



FIXING THE PROBLEM CREATED BY THE ACT GOVERNMENT

I completely agree with Brett McNamara's opinion piece (24 May) where he says that with expanding cities, the ACT Nature Reserves "need to be carefully managed if we are to ensure the places we love to visit endure and thrive.". We completely disagree that anything remotely resembling careful management is currently being undertaken by the ACT government.

Since European settlement kangaroo numbers, rather than increasing are actually being reduced by habitat loss, climate change, road deaths, and by human culling and commercial harvesting. This has pushed kangaroos right across their range to be steep and serious decline – like so many other species that have been smugly described as "abundant" until the day they suddenly become extinct.

The ACT Government has not, at any stage, before or during their annual cull, provided any figures to support the allegation that the ACT has "some of the highest densities of kangaroo densities in Australia". There was no base-line data obtained before the annual slaughter began, and no monitoring of changes in population has been undertaken since. The government ecologist himself has admitted that, in view of the slow breeding and very high infant mortality of eastern grey kangaroos, it is simply not possible for kangaroo numbers to have increased since the slaughters began in 2008.

To keep the land healthy there should be mobs of thousands of kangaroos in the ACT - as there were in this part of Australia before European settlement. Unlike sheep and cattle, kangaroos do not graze down to root stock and they do not have hard hooves that damage shallow soils. They are Australia's natural and ideal grassland managers.

Additionally, kangaroos, as the largest and widest ranging of native mammals, are critical to the wide dispersion of native grass seeds in their fur and faeces. This maintains a diversity of native food and habitat for other native animals across vast tracts of land.

It is also incorrect for Mr McNamara to assert that kangaroos have no predators. Foxes have fully replaced dingoes as the kangaroo's most significant predator. The majority of kangaroos born in any year are taken by foxes.

Mass killing of kangaroos reduces natural biodiversity, it does not protect it. Removing large numbers of kangaroos results in too much high grass which is not good for any species in the long run, because even species that like high grass depend on other species which depend on low grass. All grassland species depend on kangaroos who have evolved to provide the perfect mix of long grass, short grass and bare ground.

Take a look around at any of Canberra's nature reserves and you will see the uniformly high grass achieved by annual kangaroo culling. This uniformity is inherently contrary to biological diversity.

Local evidence supporting this can be found in the Queanbeyan nature reserve – which is ecologically part of the same grassland system as the ACT. In this reserve, where kangaroos have never been culled, the local region's threatened reptiles are making a major come-back.

Kangaroos are not trapped in the urban reserves. Kangaroos move over and under reserve fences as matter of course. Juvenile males routinely leave the home mob in search of mates, some finding

their way to other pastures on farms or reserves or other unoccupied land. Some take up residence in suburbs, grazing on people's lawns. However, as urban expansion continues to encroach around the borders of reserves, there are ever more roads for the animals to cross before they reach a new home range.

The solution for Canberra's kangaroos is to create a series of inter-connective wildlife corridors, linking reserves to other pastures, river corridors and ultimately to the nearby national parks.

Reserves are meant to be refuges for species that are being persecuted in vast numbers elsewhere, especially on farms. Reserves are – or were – the only safe havens for eastern grey kangaroos. One day in the not so distant future, the kangaroos living in reserves and national parks may be the only hope for the continuation of the species.

If reducing kangaroo populations were in any way desirable, yes, fertility control is an entirely humane, effective and proven option. However, fertility control is unnecessary as kangaroos are slow and late breeders. They are also adapted over a millions of years to Australia's cycles of drought and plenty. Females do not conceive and males do not produce sperm when feed is scarce.

What kangaroos cannot adapt to is the sheer scale of persecution to which they have been subjected since European settlement.

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