

KANGAROO INDUSTRY

FILM FACTCHECK

March 2018



Sustainable management

CLAIM 1: Loss of habitat, urban development, agricultural practices and continuing industrial-scale slaughter eliminate kangaroos across vast regions where historical records described them as once widespread and abundant.

PARTLY TRUE: While some kangaroo and wallaby species have declined in numbers due to the impact of humans on their habitats, other species have benefited and increased in population size. Only four species of kangaroo with large populations are permitted to be harvested - the Western Grey Kangaroo, Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Common Wallaroo and Red Kangaroo.

Kangaroo populations fluctuate independently of the harvest, due to factors such as drought. State harvest levels are based on population surveys, meaning fewer kangaroos are harvested when populations decline. After more than four decades of commercial harvest, harvested kangaroos remain among the most abundant large wild vertebrates on earth.¹

Population estimates for the four harvested species fluctuated between 17 million and 57 million between 1980 and 2009.² In 2016, the population in commercial harvest zones was estimated at 47.2 million. Figures for 2017 will be available after March 2018.³

CLAIM 2: Kangaroos grow and breed slowly and have high juvenile mortality. For example, a Grey Kangaroo doe can produce up to 8 independent joeys in her lifetime,” with just two likely to survive to independence.

PARTLY TRUE: Female kangaroos breed slowly in drought conditions and continuously under good conditions. They can produce up to three young simultaneously at different stages of development. Most kangaroos mate within a few days of giving birth to ensure a new birth can occur very soon after the first young exits the pouch, taking advantage of good conditions.⁴ Grey kangaroos differ in that they tend to breed seasonally and, therefore, produce fewer young.⁵

Juvenile kangaroos have high mortality rates in drought periods, which can lead to a lack of nutrition, disease and predation.⁶

CLAIM 3: Maximum wild population growth rates average “10% in optimal conditions, with annual declines of up to 60% during drought recorded. It is biologically impossible for kangaroo populations to increase rapidly.

PARTLY TRUE: An average 10% annual increase in kangaroo numbers could be considered rapid growth. A 10% increase on 2016 population numbers of harvested species would equate to around 470,000 additional kangaroos. Existing populations of some species in certain areas are already considered to be unsustainable.

CLAIM 4: Shooting quotas of 15-20% or more of population estimates exceed actual kangaroo population growth rates.

FALSE: The commercial kangaroo harvest takes place under regulations that allow a quota of 10–20% of the estimated population to be taken each year. The number of kangaroos that

are actually harvested has been much less (around 65% of the allowable quota) since 2001.⁷

Harvesting quotas are set by state wildlife management agencies based on current population estimates as well as the modelled impact of current and projected climate on numbers to protect populations from over-harvesting.⁸

CLAIM 5: Analysis shows critically flawed kangaroo survey methodologies systematically inflate population estimates from which commercial shooting quotas are then over-allocated.

FALSE: Population estimates are based on aerial and ground surveys in the areas within Australia where commercial harvesting occurs. The actual national populations would be significantly higher as these figures do not include estimates for areas not surveyed.⁹

Quotas may be modified during the year based on seasonal conditions, the results of additional surveys and monitoring of the harvest throughout the year. Restrictions may be placed on the harvest such as closing certain areas down or placing weight and size limits on the animals entering the industry.¹⁰

CLAIM 6: Consideration of commercial shooting impacts on kangaroo populations has never included millions of kangaroos additionally shot by landowners and illegal shooting. Other major mortality factors are also ignored.

FALSE: Since the late 1970s, harvest quotas have been based upon population estimates obtained primarily from aerial surveys, with some consideration being given to factors such as overall population trends, climatic conditions and trends in various harvest statistics, including carcass weight, sex ratio, skin size and the size of the overall offtake.¹¹

In its report entitled *Review of Kangaroo Management March 1990*, representatives of the US Fish and Wildlife Service found that “Adequate legislation exists in all States and Territories of Australia for the protection of the red kangaroo, the eastern grey kangaroo and the western grey kangaroo There does not appear to be any large scale illegal killing of kangaroos being conducted in any of the States of Australia having a commercial export kill quota for kangaroos.”¹²

CLAIM 7: Government survey data and commercial shooting statistics illustrate declining populations and landscapes now significantly depleted of kangaroos.

FALSE: Population estimates for the four harvested species fluctuated between 17 million and 57 million between 1980 and 2009.¹³ In 2016, the population in commercial harvest zones was estimated at 47.2 million. Figures for 2017 will be available after March 2018.¹⁴

Humane treatment

CLAIM 8: Shooting occurs away from any scrutiny and in darkness when nonlethal shots are inevitable, often causing horrific injuries. Evidence suggests 4-40% commercially shot animals are not shot directly in the brain but in the neck or body. This equates to between 65,284 - 652,839 animals mis-shot in 2015. Unknown further numbers of mis-shot kangaroos are left to die in the field by commercial and non-commercial shooters.

FALSE: The harvest occurs at dusk and at night, because this is when kangaroos are most active. Shooters are skilled and licenced professionals with a high accuracy rate. About 97%

of all kangaroos targeted by professional harvesters were killed instantaneously in accordance with regulatory requirements according to a 2014 study.¹⁵

Of the one million kangaroos inspected by Federal Government veterinarians in 2014, only 25 were reported as not having been shot in the head.

CLAIM 9: The national Code of Practice requires shooters to shoot at-foot joeys and decapitate or “crush the skull and destroy the brain” of pouch young.

TRUE: Although blunt trauma to the head may be seen as cruel and violent by observers and may be unpleasant to perform from the animal’s perspective, the duration and extent of suffering is much less than other methods. The duration of distress prior to the use of blunt trauma is also likely to be less compared with other methods (such as overdose with barbiturate).¹⁶

The Code of Practice is currently being reviewed through a project led by AgriFutures Australia. The review is being informed through a reference group of representatives from the Australian Veterinary Association, the RSPCA, industry and relevant government agencies.¹⁷

CLAIM 10: Research confirms most dependent at-foot joeys are left in the field to suffer exposure, starvation, or predation, and that pouch joeys’ heads are generally swung against vehicles.

TRUE: The Code of Practice calls for large pouch young to be killed by a single forceful blow to the head.¹⁸ This is considered the most humane treatment of the young and is supported by the commercial kangaroo industry. However, in practice, this is not always possible.

In a 2014 study by AgriFutures Australia, of the 24 young-at-foot that were observed, only one was euthanised with a shot to the head. The reasons for harvesters not killing at-foot joeys despite the requirement in the Code of Practice were found to be:

- Young often forage some distance from the mother and can be difficult to see.
- They tend to flee when their mother has been shot and are difficult to catch.
- If there are a number of young in the vicinity, it is difficult to know which one belongs to the mother.
- Some harvesters don’t like using blunt trauma on the larger joeys but consider shooting at close range to be too dangerous.
- Some joeys are deemed large enough to survive on their own.

CLAIM 11: Joeys killed or left to die are not recorded. Around 8 million dependent joeys are estimated to have died due to commercial shooting in the period 2000-2009. Over 110,000 joeys died from commercial shooting alone in 2015 based on reported figures.

PARTLY TRUE: The number of joeys killed are not recorded, therefore, the above estimates cannot be based in fact.

Health standards

CLAIM 12: 75% of emerging human pathogens originate in wildlife. Kangaroo is a wild bushmeat sold in supermarkets and restaurants. It is not tested for the many human-harming pathogens it harbours.

FALSE: Kangaroo carcasses are all subject to an independent post mortem inspection by Department of Agriculture and Water Resources veterinarians or food safety meat assessors, or a third-party meat inspector prior to being passed fit for human consumption.¹⁹ Whether it is a departmental official or third-party inspector depends on the requirements of the export market.

All registered export establishments are required to participate in the National Carcass Microbiology Monitoring Program, which involves testing conducted by NATA accredited laboratories, under the Export Control (Wild Game Meat and Wild Game Meat Products) Orders 2010 and Amendment Orders 2014.²⁰ In addition to the microbiological sampling, Meat Hygiene Assessments and Process monitoring is conducted.

Cooking meat also destroys bacteria such as Salmonella, Campylobacter and E. coli.²¹ It is recommended that kangaroo meat like most meats be cooked before eating.

CLAIM 13: Wild kangaroos are shot and butchered in the field without supervision. They are transported on unrefrigerated open trucks exposed to dust and flies and frequently high ambient temperatures.

PARTLY TRUE: To ensure wild game carcasses and wild game meat are wholesome, operators need to maintain appropriate hygiene. Field processors must ensure that their vehicles and equipment:

- are cleaned and sanitised whenever necessary to prevent contamination of wild game meat and wild game meat products;
- are clean before operations begin each day, and are cleaned at the end of operations each day; and
- if there is more than one shift in a day, are dry cleaned at the end of each shift and kept in a good state of repair.

The Kangaroo Industries Association of Australia complies with all health and safety regulations. Game meat harvester vehicles are routinely checked by the Food Authority for compliance with requirements.²²

CLAIM 14: There have been repeated findings of contaminated kangaroo meat over many years. In 2014 Russia banned kangaroo meat imports for a third time due to pathogenic contamination. Acetic acid is routinely used to cleanse the meat of systemic contamination.

FALSE: Globally, there has never been a documented case of illness due to e-coli or salmonella from the consumption of kangaroo meat. Russia has not banned imports of kangaroo meat. However, a temporary restriction was placed on a single kangaroo establishment. Russian authorities have advised that the establishment could be relisted following a successful on-site audit. To date, Russia has declined several invitations to audit Australian kangaroo establishments.

In 2014, Russia banned the import of meat, fish and dairy from the EU, US, Australia, Canada and Norway in response to international sanctions. However, the kangaroo trade was not suspended as a result of the trade sanctions and remains outside their scope.²³

Food Standards Australian New Zealand allows the use of processing aids such as acetic acid and they are widely used in Australia. No processing aids are used for EU markets.²⁴

References

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