



## FACT SHEET: EASTERN GREY KANGAROO

### KANGAROO BIOLOGY

**Evolution and adaptation:** Over many millions of years, kangaroos' grazing, movement, breeding and behaviour have become perfectly adapted to their environment, including Australia's cycles of long and severe droughts<sup>1</sup>. Kangaroos are able to survive these conditions because: they can travel very long distances to find food and water with relatively small energy expenditure<sup>2</sup>; and they stop breeding when the food supply is inadequate (males do not form sperm, and females do not conceive)<sup>3</sup>.

**Breeding:** Kangaroos are late and slow breeders: males mature at about five years of age, females around two. If food is plentiful, a mature female kangaroo will bear one joey a year, while still caring for an older one<sup>4</sup>.

**Population growth:** About 50-70% of joeys are taken by predators, mainly foxes<sup>4</sup>. Without 'culling', 'harvesting' or road deaths, the maximum growth rate of a kangaroo population is about 10% per year<sup>2</sup>. Several studies show that when kangaroo populations are not 'culled' or 'harvested', they stabilise in equilibrium with their environment<sup>5,6</sup>.

**Grazing behaviour:** Kangaroo grazing maintains diversity of landscape, maximising habitat options for other species. This makes kangaroos a 'keystone species' which means many other species of animal and plant depend on them for their very survival<sup>7</sup>.

**Environmental comparisons:** A kangaroo consumes only 13% of the water consumed by a sheep<sup>8</sup>, and produces only a small proportion of the methane produced by a cow or a sheep<sup>9</sup>. Unlike sheep and cattle, they bound on soft feet, rather than trampling with heavy bodies and hard, sharp hoofs, and bite off grass without gnawing it to bare ground or ripping it out by the roots<sup>2</sup>.

**Since European settlement:** European agriculture in Australia has taken most of the habitat once occupied by Australian native animals, including kangaroos<sup>11</sup>. Between habitat loss, 'culling', 'harvesting', and road deaths independent experts estimate that NSW kangaroo populations have dropped to about 11% of what they originally were<sup>12</sup>.

### EASTERN GREY KANGAROOS: CULLING AND HARVESTING

**NSW and Queensland:** These states have recently unleashed an eradication campaign against kangaroos, apparently in the hope of winning back the votes of farmers during the current drought. 'Culling' is now effectively unrestricted, while 'harvesting' is based on alleged population increases that are biologically impossible even under ideal conditions (which these states are definitely not experiencing)<sup>14</sup>.

**The ACT:** In this one small territory, which used to provide a refuge for kangaroos persecuted in surrounding NSW, kangaroo 'culling' has increased tenfold over the last twenty years<sup>15</sup>, despite an ongoing crash in the ACT kangaroo population due to habitat loss, huge fires, and drought. The pressure to kill kangaroos appears to come from property developers and farmers. The government's assertion that kangaroos have a damaging impact on the environment has no basis in science. In fact, CSIRO Plant Industries have concluded that up to 3 kangaroos per hectare (the usual maximum found on ACT reserves) benefit the environment rather than harming it<sup>16</sup>.

**Cruelty:** Whether killed for 'culling' or 'harvesting': kangaroos are frequently not killed by the first shot<sup>17,18</sup>; by law, pouch joeys are killed by being bashed over the head<sup>19,20</sup>; because they hop away and hide, most at-foot joeys whose mothers are killed are orphaned, die of hypothermia, dehydration, hunger or stress<sup>21</sup>; mob structure is destroyed by any mass killing, causing terrible stress and suffering to the survivors<sup>22</sup>.

**Starvation:** So-called kangaroo 'culling' in Australia has never been about euthanasing sick or starving individuals. In fact, kangaroo shooters would naturally prefer to shoot where kangaroos are still present in larger numbers (ie where food is still plentiful), rather than where there are hardly any (because food is scarce). In fact,



kangaroo killing (both ‘culling’ and ‘harvesting’) is probably the greatest cause of kangaroo starvation in Australia today because millions of unweaned joeys are orphaned by shooters every year<sup>21</sup>.

**Car accidents:** Most animals cannot see things that move as fast as most cars travel. Car accidents involving animals could be prevented by: providing wildlife corridors for animals that need to get across roads; kangaroo proof fencing to ensure they do not cross roads other than via the corridors; and vastly reduced (and enforced) speed limits.



Photo: Carol Lynn

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16	Autopsy report by Doctor Howard Ralph on body recovered from the ACT government's kangaroo burial pit 2012, in Regional Friends of Wildlife submission to Environment and Sustainability Commissioner Robert Neil, December 2014 ( pp 20, 159, Attachment J)
17	Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, <i>National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Non-Commercial Purposes</i> , p13
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