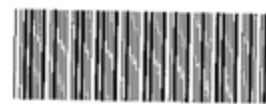




A crossroads in kangaroo politics

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Feedback



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Introduction

Australia is at a crossroads in kangaroo politics. In one direction is the traditional view of kangaroos as pests, which is leading to a focus on finding more and better ways to 'control' them. In the other direction is the view of kangaroos as a potentially valuable resource, which leads to a focus on more and better ways to market them and to have them bring significant economic value to landholders. The geographic focus of this crossroads in decision making is Australia's sheep rangelands, which contain about 15% of our sheep and perhaps 80% of our three large species of kangaroos.

This paper will argue that these two approaches are incompatible, because significant 'control' of kangaroos would remove the potential for having a significant, continuing kangaroo industry. I also argue that significant 'control' of kangaroos is incompatible with conservation goals and is therefore unacceptable. This leaves the only real, practical, long-term direction at these crossroads the one leading to the sustainable use of kangaroos as an economic resource. Moreover, with this approach it should be possible to bring about a productive alignment between the ecological and economic goals in Australia's sheep rangelands, resolving the present conflict between them.

Most people will know already that I am a strong advocate of a future kangaroo industry in which kangaroos are seen as a valuable resource rather than as a pest (Grigg 1988, 1991, 1995). I see their meat being sold as a gourmet product on the world game meat market,

from which graziers in the sheep rangelands will derive sufficient financial benefit so that they can have viable grazing enterprises with reduced sheep numbers, to the conservation benefit of the rangelands. I have elsewhere called this proposal 'sheep replacement therapy for rangelands'. The idea is my attempt at a practical solution to the desertification faced by the sheep rangelands as a consequence of overgrazing.

We are a long way from that at present.

(Note: The generic term 'kangaroos' refers to the large species currently harvested: red, eastern grey and western grey kangaroos and the wallaroo).

Identifying potential goals of kangaroo 'management'

At present, kangaroo 'management' is synonymous with 'pest control', which is seen as a necessity for reducing total grazing pressure. It seems now to be widely accepted that overgrazing is a major problem and that land degradation is severe in most of the semi-arid rangelands. There are widespread calls for significant reductions in the combined grazing pressure from sheep, goats, kangaroos and rabbits in particular, plus the insect grazers whose contribution is even harder to measure but is likely to be considerable. With kangaroos and rabbits seen as pests, reducing these is usually chosen as the desirable way to reduce total grazing pressure.

However, no matter what the goal of kangaroo management, usually lacking is any identification of specific rather

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