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Kangaroo Court? An Analysis of Social Media Justifications for Attitudes to Culling

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ABSTRACT

There are heated debates in Australia for and against culling kangaroos. Understanding community attitudes to wildlife management may aid strategic communication, leading to better outcomes for humans and wildlife. For decision-makers, social media present tantalizingly available attitude data. Using the “appraisal” framework, this study analyzed attitudes toward kangaroo culling expressed in Facebook discussions. Scholarly wildlife attitude models provide useful descriptors and categories but do not account for the complexity and contradictions within individuals’ attitudes to culling kangaroos. The findings reveal conflation of human interests and attitudes to culling; proponents generally justified culling with reference to financial cost or harm reduction. Opponents of culling argued that human convenience and economics do not justify taking the lives of kangaroos. Proponents and opponents often attacked each other

based on perceived personal and ideological differences, ignoring the substance or validity of others' comments. An urban-rural divide promulgated by some culling proponents may fuse cultural/political allegiances with attitudes to culling in ways that undermine kangaroo welfare. Humans charged with wildlife management and decision-making should aim to make assessments that benefit wildlife as well as humans. Future research on decision-making should elucidate relationships between human interest and decisions and communication concerning animal welfare.

KEYWORDS:

Social media

public attitudes

wildlife communication

Kangaroos

appraisal framework

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