council under Freedom of Information legislation shows that decisions on who gets the R&D funds are effectively made by the Kangaroo Industry Association!

## **Jobs for the Boys**

The RIRDC makes its decisions on funding of kangaroo industry projects by taking advice from the Kangaroo Industry Advisory Council (KIAC), whose chairperson is nominated by the Kangaroo Industry Association!<sup>(29)</sup> KIAC's other members are representatives of kangaroo meat production/marketing; kangaroo human consumption, meat production and marketing and kangaroo skin production and marketing. There is a single non-industry representative - the RIRDC member of the

New Animal Products Program, whose aim is to "accelerate the development of viable new animal industries".

One example of a grant - the industry received \$170,000 in 1999 to 'improve' kangaroo leather. Minutes of a meeting of the KIAC (24/3/2000) show that a proposal by John Kelly of Lenah Game Meats for funding for 2000/2001 'to improve the kangaroo industry image' was accepted for funding. RIRDC approved a grant of \$18500 with a similar amount to be provided by the industry.<sup>(29)</sup>

Kelly is the Development Manager of the Kangaroo Industry Association and its president is Ray Davis. Davis was also the Chair of the KIAC when the grant for Kelly was approved.

Kelly states that tax payers money is being used to:

*"improve public perception of the environmental wisdom, sustainability and responsible controls of the kangaroo harvest, leading to improved sales". He also says: "Ongoing public upimaging of the kangaroo industry is necessary to counter the continued efforts to denigrate it by radical animal liberationists."<sup>(29)</sup>*

Australia's federal agriculture minister, Warren Truss, actively promotes the kangaroo killing. He declares in a media release of 13 June 2001:

*"I refute claims by animal welfare lobbyists that kangaroos are harvested inhumanely and that their meat is unhealthy."<sup>(30)</sup>*

He further claims: *"Kangaroos are harvested by licensed shooters with a strict code of practice that was produced with the assistance of animal welfare groups."<sup>(30)</sup>*

The umbrella group for animal organisations, Animals Australia, responds: "We were asked to comment on the Code about 11 years ago - not one of our proposals was taken up! The Code is not enforced, nor enforceable in remote outback regions. Kangaroos often suffer and many will die in agony. The industry is the shame of Australia."

## Which Kangaroos are Killed Commercially?

It is often a surprise to people first studying the kangaroo debate that the industry kills 7 species of kangaroos and wallabies commercially.

Commercially killed animals are:

Name of Species	States where killed
Red Kangaroo ( <i>Macropus rufus</i> )	Qld, NSW, SA, WA
Eastern Grey Kangaroo ( <i>M. giganteus</i> )	Qld, NSW
Western Grey kangaroo ( <i>M. fuliginosus</i> )	NSW, SA, WA
Walleroo or Euro ( <i>M. robustus</i> )	Qld, NSW, SA, WA
Whiptail Wallaby ( <i>M. parryi</i> )	Qld
Bennetts Wallaby ( <i>Macropus rufogriseus</i> )	Flinders Island, Tas
Tasmanian Pademelon ( <i>Thylogale billardierii</i> )	Flinders Island, Tas

Kangaroos/wallabies are commercially killed in five States (i.e. Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania<sup>(17, 32)</sup>). Other States allow lesser killing by land owners for "damage mitigation", but do not allow larger scale killing for meat/skin. Red kangaroos, Eastern grey and Western grey kangaroos make up 95% of the kill for export<sup>(32)</sup>.

John Kelly of Lenah Game Meats, Tasmania, boasts: "Ours is the only state that harvest wallaby, "the veal of kangaroo". Lenah wallabies are all taken from pasture rather than the bush and are no more than three years old." (Mercury, 5 August, 1998)

## The Law Governing the Kill

Under Australian law, the individual states have responsibility for wildlife management within their state boundaries, whereas the export of all wildlife and wildlife products falls under the provisions of the *Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Imports and Exports) Act 1982* with Environment Australia administering the Act and giving advice to the relevant federal Minister<sup>(32)</sup>.

In reality, Australian wildlife groups say that Environment Australia (EA) does not protect wildlife - but does the opposite. EA implements legislation designed to ensure that kangaroos are killed, "harvested" and exported. This total exploitation of kangaroos provides a financial profit for Australians prepared to accept the needless killing of the species.

Those scientists who advise the Minister for EA make sure that there is no voice for the welfare of kangaroos, tourism or scientists that argue against the "cull". The Australian Wildlife Protection Council says of the EA: "*The disregard for important stakeholders like the \$6 billion nature-based tourism industry, and breaches of ecological and scientific oversight are indeed very serious. In reality, Environment Australia does not provide legislation to protect kangaroos and no one accepts responsibility for cruelty to them.*" (See section Enforcing the Code.)

## How Many Kangaroos are Killed?

The general trend since the early 1970's has been a steady increase in the number of animals killed commercially, from 885,000 in 1975 to 5.5 million a year today.

Legal kangaroo commercial kill quotas 1975 to 2001:	
1975	885,000
1980	2.9 million
1990	3.9 million
1998	4.1 million
1999	5.7 million
2000	5.5 million
2001	5.5 million

THESE QUOTAS ARE FOR EXPORT ONLY AND DO NOT REPRESENT THE TOTAL NUMBER OF KANGAROOS KILLED. (Note that the kangaroo industry quote these commercial killing figures for export as if they were the total kill.)

In addition, millions more animals are legally killed non-commercially.

The extent of the non-commercial kill can be shown by the Tasmanian wallaby kill figures, where more than 1 million animals were shot in one year non-commercially - when the official quota was set at 250,000. In 1986, the Queensland government stated that the legal non-commercial kill in addition to the quota was 500,000. By 1991 a Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Officer estimated that:

*"1 million kangaroos are shot annually in that state in addition to the commercial quota."*

The illegal kill is also not accounted for in the quota figures; nor are the joeys in the pouches and young at foot who always die when their mothers are shot.

According to the Australian Wildlife Protection Council:

*"...the number of kangaroos and wallabies actually killed each year is as high as TWICE THAT OF THE FEDERALLY SET COMMERCIAL QUOTA."*

In other words in 2001, the government set official quota for the number of kangaroos to be killed is 5.5 million; in reality in the region of 10 million kangaroos will be slaughtered.

## **Cruelty to Kangaroos**

The following statement is typical of the Australian government and multiple retailers that sold kangaroo meat in the UK and still sell it abroad:

Retailer: *"....the sale of kangaroo meat in no way causes undue stress to the animals".*

Below, this report examines different aspects of animal welfare in relation to the kangaroo slaughter, in answer to statements released by Sainsbury's when they sold the meat and the Australian High Commission, UK.

Retailer: *"The professional shooters involved in the cull are licensed and fully trained. They must comply with strict government laws demanding a code of conduct."*

Kangaroos are supposed to be killed by licensed shooters who are supposed to understand a Code of Practice governing the killing. The statement above implies that all kangaroos killed for meat/skin are shot by professional shooters. This is not the case. In fact, according to the Australian Wildlife Protection Council many shooters are itinerant part-timers. A pro-industry report confirms this, stating: "shooters are almost always self-employed" and they are mainly part-time because kangaroo products are "low-value".<sup>(32)</sup>

In addition, the illegal trade supplies a substantial number of animals for meat/skin.

The Code the AHC and retailers refer to is the 'Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos'<sup>(31)</sup>. However - the reason it is called a code is because it is precisely that. It is a guideline for shooters to follow but lacks any clout in law. The National Kangaroo Campaign, Australia state:

*"The code is a voluntary code only and no provision exists in it for permits/licences to be suspended in the event of failure to adhere to the code."*

The code falls down badly in many areas and has done nothing to lessen the concern for the level of cruelty to kangaroos. For example:

## Joeys

The Australian High Commission, London, claims; *"the Government code demands that joeys are put down immediately and humanely"*.

Mother kangaroos often have a joey in pouch and a joey at foot - neither can survive without her. The code states that pouch young of a shot female 'must also be killed. Decapitation with a sharp instrument in very small hairless young or a properly executed heavy blow to destroy the brain in larger young...or by a shot to the brain' must be used. When I was in Australia, amateur hunters admitted to cases of joeys being used as footballs; to stamping on joeys heads (but not killing them); to using crowbars or bashing their heads against a wheel brace or just leaving them to die.

(Even for those joeys which are dragged out of their mother's pouch and killed according to the code's recommendations - I hardly think that the Commission's description of 'put down' conjures up the reality.)

The code does not even make a reference to how older joeys should be dealt with! They are completely dependant on their mothers for milk, warmth in the cold winter nights, protection from predation and emotional support. Without their mothers, they are left to die of starvation or cold or from predation. (25)

Dr John Auty BVSc has studied the killing of kangaroos in all Australian States. He firmly maintains that:

*"Shooters often have a thorough contempt of the law and the Code. They commit cruelty on a regular basis."*

Dr Auty's credentials to speak on this subject are far more persuasive than Sainsbury's. He has post graduate qualifications in veterinary science and was Chief Agronomist in the Northern Territory; Assistant Director of the Australian Bureau of Animal Health and has worked in the outback for many years where he studied kangaroos.

Viva!'s research shows that the killing of joeys is obscene and unavoidably cruel.

Other failures of the code to protect kangaroos include the fact that:

- ▶ Some firearms used are unsuitable e.g. shotguns and small rifles when used on wallabies are unlikely to cause instant death.
- ▶ Laws relating to the killing of kangaroos vary between states and some laws contradict the code. For example, in Western Australia there is an open season where shooters can operate without a licence and do not have to stick to the code.
- ▶ Most of all, wildlife authorities do not have the ability to enforce the code. There are not enough staff to cover the vast distances and they rely on the shooters to keep them informed.

*Source: National Kangaroo Campaign, Australia*

Most telling is the code itself, which states: "No matter how carefully the shooter aims, some kangaroos will not be killed outright."<sup>(31)</sup>

## **Enforcing the Code**

The kangaroo industry state that to enforce the code of conduct: "*National Parks & Wildlife Rangers CONSTANTLY conduct unannounced inspections.*"

This is nonsense. Even if the wildlife authorities had powers to enforce the code they could not use them as the shooting takes place at night in remote areas without monitoring.

The Australian Wildlife Protection Council says: "*the code of practice is legally unenforceable.*"

The number of kangaroos allowed to be killed in New South Wales in 1998 was 1.3 million and yet in 1997 the NSW Parks Law Enforcement Officers were being reduced from a mere 8 down to 6.<sup>(18)</sup>

And in any case, in direct contradiction to the kangaroo industry's claim, the New South Wales National Parks & Wildlife Service state:

*"Cruelty to kangaroos are regulated and dealt with under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals legislation....NPWS does not have direct access to or maintain records on prosecutions under that legislation". (8 December 1996)*

Cruelty to kangaroos is ignored by wildlife authorities at both State and Federal level.

Further, commonwealth powers in relation to wildlife are restricted to the control of exports under Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Exports & Imports) Act 1982. This allows no power to link cruelty or animal welfare to decisions made as to the number of kangaroos being killed for export <sup>(17, 19)</sup>.

## Under Fire

"Kangaroos are strictly protected" Australian High Commission.

Men drive through the bush in four-wheel drives, searching for wild kangaroos which they illuminate with powerful searchlights. They are then shot, supposedly in the head. For many animals it is the throat or neck, leaving them struggling and still conscious when they are dragged to the truck. A kangaroo shooter of 20 years who moved to London, UK told Viva! in 1998 (and reiterated a similar quote to the London Evening Standard in 2001):

*"We often shot kangaroos in the leg because it was a much easier target than the head. You hoped that it would slow them enough to find them and finish them off. That could take some time. I've seen kangaroos running with their guts spilling out.... I'm not proud of what I've done; I just wanted to tell you that the kangaroo industry is lying."*

Some animals are still alive when their leg is sliced open, a hook is inserted through the gash and they are hauled up onto the truck. Their throat/chest is then slit. The shooter stops from time to time and guts the kangaroo, the head, limbs and tail are chopped off and discarded. The skin is left on until the dead animal reaches the processing works.<sup>(32)</sup> The carcasses are supposed to be delivered to a chiller, usually at a local town depot before high temperatures help further rotting. They are then taken to a processing plant where skins are pulled off and taken to a tannery to make leather and the carcasses butchered for meat. What is left of Australia's national emblem goes to make fertiliser.

Even for an experienced shooter, the small kangaroo head is a difficult target, especially at night with the dazzle of spotlights distorting vision. In 1985 the Australian RSPCA carried out a survey into the kangaroo industry, paid for by government. The RSPCA warn that their results were distorted because *"the shooters volunteering information were considered the cleanest in the industry. Even so, they found that "at least 15% of kangaroos killed commercially die inhumanely"*. They say the true figure is much higher.

The Australian RSPCA said in 1997:

*"The RSPCA opposes the killing of kangaroos for economic purposes...the incidence of cruelty is too high to be justified...we are campaigning against the quota system and the industry it sustains".<sup>(20)</sup>*

Amazingly, the kangaroo industry often states that the RSPCA supports the commercial kill. In 1999, Peter Barber, Director of the Victorian State RSPCA put the record straight. He said:

*"In its 1985 report, the RSPCA voiced its concern over the high incidence of inhumane kills. For some self-promoting reason several people have interpreted the report as an endorsement of the kangaroo industry. This is completely untrue, in fact, absurd."*

*"The RSPCA has steadfastly opposed the quota system and the killing of kangaroos for economic purposes. The industry has not identified that any*

*improvements have been made since the RSPCA report was written and, in any case, as with other self-regulated industries, proper regulation and standards cannot be guaranteed."* <sup>(22)</sup>

If a shooter is a poor shot it simply means he uses a few extra rounds of ammunition, using living animals for target practice, many of which will limp off into the bush to die a painful death. In Britain, the use of shot guns with a wide spread of shot, have been consistently decried as an undesirable way of killing foxes by the hunting lobby. Yet in Australia, the single shot of a rifle is portrayed as a humane and infallible method of killing kangaroos.

One thing is certain, such a method of killing farmed animals and their young carried out under similar conditions would not be tolerated in the UK and would be seen as what it is - an animal welfare outrage.

Video footage filmed by IFAW Australia shows a middle-aged man, an 'experienced' unlicensed but commercial killer, and his son of about 10 years old, killing kangaroos and joeys. It is evidence of just one night's slaughter and contains numerous instances of blatant cruelty:

1. The majority of kangaroos shot are hit in the throat and do not die instantly.
2. The child stands on the face of a wounded, conscious kangaroo as the shooter cuts into its leg in order to place a hook through it.
3. A kangaroo is shot in the throat, hung onto the truck by a hind leg and the truck is driven away with the animal still gasping for breath.
4. A joey is pulled out of the pouch of his dying mother. The shooter comments: "You'd better turn the camera off," as he stamps on the baby's head. The child then also casually twists his foot on its head but the joey is still alive and moaning after these crude attempts to kill it.
5. The shooter allows a pouched young to escape into the bush where it will certainly die.
6. The shooter boasts about shooting pelicans, a protected species of wallaby and tries to shoot at a moving fox. And so it continues....

(For a copy of the footage, contact Viva!.)

The shooters may work through most of the night. If the killing is for skin only, often the case in Queensland, the shooters stops from time to time to skin the animals, leaving the carcass. He may kill over 100 kangaroos per night. In NSW and WA, shooting only for skins is illegal and the number of kangaroos slaughtered in one night is limited by what the truck can carry, usually 50. <sup>(32)</sup>

## Why Are Kangaroos Killed?

Australian wildlife, including kangaroos, is under serious threat from Australian government policy, which now states:

*"Australian native wildlife is a renewable resource. If managed in an ecologically sustainable manner, wildlife can provide a perpetual source of economic benefits for all Australians."*

Two main reasons have been given to Viva! by the industry for killing kangaroos. These are:

1. Kangaroos are a major wheat crop pest and
2. Kangaroos compete with sheep/cattle for resources

These statements are untrue and do not justify the largest wildlife massacre this planet has ever seen. Let's look at each statement in turn.

1. "Kangaroos no longer exist in wheat areas as they have long since been killed off." (Australian Wildlife Protection Council) <sup>(23)</sup>.

A four year study of Grey kangaroos in Western Australia by CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific & Industrial Research Organisation) found that 95 per cent of wheat crops are never visited by kangaroos <sup>(2)</sup>. Also few kangaroos wander more than 400 metres from their home range in the bush. The study found that kangaroos have virtually no impact on the country's crops, despite claims by farmers that they are a major crop pest and further, the study recommended that farmers who have natural bush land on their property encourage its growth to help keep the kangaroos fed.

Dr Graham Arnold, former Senior Principle Research Scientist, CSIRO, Division of Wildlife and Ecology, who studied the impact of kangaroos on croplands, stated in 1998:

*"Most kangaroos did not like to eat farm crops and would only thrive if given access to their natural foods.....Unless the community manages remnant vegetation to minimise degradation and enhance the regeneration of native plants, kangaroos and some other native species will disappear from much of Western Australia over the next 100 years."*

He also said:

*"All the land cleared for farming in Western Australia was habitat for one or more species of kangaroos, wallabies and their relatives. Today, five species are extinct throughout the wheatbelt and four species are found only in a few locations." (22)*

Furthermore, a study of the kangaroo killing zones quickly reveals that kangaroos are largely commercially shot in areas where they are NOT seen as a problem to crop growers. Instead, commercial killing takes place in regions of extensive grazing. These areas produce almost no crops and account for only 10 per cent of Australia's meat production.<sup>(22)</sup> Dr Arnold states:

*"Due to the marginal nature of these areas {where kangaroos are killed commercially for meat and skin}, stocking rates of {sheep or cattle} are traditionally very low. Properties need to be enormous. Indeed, publicity given to property owners in these areas in the outback show that the kangaroo, even if in large numbers, could only be placed very low on a long list of environmental and economic factors effecting their livelihood".*

Yet farmers and the Australian government regularly refer to kangaroos as pests. Dr Arnold responds:

*"Pests is an emotive word. It conjures up visions of animals destroying crops. I can think of no situations where this is likely to be true for kangaroos."*<sup>(22)</sup>

2. The second main reason given for slaughtering kangaroos is that they compete for resources with cattle and sheep. A six year study by Dr Steven McLeod at the University of New South Wales<sup>(3)</sup> is the most comprehensive of its type and thoroughly examines whether the presence of red kangaroos negatively impacts on sheep. When I gave interviews in Australia on the kangaroo trade, the industry's, farmers, politicians and some journalists most favourite excuse for the killing was that kangaroos would eat sheep out of house and home if left to their own devices. According to Dr McLeod some studies previous to his have suggested that kangaroos and sheep compete for food, but none have been conclusive. His study is the first to examine this hypothesis properly. In a nutshell, he finds that:

*"There was no evidence of a competitive effect of red kangaroos on sheep."*<sup>(3)</sup>

This was true even in drought conditions. In the winter of 1991 when the study region was officially declared as drought stricken by the government of NSW, the study found no competition for food between sheep and red kangaroos. The study concluded that red kangaroos do not effect the body mass, wool growth, reproductive output of sheep or the growth and survivorship of lambs. In fact, it was found that red kangaroos "consistently avoid areas used by sheep" and that sheep have a negative impact on kangaroos!

Further, Ingrid White who was awarded the Australian Post-Graduate Award for her PhD, started field research for her thesis, *Spatio-temporal interaction of mammalian herbivores in the arid zone*, in 1994 at UNSW Arid Zone Research Station Fowlers gap, Broken Hill.

She states:

*"Like several other researchers before me, working in the same study area located on a commercial sheep station in the outback of New South Wales and working under real conditions, in real paddocks and with real stocking rates, I found little evidence for detrimental effects of kangaroo on the domestic sheep*

*or vegetation. And this, despite the kangaroos not having been culled as a "pest" species for more than 30 years - and the kangaroos equalling or surpassing the numbers of sheep stocked on the station."* <sup>(22)</sup>

Clearly, the reality is the opposite to that which the meat industry would have us believe. And the whole basis upon which the kangaroo massacre has gained public tolerance in Australia is false.

## **Population Matters**

The kangaroo meat industry contradicts itself in its claims over why kangaroos are killed. On the one hand they state they the animals need to be killed to keep their numbers in check. On the other, they claim that killing kangaroos conserves the species and increases numbers. They cannot have it both ways!

There is no evidence to show that kangaroos are commercially killed for meat and skin today as a method of population control. (See 'Quotas - a Cynical PR Exercise' below.)

This claim of 'population control' becomes particularly hollow when you realise that the kangaroos are not 'culled'. A genuine cull aims to reduce the size of a population and involves killing whole family groups. It may involve killing the old, sick, diseased and lame animals. In the case of the commercial kangaroo slaughter - only the largest and fittest animals are shot and usually more males are killed (because they are bigger); leaving young females to breed rapidly. The commercial killing industry is not an organised cull working with the best interests of the kangaroo at its heart!

The late Dr Peter Rawlinson, zoologist at La Trobe University, Melbourne, said:

*"Kangaroo culling programs, completely disregard the age and sex structure of herds, and for this reason cannot be taken seriously.... Professional hunters shoot mainly large adult males, because these animals earn them the most money."*

The estimates of the population sizes of the most commonly killed species of kangaroo vary enormously. In 1983 Barry Cohen, then Minister for the Environment, Australia stated that there were 21 million kangaroos; in the same year the National Farmers Federation claimed there were 30 million!

In 1998 the Australian High Commission in London stated that there were over 50 million kangaroos. This is a ludicrous figure and not supported by Australia's Federal Department of the Environment which quoted a total of 19 million animals in the same year. The industry estimated that there were 27 million animals in an interview with myself in 1998. In 2001 they stated that there are 35 or 50 million animals <sup>(27)</sup>; 40 million <sup>(28)</sup> and 50 million!<sup>(26)</sup> It is in the killers interests to quote a high number - so even if 35 million were accurate; this is not a high number for a country the size of Australia; nor is it a large number when you consider in the region of 10 million kangaroos were killed last year. (Includes commercial, non-commercial and illegal shootings, joey deaths due to mothers being shot and road kills.)

In any event, averaging the staggeringly variable estimates of kangaroo population sizes over the past 30 years, shows that the population has NOT increased and until recently has remained fairly constant, except during severe droughts (e.g. in 1982-83 it dropped to only 11 million). However, there are worrying signs of populations falling today. For example, in New South Wales (NSW) the percentage of all species of kangaroos killed has increased over the last decade. 19% of Eastern Greys are shot and 21% of Western Greys (risen from 14% in the 1980s). Also, in 1996 the NSW kill was the highest on record, whilst the population was the lowest for 11 years. <sup>(21)</sup>

Due to the steady increase in the size of the annual massacre and the decrease in habitat, numbers are set to fall nationwide.

The population estimates above are for the main species of kangaroos killed; there are many other macropod species which are endangered or vulnerable. Furthermore, kangaroo expert Dr John Auty BVSc claims that the current population size of the main species of 19 to 35 million today is far less than the numbers which existed when the Europeans first settled in Australia. In other words, the industry's portrayal of the kangaroo being in 'plague proportions' is a convenient but false assertion.

### **Survival of the Unfittest**

Dr Ian Gunn, BVSc, FACVS, Project Director at the Animal Gene Storage Resource Centre of Australia, Institute of Reproduction and Development, Monash Medical Centre, was asked by the kangaroo industry in 1997 to approve a reduction in the official weight of kangaroos being commercially killed. This request by the industry is of great concern to Viva! as it means that there are insufficient numbers of kangaroos meeting the current weight.

Dr Gunn refused to support the request by the kangaroo industry and stated in July 1997:

*"..the current situation will ultimately reduce the mature weights and sizes of future generations and could lead to a decrease in the ability of the population to survive."*

*"The ability to accept adhoc decisions and to the development of future policy without rational and valid facts, seems to be a continual feature of this industry. Without a national plan to preserve the species and the environment, it is totally inappropriate to allow the continual mass slaughter on the basis of the economic viability of those in the industry." <sup>(4)</sup>*

*"...the continued slaughter of kangaroos has the potential to cause the extinction of a number of remaining species."*

In 1999, Dr Gunn explained that the continued culling may cause extinctions for three reasons <sup>(22)</sup>:

1. The indiscriminate killing - i.e. the elimination of the largest, healthiest kangaroos
2. The unreliable and largely estimated kangaroo population figures that the government and industry use to justify the extent of their kill

3. The re-location of species habitats. Kangaroos are being forced into areas that are very sensitive to climatic changes and increased grazing pressures as e.g. their habitat has been destroyed and they have been killed in increasing numbers.

Dr Gunn stated in 1999 that:

*"The evidence is indisputable and, if left to continue, has the potential to result in reduced genetic variability, lower reproductive efficiency and a radical reduction in the population density below sustainable levels in certain regions of the country when associated with habitat destruction or seasonal conditions such as droughts."*

He further states that Australia has the worst wildlife record in the world. Since the settlement of Europeans 209 years ago, 18 species of mammals have become extinct (half of all the world's loss of mammals in the same time), another 45 are threatened with extinction. Six species of macropods have become extinct (and a further four are extinct on the mainland), seven are classed as endangered and 10 as vulnerable. Only nine species are considered abundant however these are killed annually. <sup>(22)</sup>

The basis of Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection is that natural factors kill the less fit individuals in all wildlife species and so only the fittest survive to reproduce. This is survival of the fittest and is an essential process for a species to remain healthy and genetically viable.

The annual kangaroo massacre undermines the process of natural selection. The larger animals are always targeted as they provide more meat and skin. This means that although a population will try to breed quickly to regain numbers, the less fit individuals reproduce, leading to a genetically inferior population. This situation is worsened in severe drought conditions when, on top of the millions of kangaroos that die naturally, the kangaroo industry wipes out the very individuals who are able to survive the extreme conditions.

This unnatural process which flies in the face of nature, leads to populations of kangaroos becoming less and less suited to the harsh environments which they face.

The Australian Wildlife Protection Council told Viva!:

*"Defying natural selection and acting to ensure the artificial process of always killing the biggest and best out of a mob is a threat to the future survival of the species because even if there is an increase in populations, the animals are not fit and the populations are unstable."*

*"Taking the biggest Red kangaroos for the skin trade and the young one to two year old Red kangaroos for human consumption puts insupportable pressure on the Red kangaroo. An up to 80% male bias in the kill leaves weaker, unfit, unstable, unhealthy populations to breed next year. Is this really supposed to be "good management!"*

Further, the killing destroys the social order of a mob. *"When a shooter enters the structured society of a mob of kangaroos, he destroys a complex system by killing the alpha male, his immediate rivals, and the older females, who are the educators*

*of the group. This selective hunting results in females mating with young males and the loss of the inherited genetic strength of the mob."* <sup>(22)</sup>

As Peter Preuss of the National Kangaroo Campaign, Australia states:

*"This fundamental ecological implication of the commercial kangaroo industry should be enough for commercial killing to be seen as a threatening process in the long term."* <sup>(6)</sup>

Further Dr David Croft, School of Biological Sciences, University of New South Wales adds to this view. He says that reproductive success in kangaroos is a complex interaction between size, age and condition of males and females - and *"very few individuals enjoy high success, most miss out."* <sup>(40)</sup>

*"Amongst males, the largest and fittest fight their way to dominion over mating rights to most of the females in their local population. To achieve this status they have grown for around 10 years and on average, survived at least one drought. Where the opportunity arises, females will selectively seek out and mate with these alpha males, and attempt to thwart often successfully, the mating attempts of lesser males. Females advertise their oestrus widely...with the consequence of attracting a bevy of competing male suitors, amongst which a "superior" mate will emerge."*

*"Relatively few unharvested males live long enough to challenge for alpha status".* For example, studies in Queensland show that only 20% of male red kangaroos reach 4 to 9 years and yet almost 60% of males are commercially shot in this age group <sup>(41)</sup>. Croft points out: *"If we then impose an artificial selective pressure through the current regime of male-biased "top-down" culling, fewer still will survive and the result is a severe disruption to the natural social organisation, changes to population dynamics and the introduction of unnatural selective forces"*.

Breeding males are becoming smaller and younger and Croft says those that would not normally breed are doing so. *"There is a strong selection for smaller body size. We lose genotypes that have been strongly selected by the environment because survival to an old age is a matter of good foraging skills, disease resistance, competitive abilities and chance" says Croft. There is sound scientific evidence to show that female kangaroos choose "good genes" in potential partners. The kangaroo industry argues that killing kangaroos does not destroy "good genes" because killing 15-20% of the population should leave plenty of copies of "good genes" in the population.*

Croft refutes this as: *"This would be true if the cull selected targets at random but clearly this is not the case. The cull may effectively take close to 100% of large males"*. He says this should *"prompt alarm"*.

Other countries indicate how commercial killing selects against characteristics developed for survival. In Sri Lanka the strong selection pressure from killing elephants for ivory has increased the proportion of tuskless individuals in the wild populations. Kurt et al (1995) report a very high proportion - 93% - of tuskless subadult and adult bull elephants, yet this trait is rare in Asian elephants. Tusked elephants are preferred as mates because they have better foraging skills and can

defend themselves and their family against predators, but there are now few to find.<sup>(42)</sup>

The above shows that the Australian government's claim that slaughtering kangaroos for meat "saves millions of kangaroos from dying a slow death due to Australia's frequent droughts" to be grossly misleading as the weakest kangaroos are left to survive by the targeted killing.

The kangaroo industry is responsible for potentially putting the kangaroo at risk. Dr Ian Gunn reiterates: "The evidence is indisputable. A moratorium on the culling of all macropods is urgently needed."

## Further Contradictions of the Kangaroo Industry

Michael Archer, director of the Australian Museum, Sydney is a driving force behind killing kangaroos on the basis of it helping wildlife. This ill-conceived plan is aptly called FATE (The Future of Australia's Terrestrial Ecosystems). Politician Richard Jones (member of the New South Wales legislative council), criticises FATE: "*... as it does indeed represent the ultimate fate of Australia's fauna and flora - for it proposes what is essentially their privatisation*".

Jones states that the commercialisation of wildlife means: "*the possible loss of our national symbol and the continuing degradation of ecosystems with four wheel drives carving up our fragile soils of rangelands in their nightly search for a kill. With the legal commercial kill tripling in the last 10 years and with the biggest kangaroos the prime target, there can be little doubt that the gene pool is weakening. Recent outbreaks of disease may be an indication of this.*"<sup>(34)</sup>

Amazingly, Archer argues that unless the kangaroo is valued as an economic resource, "*it is at risk of extinction through general disinterest, destruction of its habitat and predator activity.*"<sup>(18)</sup>

The government backs Archer and yet they state that the kangaroo is certainly not at risk from extinction - in fact it is in plague proportions. Politician, Mr Slack-Smith declared that there are "*at least 50 million of the four most common kangaroo species. As a result it is essential to protect the environment and to reduce the impact of kangaroo populations on farming and grazing enterprises. Fortunately, every State in Australia has managed to establish effective culling programs and Australia is beginning to benefit from the increasing popularity of kangaroo products domestically and overseas.*"<sup>(26)</sup>

Archer claims that large-scale farming of non-Australian species such as sheep and cattle is damaging the vast and marginal rangelands and that they should be "downsized" (one point on which we agree!). Even John Kelly of the Kangaroo Industry Association agrees in one breath, saying that killing kangaroos instead of sheep and cattle "makes enormous environmental wisdom."<sup>(26)</sup> In the next, his association states that the industry "plays an important role" in controlling kangaroos. "*The kangaroo population would be approximately 30% higher if the industry did not exist. (Caughley 1987) This would threaten the stability of the region and potentially*

*result in extensive desertification.*" (Note the native kangaroos do not cause desertification - hardhoofed cattle and sheep do.)

Many other advocates of the kangaroo industry also do not support Archer's view, stating that the kangaroos should be killed so that they do not harm cattle and sheep farmers. They argue that it is the kangaroos, not their own farming practices, that destroy the environment. (See section Why are Kangaroos Killed? for information on why this argument is false.)

An analysis of the arguments put forward by the industry and government quickly exposes that they frequently contradict themselves and, to put it mildly, manipulate the facts.

## **Quotas - a Cynical PR Exercise**

Quotas were introduced in 1975<sup>(32)</sup>. Each year the federal minister for the environment announces the annual kill quotas. These are set state by state and species by species.

As the National Kangaroo Campaign in Australia state, it is assumed that the quotas reflect the actual numbers of kangaroos and determine the level of killing.

However, if this were the case, you would expect sizeable fluctuations in state quotas to accommodate the rise and fall in kangaroo numbers. The general trend has been a steady increase in state kills since the 1970s. Even in 1982 to 83, during a severe drought which caused kangaroo numbers to drop to 11 million; the kangaroo quotas were set at more than 3 million annually.

The National Kangaroo Campaign state:

*"An examination of quotas together with the actual number of kangaroos killed exposes the quota system to be little more than a PR exercise. The number of species killed often exceeds the set quota. When this occurs, the following year's quota is simply increased to accommodate the overkill in that state".*

The RSPCA of Australia totally opposes the setting of quotas and further opposes the commercial kangaroo industry because of the inherent cruelty involved in the killing.

## **Kangaroos are Killed for Money, not Love...**

It is interesting that outlets that sell kangaroo meat, and the industry, desperately try to defend the kangaroo massacre, rather than admit that these wild animals are killed purely for money. Even state governments in Australia concede that the huge numbers killed now has nothing to do with damage mitigation or population control; it is simply a profit making exercise.

In 1984 the Queensland government added the following statement to its kangaroo management programme:

*"It is important to recognise that while the kangaroo industry was originally a response to the past problem caused by these animals, it has now come to exist in its own right as the user of a renewable natural resource and thus serves its own interests."*

Of course referring to living, feeling creatures as 'renewable resources' is meant to soften the reality of what it really means - the wholesale slaughter of the planet's wildlife.

The Queensland admission that commercial killing is NOT a tool for management has been extended to other states. The Tasmania, New South Wales and Western Australian governments all openly promote the commercial species of kangaroo and wallaby as a 'renewable resource' which should be shot regardless of whether the animals are perceived to cause damage or not.

The Australian Wildlife Protection Council says:

*"Kangaroos are killed for profit rather than in response to damage mitigation. The huge increase in the numbers killed since the 1970s has ensured profits but conflicts with the traditional objectives for which the kangaroo industry has gained public tolerance."*

*"Most Australians are not aware of this recent change in official policy which erodes the status of the kangaroo to that of a mere commodity."*

## **Kangaroos and the Environment**

One of the most disingenuous statements the sellers of kangaroo meat make is that the commercial killing of kangaroos "protects the environment."

The kangaroo industry is environmentally unfriendly! Night after night shooters criss cross the fragile outback terrain, causing erosion, trampling the native vegetation and disturbing (crushing and sometimes killing) the small ground dwelling native species (many of which are endangered). They kill and gut millions of kangaroos, leaving their remains to feed feral animals, thus further skewing the ecology of the outback.

When I was in Australia in March 1998, I had a TV debate with John Kelly, director of a possum abattoir in Tasmania and spokesperson for the kangaroo industry. He argued that kangaroos needed to be killed to protect the environment and that kangaroos were incapable of controlling their own numbers. (In fact, female Red kangaroos stop reproducing (anoestrus) during prolonged poor conditions.) He spoke of the kangaroos as if they were some alien species destroying everything in their path. (See section Further Contradictions from the Kangaroo Industry.) I pointed out that the truth was the opposite - as Australian ecologist Bryan Walters says: "the kangaroo does not destroy Australia's environment - it is an integral part of that environment and lives in harmony with it."

Of course the kangaroo is the original resident of Australia. They are unique to Australia and are perfectly adapted to live within that magnificent country's harsh climate and sensitive environment. The earliest ancestors of kangaroos evolved about 50 millions years ago; by about 25 million years ago the evolution of the macropoids was well under way and by 4-5 million years ago the first species clearly related to the modern grey kangaroos and wallaroos appeared. The red kangaroo is the most recently evolved kangaroo. Its fossil record goes back up to two million years ago and its evolution coincides with the spread of the deserts in Australia. <sup>(7)</sup> The Aborigines entered Australia 40 to 60,000 years ago; the Europeans 210 years ago. The environment of Australia has been decimated over the past 150 years. One guess as to which species is to blame.

## **Kangaroo - the scapegoat for land mismanagement**

The federal government's Environment Australia (which implements legislation designed to ensure that kangaroos are killed and exported) aggressively supports the kangaroo industry. It published a revised report, *The Commercial Harvesting of Kangaroos in Australia* in April 1999. It is supposedly a justification of the massacre - however, it is nothing of the sort. As David Nicholls, formerly a full time commercial kangaroo shooter, states: "Nowhere in its 134 pages does it state that kangaroos are a significant and widespread problem other than a perceived one to the grazing community. It does however, on many occasions point out that the unsustainable use of land by sheep and cattle producers is a real problem."

Primary Industries, a government body, equate two kangaroos to one sheep. In other words, the 130 million sheep in Australia is equivalent to 260 million kangaroos! Yet - as already seen, the estimate of the kangaroo population is, according to Environment Australia, 25 - 35 million <sup>(32)</sup>.

As Nicholls states:

*"For kangaroo "culling" to be necessary, scientific method requires that significant, widespread and continual damage to rangelands and infrastructure is actually happening. IT IS NOT and no such inkling of evidence exists and because of the proportionally smaller number of kangaroos than stock, for it to exist, would mean that kangaroos would have to be far greater destroyers per capita than introduced stock." <sup>(33)</sup>*

Kangaroos, as already seen, have evolved to suit Australia's environment - with soft feet, requiring less water than livestock, no need to grow wool or fat and are efficient travellers that do not compete for resources with sheep (see *Kangaroos are Killed for Money, not Love...*). The Australian government tries to portray the kangaroo as a pest - Nicholls states: "Kangaroos have never been pests and they are not now." They are vilified when it is the sheep and cattle that are ruining sensitive environment.

The Europeans who first invaded Australia soon found that it was not a trouble-free land. By 1853 John Robertson of south-western Victoria wrote:

*"...the few sheep made little impression on the face of the country for three or four years...then plants began to disappear...the clay hills are slipping in all directions...springs of salt water are bursting out in every hollow...when rain falls it runs off the hard ground into the creeks and is carrying earth, trees and all before it."*

As the Australian Wildlife Protection Council says:

*"By the 1850s the kangaroo had become a scapegoat for land mismanagement. It was seen as one more problem facing man on the land. But, unlike many other environmental and economic problems facing these folk, the kangaroo could be dealt with by the age old expedient method of extermination."*

The kangaroo has not destroyed Australia's environment; the white human settlers have raped the land by introducing heavy, hard hoofed domestic animals such as cattle and sheep. Australia's soils are far thinner than those in Europe and tree clearance and livestock have taken a heavy toll. Land degradation is now Australia's "most pressing environmental problem." <sup>(11)</sup>. Despite the enormous damage done by these species, livestock numbers are still high - as shown here

Year	Cattle	Sheep
1861	4 million	20 million
1921	13.5 million	82 million
1961	17 million	152.5 million
1990	23 million	170 million
2000	27 million	130 million

Source: Livestock and Livestock Products, Australia

Estimates of degraded land due to pastoralism range from 1.85 to 2.18 million km<sup>2</sup> <sup>(8,9)</sup>. The situation is particularly serious in New South Wales where 100% of the rangelands are degraded. Considering that the rangelands have only been used for pastoralism for 100-150 years, this data is frightening. Much of the badly degraded land will turn to desert unless urgent action is taken <sup>(8)</sup>.

As Greenpeace International surmise:

*"The farming lobby continues to use kangaroos and wallabies as an excuse for diminishing margins between farm costs and returns.....in fact kangaroos are not a significant factor in the reduction of farm productivity nor indeed do they threaten agricultural interests."* <sup>(10)</sup>

Currently, farmers cannot blame kangaroos for their misfortunes - because they are celebrating an upturn in profits. The Age reported on 7 April 2001 a farmer saying: *"Everything has jelled together for this season. The wool market is good, so is the beef, the lamb and the oats...I haven't seen anything like it in my time. It's unbelievable."*

And The Australian reported on 17 April 2001 that investors are rushing into the rural services and that *"cattle and wool prices are booming.....{there is} a kind of renaissance in Australia's rural sector."*

Despite the fact that the kangaroo does not compete with livestock for food, the kangaroo has been labelled a pest by farmers which gives them a good excuse to make money from killing them. The government has a greater imperative to placate the farming lobby than protect wildlife because of its political leverage. This is because historically, Australia's economic base was built through the agricultural and pastoral sectors. However, since the 1950s other sectors in the economy have become the dominant players. The rural sector now accounts for only 4% of Australia's gross domestic product.

Despite its minimal contribution, the rural sector still has considerable political power, as the primary support-base for conservative governments and as a critical force in marginal seats for labour governments. Neither have wanted to jeopardise its constituency for wildlife.

Currently the push from the Australian government is to commercialise wildlife - plugging the self evident lie that killing kangaroos protects them! The Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales, the umbrella organisation for more than 100 conservation, environmental protection and scientific societies, has called on the government to "refrain from legislating or otherwise enabling the commercialisation and consumptive use of certain types of wild fauna (including kangaroos and all other mammals)". It also opposes the farming of native animals and has called for a ban on the export of all kangaroo and wallaby products. The NCC does not believe the kangaroo industry - whether shooting animals in the wild or farming wildlife - to be ecologically sustainable. <sup>(22)</sup>

## **Kangaroo Farming**

So serious are the problems of land degradation that the federal Government announced that the 1990s is the 'decade of landcare' - what a miserable failure that has been! The kangaroo industry has taken advantage of the increasing public concern over land destruction, arguing that soft footed kangaroos do not destroy the sensitive landscape and so kangaroo farming should replace sheep and cattle.

(This has caused disagreement amongst farmers as many will not publicly admit the damage they have done to the environment and others believe kangaroo farming to be unviable.)

This 'farm the wildlife' argument is appealing to some who would like to see introduced species removed from the arid and semi-arid zones. Even some 'conservationists', usually concerned about wildlife exploitation are prepared to sacrifice the wild status of kangaroos in the belief that it is a better option than continued land destruction.

But kangaroo farming is not the answer to protecting the environment.

All it will lead to is the kangaroo industry shooting yet more wildlife and ecosystems being further destroyed. Valuing animals in purely economic terms ignores their intrinsic worth. It ignores their individuality and right to well being. It also ignores their

ecological worth. It is this attitude that has led to one-third of the world's animal genetic resources now being at risk.

Other species, when used as 'renewable resources', have declined or become extinct. Even the fishing industry, with all its management programmes, quotas and massive subsidies - and knowledge of the damage it is causing by over exploitation, has still reached crisis point, with half of the world's main fishing grounds facing environmental collapse <sup>(12)</sup>. Think of any wild animal which has had a price tag put on its head - cheetahs, whales, tigers, gorillas, chimpanzees, rhinos, seals, exotic birds, Toolache Wallaby (extinct) and the danger signs for the future of the kangaroo become clear.

The challenge is to save and preserve our remaining wildlife - not to farm it or blast it off the face of the planet.

## **Kangaroo Farming is not commercially viable**

Apart from the ecological and ethical debates, livestock farmers will not give up sheep and cattle in favour of kangaroos because it is not commercially viable.

As stated by the National Kangaroo Campaign <sup>(6)</sup>, female kangaroos first breed in their second or third year, after which they produce a maximum of one offspring per year. Often mortality of pouch young is very high and drought may stop kangaroos breeding altogether. (Nature has worked out how to control populations, without the intervention of humans, over millions of years). A young kangaroo is dependent on its mother until it is at least 14 months old and so cannot be sold as live young.

Compare this rate of reproduction with sheep. Sheep, unlike kangaroos can produce twins. Lambs are independent of the mother within a few months and can be sold live. Sheep first breed after one year.

Kangaroos only produce two commercial products, meat and skin. Both are one-offs and require the animal to be killed. Sheep on the other hand are productive throughout their lives, producing at least one wool clip a year and meat and skin when they are slaughtered. Furthermore, whereas lambs produce 20kg of meat at 3 - 6 months old, kangaroos produce much less meat and are too small to kill before 18 months old. Only about 10% of a kangaroo is useable for meat - a large red kangaroo of 60kg will only result in 6kg of prime cut meat. The rest will only be sold for pet meat or meat and bone meal.

In John Cameron's *Recovering Ground*, he concludes that the kangaroo industry could only ever provide 0.5% of Australia's current meat production <sup>(13)</sup>.

Furthermore, anyone trying to care for kangaroos will testify to the difficulties involved. Kangaroos suffer from e.g. post-capture myopathy, lumpy jaw (a fatal and highly contagious disease which is very hard to treat, meaning once contaminated an area must be free of kangaroos for at least three years), Coccidiosis and much more.

Post-capture myopathy is common and affects kangaroos after a chase or handling. Kangaroos suffer greatly from stress and an adrenalin rush can quickly kill the animal or may cause deterioration of muscles and a slower death.

The inability of kangaroos to be herded, yarded, or easily handled makes veterinary treatment and inspections difficult. It also makes farming the animal very risky.

## Diseases in Kangaroos

As stated recently by agricultural scientists: "*The recent series of diseases and mass mortalities in wild fauna, and emerging disease of wildlife in Australia have demonstrated the importance of wildlife disease as threats to biodiversity, human health, agriculture and trade.*" <sup>(36)</sup>

It is possible that the weakened genetic pool due to continually shooting the healthiest, strongest animals is responsible for increased disease levels in kangaroos. Some examples include:

- ▶ In October 1998 there was a major epidemic of an unknown disease in north-western New South Wales. The epidemic had a sudden onset, a short duration of about two weeks and high death rate. <sup>(37)</sup> Most animals were found dead, some had difficulty rising and moved awkwardly. More mature kangaroos were affected than young. The epidemic had drastic effects on the population. Between 1998 and 1999 in the five affected areas, there was a 42% decline in red kangaroos and a 46% decline in greys. In the main affected area, there was a startling 72% reduction in red kangaroos. (This did not lead to a reduction in the quota for New South Wales for the number shot for meat.) Similar types of epidemics have also occurred in Queensland in 1990 and 1999.
- ▶ A widespread outbreak of blindness occurred in many thousands of kangaroos between April and July 1994, and between March and June 1995, in western New South Wales, Southern Australia, north western Victoria and later, in December 1995 to April 1996 in Western Australia. Western greys were mainly affected but also eastern greys, reds and euros succumbed - all species that are commercially killed for meat. <sup>(38, 39)</sup> It is believed that the outbreaks were caused by a virus (possibly the Wallal virus) spread by insects but the factors leading to the epidemic are unknown <sup>(38)</sup>.

## Parasites in Kangaroo Meat

Agricultural scientists identify a complete lack of "preparedness" to cope with wildlife diseases in Australia <sup>(36)</sup>. Indeed the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Warren Truss, issued a press release on 12 April 2001 stating that kangaroo meat does not represent any health risks! However he has still not backed up this statement with evidence.

Kangaroos harbour a vast range of parasites - many increase with stress and crowding.

Speare et al <sup>(14)</sup> neatly sums up the problem:

*"Both species of Grey kangaroos may be infected with 30,000 nematodes from 20 different species..."*

*"A forceful advertising campaign will be required to convince the consumer of the unique health benefits of Pelecitus Roemeri (large nematode worm which in southern Queensland infects 18% of M. gigantus, 6% of M. rufus and 22% of M. robustus...)"*.

Dr David Obendorf, Wildlife Veterinary Pathologist, Australian Member of the Scientific Advisory Board to the International Animal Health Body, Paris (Office des Internationale epizootes), with 20 years experience in the parasites and diseases of Australian fauna says:

*"Kangaroos and wallabies can harbour a wide range of parasitic bacterial, fungal and viral diseases and most of the infections are inapparent (i.e. the animal looks normal). Even meat inspection procedures are unlikely to detect some infections unless gross lesions are apparent or samples are taken for testing."*

*"Worldwide, it is well recognised that so-called game meats are a source of infections for consumers, especially when care is not taken while eviscerating and handling the carcasses or when the meat is served undercooked or raw."*

*"In the last 25 years or so, of 35 new or newly recognised infections in humans, 20 (57%) have been zoonotic in origin - some trivial, some devastating to both the individual and the community."*

*"In Australia, Toxoplasmosis and Salmonellosis are two infections with public health significance directly related to the handling, processing and consumption of kangaroo meat. A recent food-borne outbreak of Toxoplasmosis caused acute clinical illnesses in 12 humans and one case of congenital chorio-retinitis (inflammation of the eye tissue) in a new born baby. The mother of the baby with the other 12 people had attended a function at which rare kangaroo medallions were served. A thorough epidemiological examination concluded that the most likely risk food was the kangaroo meat."*

Toxoplasmosis is caused by a protozoan parasite; symptoms include fever, headache, weakness, muscle pains and liver dysfunction lasting 1 to 4 weeks. The cysts are killed by thorough cooking, but survive in rare cooked meats. As kangaroo meat is often undercooked, chances of infection are greater.

A recent scientific report from the International Health Organisation warns that wild animal meats which are raw, undercooked, dried or cold-smoked are potentially infectious to animal or humans that eat them.

Dr Obendorf states: *"The concern is that chefs recommend cooking methods which would not kill this {Toxoplasma} parasite."* <sup>(22)</sup>

He continues: *"I know of no comprehensive or recent serological or direct parasitic survey of kangaroos for Toxoplasma prevalence. It would seem very necessary that Australian authorities can reassure 'roo meat consumers about the safety of this product. Toxoplasma is one defined public health risk associated with game meat from Australia. In addition there is no data available to assess whether these free-*

*ranging pseudo-ruminants (i.e. macropod marsupials) are likely to have any transmissible spongiform encephalopathy conditions."*

*"In the case of Toxoplasma, the 'absence of evidence' of disease freedom, - in itself is concerning, as importing WTO member countries should be requiring the 'evidence of absence' before permitting this meat to be made freely available or stipulating that (1) meat undergoes processing measures to kill this organism through freezing for a defined period of time and/or (2) labelling the meat with a warning and providing precise cooking instructions to customers. This should be a basic requirement for minimizing the food-borne risk against Toxoplasma infection." (35)*

Australian doctors in 1997 warned of a new threat to human health from eating kangaroo meat. Two victims have been identified and one, a Tasmanian man, suffered a mysterious illness for many years before eventually being placed on a ventilator. He was unable to stand and was losing his power of speech before the parasite was detected. (The nematode worm inhabits muscle cells making it very difficult to detect.)

Dr Erika Cox, clinical microbiologist at Launceston General Hospital, said: "Laboratory tests suggest a new species of microscopic worm is responsible." She added: "People who eat kangaroos and wallabies are at risk of all kinds of parasites that are not normally studied because they don't occur in livestock."

Professor John Goldsmid, medical microbiologist at the University of Tasmania, claims that the cases illustrate how little is known about the potential for 'native' animals to infect humans. He also questions the safety of exporting 'native' meats from Australia to countries such as the UK and maintains that further research is needed. He stressed that the trend to undercook kangaroo involved "probable dangers". (15)

Dr Obendorf says: "Australia has no dedicated research or diagnostic facility to investigate wildlife diseases. Detections of new diseases are handled on an ad hoc basis by government or university laboratories".

Some states of Australia rejected kangaroo meat for many years because of lack of hygiene and control in the killing of these animals. In fact in most states it only became legal to sell kangaroo meat for human consumption in 1993!

One in two kangaroos may harbour Salmonella (16). Killing in the outback and the time delay between processing and cool storing is obviously a problem for bacterial contamination. Shooters are supposed to carry out pre-death inspections - monitoring the movement of an animal to determine if there is any apparent indication of sickness. Shooting animals at night requires them to be static, transfixed by the spotlight so any such inspections are impossible. If the animal is ill and the meat becomes fevered after death, the dark colouring of kangaroo meat ensures there are few visual indications of the condition.

Because of the many external and internal parasites, kangaroos killed between sunset and sunrise are supposed to be placed under refrigeration within two hours of sunrise. Shooters often travel long distances for their night's kill and in summer there

are few hours of darkness. Again there is no monitoring of this regulation and no supervision that can reject meat delayed through mechanical breakdown or from vehicles which have become bogged down. The whole process of regulation is worthless.

As Wally Curran, Secretary of the Australian Meat Industries Employees Union stated:

*"The only thing game about kangaroo meat is that you would need to be game to eat it."*

## **The Future: Tourism?**

It is tragic that some people need to put a commercial value on wildlife. They have no true appreciation or understanding of the natural world and are intent on destroying it. They feel the world belongs to them; that they have the right to kill other species because it gives them pleasure, a rush of power and money - or because of sheer ignorance. Any pretence that killing kangaroos is to "prevent extinction" or to "control pests" is simply an attempt to gain public and media acceptance. However, the kangaroo industry is not a benign force - it is destructive, cruel and brutal and responsible for the worst land wildlife massacre this planet has seen.

It is ironic that if you do accept that wildlife can be valued monetarily, then kangaroos are worth more alive than dead. Stafford Smith (1994) has shown that the value of mining and tourism in the Australian rangelands far outstrips pastoralism and the relatively paltry income from killing kangaroos. Dr David Croft, School of Biological Science, UNSW, says: "International nature-based tourism had a value to Australia of \$6.6 billion in 1995. More than half this expenditure was in national parks". Despite the almost complete lack of promotion of a great wildlife experience in the Australian outback, tourists spent \$343 million in 1995 on outback safaris (the kangaroo industry is worth \$200 million in 2001 - less if you take into account subsidies). Croft says: "many an outback tourist will lament that of the few kangaroos they saw, the majority were roadkills." <sup>(43)</sup>

Dr Croft compares the poor promotion and development of wildlife safaris in Australia with the excellent profile of South Africa. He contrasts Sturt National Park, western New South Wales with the Kalahari-Gemsbok Park in S Africa/Botswana. The climate and landscape of both parks are similar with low rainfall, hot summers, ephemeral rivers, dune fields, pans and stony plains. <sup>(43)</sup>

Croft maintains that poor marketing and development of wildlife tourism in Australia means that while the Kalahari-Gemsbok Park enjoys 48,000 visitors with large annual growth since the release of Nelson Mandela and changes in the political system, Sturt National Park has 12,000 visitors. Croft argues that dingoes should be reintroduced to Sturt to help restore biodiversity and provide the drama of predation, and that the variety of mammals (especially kangaroos), reptiles (46 species) and birds (150 species) would attract many more visitors if managed correctly. He says: "We should emphasise our assets. Kangaroos have a body form unlike any other mammal. A European or American visiting Africa sees antelopes which share the same form as familiar deer, sheep and goats. In contrast, the hopping locomotion,

the bipedal stance endowing the kangaroo with human-like behaviour and the joey in the pouch will leave international visitors entranced." <sup>(43)</sup>

Croft lists the benefits of such a strategy where wildlife is admired and respected, rather than blasted to bits. They include countering the extensive criticism worldwide for needlessly killing wildlife; recognising the intrinsic worth of kangaroos and Australia's exceptional wildlife heritage before it is too late; sustaining large populations of kangaroos as desirable and valuable; adding to the economic value of tourism; restoring biodiversity and expansion of protected areas; generating economic activity in rural communities.

Croft says: "Australia is perhaps the only country which is capable of maintaining large protected and wilderness areas without strong human population pressures on their boundaries. We cannot lecture other nations about maintenance of habitat and biodiversity if we, with the best possible circumstances, cannot get it right. It is time to show leadership and innovation on the world stage." <sup>(43)</sup>

## **Viva! concludes**

Throughout human history, massacres of animals have taken place for pleasure or monetary gain. Each and every one of them, from the harpooning of whales to the shooting of passenger pigeons, the near annihilation of Africa's wildlife to the hunting of otters, foxes and deer, has been justified, excused and encouraged by those with a personal interest in the killing. Their arguments have, without exception, been proved wrong.

Human treatment of the wildlife of this globe and the habitats essential for its survival is a calamity. Those responsible appear to have learned nothing from history and continue to offer the same insupportable excuses for short-term commercial advantage. The fate of the world's wildlife is increasingly being determined by politicians and shop keepers who exclude morality from their decision making.

Viva! has stopped 1500 supermarket stores from selling kangaroo flesh nationwide. We believe that the British public does not want the world's wildlife to be massacred for meat or skin. However other countries are importing the flesh and skin of these beautiful creatures. If this trade becomes further established, no wild animal will be safe. It is time for those with vision and compassion to work within Australia and in the countries that import kangaroo meat and skin on a concerted consumer campaign to stop the trade for good. Viva! will play its part, you can too!

## Statements in support of Viva! from Australia:

*"Viva! is bringing the misery of our wildlife to the world and we praise their work. We implore the British people to support Viva!'s campaign to save our kangaroos from terrible cruelty and greedy exploitation."*

Maryland Wilson, Australian Wildlife Protection Council

"Animals Australia supports the vibrant work of Viva! to expose the suffering of kangaroos in Australia. Unfortunately too many Australians wrongly believe that kangaroos are in large numbers and must be slaughtered.

"The killing is undertaken only because there is a market, and dollars and rural votes are considered important by politicians. If only those whose taste buds are excited by kangaroo flesh could see the ghastly reality of the nightly killing of these magnificent animals".

Glenys Oogjes (BBSoc), Executive Director, Animals Australia  
(umbrella body representing 37 animal protection groups in Australia)

*"I support your campaign because huge numbers of pregnant female kangaroos and their babies are being slaughtered every night and families destroyed and scattered through the blood lust of an indescribably cruel industry. Sellers of kangaroo meat, in their greed for profits must take responsibility for the horror inflicted on innocent wildlife. They are to be condemned for supporting what amounts to genocide of kangaroos merely to make 30 pieces of silver."*

The Honourable Richard Jones,  
Member of the Legislative Council, New South Wales

*"I support Viva! because the kangaroo must be preserved for future generations and protected from the insatiable demands of the commercial kangaroo industry"*.

Marjorie Wilson, Kangaroo Protection Co-Operative

*"The power of money has superseded wildlife management principles. We support Viva!'s work to right that wrong."*

Lindy Stacker, Australia Against Commercialisation of Wildlife

*"The Vegan Society (NSW) wholeheartedly supports the Viva! campaign to stop the kangaroo massacre in our country. The unsupervised and often inept slaughter of this native marsupial in the Australian outback, which routinely sees joeys thrown carelessly from the pouch and left to die, is a national disgrace. While cattle and sheep farming erode the land and contribute substantially to the highest rate of mammal extinctions in the world, this planet's largest massacre of a national symbol remains indefensible"*.

Vegan Society of New South Wales

*"Viva!'s efforts to stop the sale and consumption of kangaroo meat in the UK are of utmost importance to the success of our campaigns here."*

*"The industry is bent on exploiting and killing our kangaroos into extinction. It cannot succeed, however, unless it is assured of a thriving export market, since kangaroo meat at home is neither popular nor expensive. No wonder industry representatives*

*saw red and reacted with indignant defensiveness at Viva!'s success with Tesco followed by Juliet Gellatley's speaking tour of Australia."*

*"We fully support Viva!. Together we can make our voices heard across national boundaries for the preservation of indigenous wildlife is a global issue."*

Rheya Linden, AnimalActive! (Vic)

*"For Australia to sell kangaroo meat to the UK not only countenances cruelty for profit but holds Australia up as barbaric in its treatment of animals. It smacks of hypocrisy to hold up the kangaroo as our emblem and slaughter them in their millions for profit."*

Lynda Stoner, Animal Liberation (NSW)

*"The International Fund for Animal Welfare wholeheartedly supports Viva!'s work to stop the massacre of kangaroos for meat and skin."*

*"The killing of kangaroos is the largest wildlife slaughter in the world and involves unavoidable and sickening cruelty".*

Sally Wilson, IFAW Australia

*"I applaud Viva!'s tireless work to stop the indefensible slaughter of our native wildlife for meat".*

Andrew Bartlett, Australian Democrat Senator for Queensland

*"Animal Liberation Victoria totally supports Viva!'s vigorous campaign alerting the public to the cruel slaughter of Australia's kangaroos. The nighttime massacre with spotlights, guns and axes of these gentle marsupials is the largest wildlife slaughter in the world and an international disgrace. The bloodshed and brutality must stop and we plead to people around the world to help save the kangaroos."*

Patty Mark, Animal Liberation (Vic)

*"Every night while Australia sleeps, 10,000 kangaroos are massacred for profit. We cannot remain silent in the face of this ongoing abuse of sentient beings. Animal Liberation NSW applauds Viva's campaign to raise public awareness and bring an end to this terrible slaughter."*

Margaret Setter, Animal Liberation (NSW)

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