

SUBMISSION

Inquiry into the impact on agriculture of pest animals

House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Parliament House, Canberra

23 May 2005

Table Of Contents

Executive Summary	1
1 Kangaroo numbers	2
2 Control Techniques.....	4
3 Alternatives	5

Executive Summary

Wildlife Advocate is an Australian not-for-profit community organisation dedicated to ensuring the needs of Australian native wildlife are taken into account in the development and enforcement of policies and practices affecting the safety, freedom and independence of native Australian fauna.

Wildlife Advocate wishes the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to note that:

1. contrary to popular belief, the number of kangaroos has significantly declined over the last three years and is now the lowest in 20 years;
2. there is no logic in the practice undertaken in some jurisdiction to shoot kangaroos to provide meat baits to kill dogs that are preying on native animals. It would be better to employ dog-men to catch the dogs in the first place; and
3. research is currently underway to find alternatives to the environmentally unfriendly poison - 1080. All these efforts should be supported and accelerated to reduce the harm on our native wildlife.

1 Kangaroo numbers

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the Committee) has received a number of submissions that claim that kangaroo numbers are exploding¹ and are having significant effect on crops, fences and pastoral lands when numbers reach high levels².

These submissions are unsubstantiated and have no basis in fact.

According to statistics published by the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage³ the number of macropods (kangaroos and wallaroos) in areas open to commercial harvesting has almost halved over the last three years (41,051,708 in 2002 to 23,271,131 in 2005). Kangaroo numbers are now the lowest in 20 years (previous lower population was 17,666,667 in 1985).

Table 1 (below) shows the population figures for kangaroos in areas open to commercial harvesting for the period 1984 to 2005⁴.

Year	Population				Total Population
	Red	Eastern Grey	Western Grey	Euro/ Wallaroo	
1984	9617021	6434043	714894	819149	17585106
1985	7472917	8334375	926042	933333	17666667
1986	10135417	12361875	1373542	958333	24829167
1987	10368932	14456311	1465049	839806	27130097
1988	9911321	14820755	1714151	910377	27356604
1989	11948031	13559055	1362205	1003937	27873228
1990	12387407	14029630	1732222	862963	29012222
1991	13179021	13174825	2074825	1038462	29467133
1992	12639510	14011754	2423596	1379428	30454288
1993	12100000	14848684	2772368	1720395	31441447
1994	10892808	13063014	2627740	1807534	28391096
1995	11037814	9821910	2374248	1673310	24907283
1996	11353741	8877551	2816327	2108844	25156463
1997	12577381	8125000	3035714	2028571	25766667
1998	10550833	8514881	2641071	2365476	24072262
1999	14527202	12801435	3084042	3135810	33548488
2000	13828631	12355339	3248411	3128482	32560863
2001	13803631	12627476	3066762	3134286	32632155
2002	15188250	18822839	3254732	3785887	41051708
2003	13830881	19573589	3203280	2393405	39001155
2004	9079577	12159030	2520565	2561613	26320786
2005	8364476	9715238	2511089	2680327	23271131

Table 1

¹ Allan Scammell, Managing Ranger, Hume Rural Lands Protection Board

² Chris Gibson, Secretary, Victorian Farmers Federation (Wangaratta Branch)

³ See <http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/trade-use/wild-harvest/kangaroo>

⁴ Derived by multiplying the number of kangaroos commercially slaughtered by the quota as a percentage of total population

These numbers can best be interpreted through the graph in Figure 1 (below)

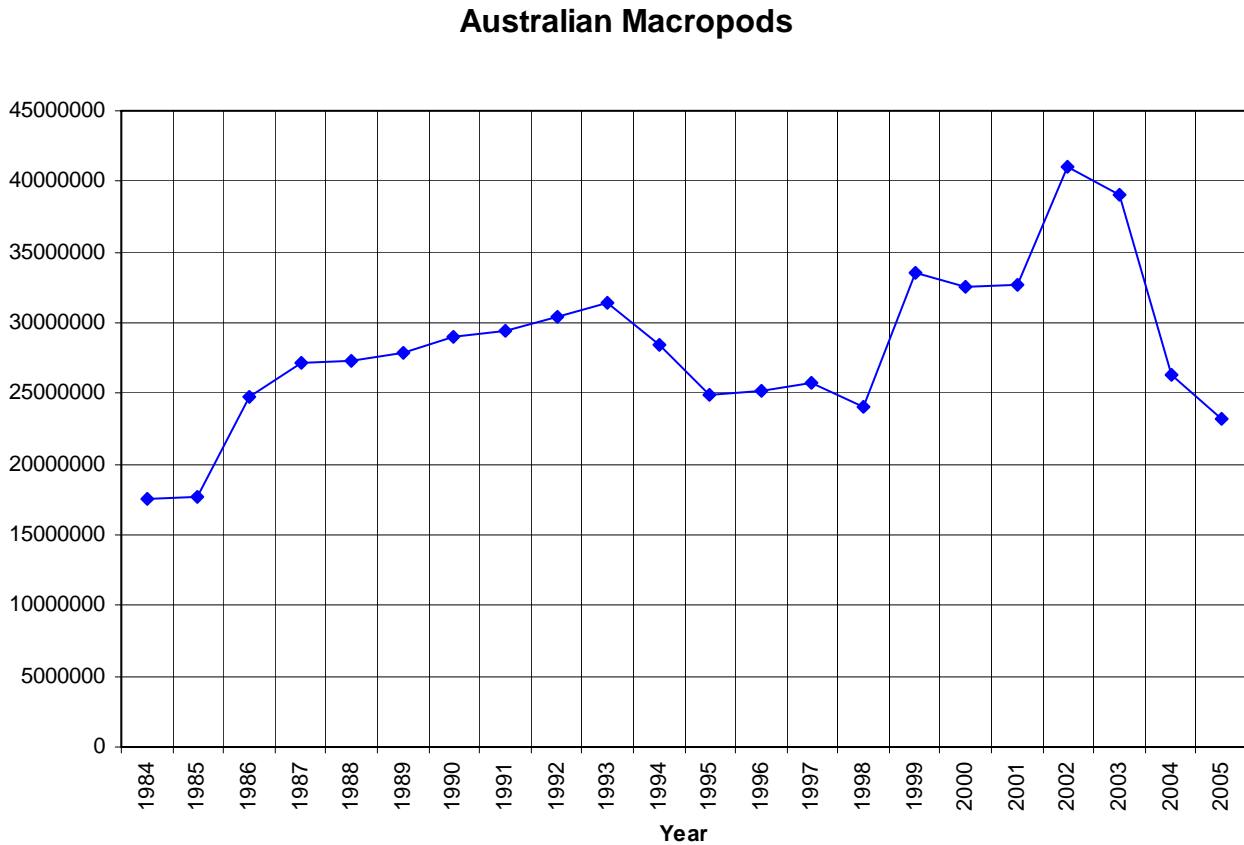


Figure 1

As can be seen from figure 1, the population of macropods has dramatically declined in the last three years and is now the lowest since 1985.

Furthermore, while a number of NSW Rural Land Protection Boards claim in their submissions that kangaroos are a problem, the State Council for the Rural Lands Protection Boards of NSW only listed feral pigs, wild dogs, rabbits, foxes and locusts as pests. The State Council does not consider kangaroos, or any other native animals, as pests.

2 Control Techniques

Wildlife Advocate adds its support to the concerns expressed in other submissions regarding the use of baiting to control pests (wild dogs, pigs, rabbits etc.)

- Mr Geoff Burston, member of the Victorian and NSW Wild Dog Coordinating Committee, questioned the effectiveness of poisoning programs;
- The NSW Farmer Federation pointed out that 1080 baiting of wild pigs was problematic because the amount of poison required in individual baits is of a high level and this poses an increased possibility of non-targeted species being affected. Furthermore, there is no single procedure which guarantees that 1080 will always be totally target specific;
- M.N. Brown, CEO of the Shire of Laverton reported that aerial baiting has not proven successful and that pastoralists do not want aerial baiting carried out. Pastoralists in the Laverton Shire have instead banded together to form and fund “dogging groups”; and
- In 1989 the Tasmanian Government Wildlife Advisory Committee found that native non-target species affected by incidental 1080 poisoning include wombats, potoroos (including the threatened eastern barred bandicoot), the Tasmanian betong (extinct on the mainland), cockatoos, parrots, the broad-toothed rat, the New Holland mouse, the long-tailed mouse, ringtail possums, eastern quolls, shrike-thrushes, forest ravens, herons, hawks and owls. Basically any creature who eats carrots or meat, or invertebrates who feed on carrion are at risk.

Furthermore, Wildlife Advocate supports the call for the continuance/increase in the use of doggers, instead of baiting, to control wild dog populations.

- Ms Betty Murtagh, Honorary Secretary of the Victorian Farmers Federation (Barnawatha Branch) submitted that “*we need more people on the ground - dogmen*”;
- Ms Carol Talbot submitted that “*if sufficient people were permanently employed as trappers/pest animal controllers the pest problems would be taken care of*”;
- Mr Fraser Barry of Bindi Swifts Creek (Victoria) called for dog-men to be retained;
- Field and Game Australia pointed out that hunting is a very effective & targeted method of pest control...For example, during 2002/03 Victorian hunters participated in a fox bounty trial that eradicated over 198,000 foxes in just over 12 months;
- Rodger & Yvonne Connley (pastoralists) submitted that “*...more funding [should be] made available to employ more dog-men as well as train new and young dog-men for the future*”;
- P.C & D.F Foster stated that “*dog-men should be retained at all cost*”; and
- Robert Lee submitted “*dog trappers were needed to control wild dog numbers*”.

Doggers are 100% target specific and there is no secondary exposure for non-target animals.

3 Alternatives

Wildlife Advocate adds its support for the call made in many of the submissions for research into finding alternatives to the toxic poison 1080.

- Chris Gibson, Secretary of the Wangaratta Branch of the Victorian Farmers federation stated that “*ongoing research needs to be continued to develop alternative methods [to 1080] of control and/or eradication. For example: development of viral infection specific to foxes...*”; and
- Bomballa Rural Lands Protection Board has submitted that “*more research is needed into the sensitive issues with 1080 baiting - there is little science available...*”.

Wildlife Advocate notes that work is already underway and calls for more financial support to be given to these initiatives so that results can be generated quicker and the benefits of non-toxic pest control measures can be introduced earlier. The sooner better alternatives are implemented, the sooner our Australian wildlife will no longer suffer needlessly.

- Forestry Tasmania and the CRC for Sustainable Production Forestry have been researching alternatives to 1080 - spending >\$0.5 million annually over the past few years;
- Bureau of Rural Sciences and the Livestock Corporation are currently supporting research (by the Queensland Department of Natural Resources, Mines & Energy and the Pest Animal Control CRC) to investigate alternative bait toxins, mediums and strategies; and
- The Pest Animal Control CRC is currently investigating canid-specific toxins that would theoretically allow aerial baiting of wild dogs in areas where it is not currently undertaken due to non-target risks.