

CHAPTER 8

CRUELTY TO KANGAROOS

Introduction

8.1 Incidences of cruelty to animals normally evince an emotional response in people in our community. The level of response does depend to some extent on the species of animal involved; cruelty to a kitten will create a greater emotional response than cruelty to a rat. The physical characteristics and national symbolism of kangaroos tends to create a high emotional reaction to incidences of cruelty perpetrated against them.

8.2 The level of cruelty to kangaroos is an essential element in this inquiry. To some extent, cruelty to kangaroos has been institutionalised through the system of kangaroo management. However, the worst examples of cruelty can be seen in the actions of illegal hunters or people, often drunk, who have no respect for animals. The actual extent of cruelty is very difficult to determine. The illegal killing of kangaroos is difficult to detect and prosecutions have been few. This position has been exacerbated by the lack of resources available to fauna authorities throughout Australia. The extent of cruelty within the system of the legal killing of kangaroos is also hard to uncover.

8.3 In 1984, the ANPWS commissioned RSPCA Australia to carry out a study of cruelty to kangaroos. Three executive members of RSPCA Australia and two consultants produced a report entitled 'The Incidence of Cruelty to Kangaroos' in May 1985. Because of the short time available to the RSPCA to conduct the inquiry, it was decided to examine cruelty to the eastern and western grey kangaroos, red kangaroos and the common wallaroo during

commercial, non-commercial and illegal hunting. The killing of wallabies in several States, particularly Tasmania and Queensland, was excluded.

8.4 In January 1986, the ANPWS commissioned RSPCA Australia to do a study of cruelty to wallabies in Tasmania. The RSPCA presented its report entitled 'Incidence of Cruelty to Wallabies in Commercial and Non-Commercial Operations in Tasmania' in May 1987.

8.5 The two reports of RSPCA Australia on cruelty to kangaroos and wallabies go some way to filling the large gap in knowledge in this area. Whereas beforehand much of the debate centred on anecdotal information, the work of the RSPCA has now put discussion on a firmer and more rational basis. The RSPCA would be the first to agree that there are inadequacies in its studies. However, it would take considerably more time and resources than those available to the RSPCA to accomplish results which would significantly improve on its work.

Definition of Cruelty

8.6 The Committee adopted, for the purposes of this report, the definition of cruelty which was used by RSPCA Australia in its study, namely:

Cruelty means the infliction upon an animal of pain that in its kind or in its degree or its object or its circumstances is unreasonable.¹

In the above definition 'pain' should be taken to mean 'suffering or distress of body or mind'.

8.7 Although it can be argued that deprivation of life is itself an act of cruelty, the Committee has agreed that in this report it should not be treated as an act of cruelty.

Consequently, when instantaneous death or loss of consciousness without recovery occurs, there is no cruelty involved. When there is not instantaneous loss of consciousness, and the kangaroo suffers pain (in the common usage of the word) or distress, there is, in the opinion of the Committee, some degree of cruelty. That degree depends on the intensity and duration of suffering. It is important, therefore, when a kangaroo is wounded rather than killed, that it be killed as soon as possible, to avoid unnecessary suffering. In other words, the shooter must despatch the wounded kangaroo before shooting any other kangaroo.

8.8 If a doe is killed and a young at foot escapes, the young may suffer some distress. If distress is caused this, too, is cruel. Such cruelty is, however, often difficult to prevent.

Methods of Killing Kangaroos and Wallabies

8.9 Various methods are used to kill kangaroos and wallabies. Each is examined below to determine its humaneness.

Rifle Shooting

8.10 The RSPCA examined the effect of the impact of a bullet in the brain, neck and chest of a kangaroo.

8.11 The RSPCA found that a bullet which penetrates the brain will cause instantaneous death and it regarded this method as humane. Sometimes a bullet, which is fired by a shooter facing the front of the head, 'enters the frontal sinuses and fragments without entering the cranium and often two shots are required to kill the kangaroo'. The kangaroo is in a comatose state after being struck by the first bullet.

8.12 With regard to chest shots, the RSPCA study concluded that:

1. A direct shot to the heart which ensures massive rupture of one or more heart chambers should induce unconsciousness in the kangaroo within 5 to 20 seconds depending upon the severity of heart rupture. Death will follow rapidly.
2. Unconsciousness following rupture of a thoracic artery is much less predictable, and depends upon the artery ruptured, and the state of activity of the kangaroo both before and following being shot. Kangaroo shooters and observers regularly report kangaroos traversing up to 100 metres following a "chest" shot before falling unconscious. Death will occur.
3. The problem of chest shots which traverse the thoracic cavity without doing vital damage is more frequent than jaw/nose shattering in "missed" head shots according to veterinarians experienced in shooting kangaroos.

From the above information it is concluded that it would appear that a bullet placed in the heart of an animal so that it causes massive damage to the organ will result in the death of the animal that could be called "humane" using the criteria established by the European Parliament. However, it is probable that chest artery rupture which will cause the death of the animal does not meet the "humane" criteria.²

8.13 The Code of Practice specifies the use of centrefire rifles to shoot kangaroos or wallabies. However, many non-commercial shooters and illegal shooters use rimfire rifles. The RSPCA commented in its first report 'that these arms do not usually kill humanely'.³ In its second report, the RSPCA again found that rimfire rifles were not satisfactory to kill wallabies. It stated:

Considering the high degree of wounding with 0.22 rimfire it is recommended that the use of rimfire be banned.⁴

Shotgun Shooting

8.14 The 'Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos' provides for the use of 12 gauge or larger shotguns for shooting the smaller wallabies within a range of 30 metres. The first RSPCA study excluded the incidence of cruelty to wallabies but the use of shotguns was briefly addressed. No literature or data were found to determine whether the use of shotguns to kill wallabies is humane. Witnesses from fauna authorities of Tasmania, Victoria and New South Wales believed that shotguns used in accordance with the Code of Practice resulted in the humane killing of wallabies.

8.15 In its second study, the RSPCA recommended the banning of shotguns for shooting wallabies. It found that in its survey less than 50 per cent of animals shot with shotguns were killed cleanly. Although changing the point of aim from the chest to the head would probably have increased that percentage, there would still have been an unacceptable level of inhumane deaths.

Kangaroo Drives

8.16 The RSPCA concluded that kangaroo drives are inhumane, based on observations of a government-controlled drive in the Hattah-Kulkyne National Park in Victoria in July 1984 and on work done by Dr N. Shepherd of the NSW NPWS.

8.17 The RSPCA had difficulty in obtaining information on the incidence of kangaroo drives. Although it was told that drives occur, it could form no judgement on their frequency.

8.18 The Committee received private information from a number of sources, including landholders and shooters, that landholders often resort to drives in areas where professional shooters are not operating. Many landholders believe that drives are a more

effective method of reducing kangaroo population levels in those areas than landholders shooting alone.

Snares

8.19 The use of snares to kill kangaroos or wallabies is banned in all States other than Tasmania, where the Director of the Tasmanian NPWS may give permission for snares to be used to kill wallabies, provided that:

- (i) A primary producer has a crop or improved pasture to protect and shooting is not practical.
- (ii) The person or persons who are to undertake the snaring are experienced and efficient snarers.
- (iii) The chances of catching species other than wallaby are small.⁵

8.20 An officer of the Tasmanian NPWS told the Committee that only about three or four permits are issued a year. However, interviews conducted by the RSPCA indicated that considerably more people were using snares without permission. The Tasmanian NPWS had tried some years ago to ban snaring in Tasmania but the regulation was rejected in the Legislative Council.⁶

8.21 The illegal use of snares also occurs on the mainland and there has been a conviction in Victoria for illegal use of snares against kangaroos.

8.22 In its first report, the RSPCA reported the findings of its consultant during a visit to Western Australia.

He observed snares being used along fences in this state and found that the kangaroos caught in this fashion suffered a slow death due to starvation etc. Many of the snares were not found around the kangaroos neck but around a

leg or a part of the body e.g., chest and torso ...⁷

In its second report, the RSPCA stated:

This form of killing is mainly by neck snares, which can kill by strangulation. Foot snares are also used and these snares cause leg injuries and a slow death to a trapped wallaby. Not all snares are checked daily, as requested by the NPWS.⁸

The RSPCA went on to recommend a complete ban on snaring.

8.23 In 1985, a representative of the ANPWS expressed that Service's 'quite overt opposition' to snaring.⁹

Poison

8.24 Tasmania is the only State that permits the poisoning of wallabies. Landholders may obtain a permit from the Tasmanian NPWS to use 1080 poison to protect crops or pastures, usually in areas where shooting is ineffective. The Forestry Commission also uses 1080 poison to kill wallabies which browse on seedlings.

8.25 The RSPCA quoted from work done by McIlroy on the effects of 1080 poison on native herbivores as follows:

The most common signs of poisoning amongst herbivores are either hypersensitivity to stimuli or, more frequently, lethargy, respiratory distress and finally respiratory or cardiac failure. Some species experience convulsions, particularly before death.¹⁰

As a result of the above effects, the RSPCA concluded that the use of 1080 poison to kill wallabies was cruel. It recommended the banning of poison to kill wallabies.

8.26 A representative of the ANPWS told the Committee that:

... it is not a practice we in any way condone. It is something that I guess we reluctantly accept.¹¹

Killing to Reduce Potential Suffering

8.27 During the course of the inquiry, landholders, in particular, expressed the view that it is preferable to shoot kangaroos on a regular basis rather than let populations build up. This would reduce competition between kangaroos and livestock in bad conditions when little feed is available and would help to prevent a slow and lingering death of a large number of kangaroos from thirst and starvation.

8.28 Animal welfare representatives pointed out that nature should be allowed to take its course without unnecessary intervention by humans. Inevitably, some kangaroos will die because of droughts or other natural disasters. In 1982-83, aerial survey results showed a decline in populations of about 40 per cent, attributed largely to the severe drought in south-eastern Australia. These losses occurred despite the programme of killing under the National Kangaroo Management Plan.

8.29 This is a question to which there is no easy answer. The Committee noted, however, that the kangaroo is a protected animal except where permission is given by fauna authorities to kill a number of them. The NPMK provides for the killing of kangaroos to contain the deleterious effects of kangaroos. There is no reference in the Plan to the killing of kangaroos to prevent suffering in droughts.

8.30 If kangaroos did not cause damage to properties, landholders would not try to kill them. Landholders do not normally kill other wildlife unless there is a threat to property, human life or stock, except perhaps moribund animals for individual altruistic reasons.

8.31 As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the Committee does not condone the killing of kangaroos except to contain their deleterious effects or, in very limited numbers, for scientific purposes.

8.32 The Committee therefore does not accept the possible prevention of suffering during drought as a reason for killing kangaroos even though regular killing may have that effect, in varying degrees. It should not be forgotten that shooting, particularly by non-professional shooters, also causes suffering.

8.33 The principle of not killing kangaroos to avert possible future suffering from natural disasters should not be confused with the killing of kangaroos in anticipation of damage to property.

RSPCA Australia's Mainland Study

8.34 In its first study, the RSPCA examined cruelty during commercial killing, non-commercial killing and illegal killing in the mainland States. The findings of the RSPCA in each of the three areas are summarised below.

Commercial Killing

8.35 A consultant to the RSPCA did field surveys in the four mainland States where there is commercial shooting to observe the shooting of kangaroos by professional shooters and to inspect the carcasses held in chillers to find out in which part of the body they were shot. He found that the percentage of head shots varied from State to State reflecting the different requirements of the industry. In New South Wales, where there is a high demand for full carcasses, 95 per cent of carcasses inspected were head shot. Some processors paid lower rates for kangaroos which were shot in the chest rather than in the head.

8.36 In South Australia, the proportion of head shots was 84 per cent, reflecting the demand for 'trade butts' as well as full carcasses.

8.37 In Queensland there is both full carcass and skin shooting. Of the carcasses inspected, 85 per cent were head shot. Apart from head and chest shots, there were also some hip shots detected during examination. However, it is stated in the study that:

It would appear that most shooters use chest shooting for skins and head shots for meat carcasses.¹²

If that were correct, the percentage of head shots in Queensland would be much lower because of the substantial skin shooting in that State.

8.38 In Western Australia, only 81 per cent of the carcasses inspected were head shot.

8.39 The consultant accompanied shooters in the four States on kangaroo shoots. The general standard of marksmanship of those shooters was good with few misses and hits which were not clean kills. The Committee members accompanied four full-time shooters in the Broken Hill and Menindee areas of western New South Wales in January 1986. Those shooters displayed a high standard of marksmanship. All the kangaroos killed by them were head shot.

8.40 In its general conclusions, the RSPCA stated:

It should be noted that the survey could not be considered fully adequate to establish definite figures for the proportion of head shot kangaroos, as time was limited. Also, it was apparent that most shooters and chillers volunteering information were those considered "the cleanest" in the industry. There were several indications that not all shooters were

as competent as those observed. Also, there were reports of processors willing to accept hip shot kangaroos, yet evidence for this, as well as other inhumane practices, were difficult to obtain.¹³

Non-commercial Killing

8.41 The RSPCA found it difficult to obtain information on the incidence of cruelty to kangaroos by landholders or their agents who had permission to reduce kangaroo numbers on their properties. Most of the information obtained was derived from interviews with landholders and from a mail survey of veterinarians in rural areas.

8.42 From interviews with landholders and fauna authorities it was elicited that a range of firearms of different calibres, including those which were not allowed under the Code of Practice, were used to kill kangaroos. In addition, some landholders used shotguns.

8.43 Responses from veterinarians indicated that 86 per cent of landholders used rifles, 11 per cent used shotguns, one per cent used poison and two per cent used dogs to kill kangaroos. The veterinarians also said that 38 per cent of kangaroos were head shot, five per cent were neck shot, 52 per cent were chest shot, two per cent were hip shot and three per cent were shot elsewhere.

8.44 In its general conclusions, the RSPCA stated:

From the information obtained during the survey it would appear that many of those people involved in non-commercial culling do not always use humane methods and that there are incidences of illegal (and cruel) culling techniques e.g. kangaroo drives, poison. The use of shotguns was common as was the use of the chest as a preferred point of aim. Small calibre rifles were used by people that had not spent time ensuring that their equipment

and techniques were good enough to humanely cull kangaroos.

The problems associated with non-commercial culling appear to be neglected by the relevant authorities in each state visited. The supposed off-take from this method is relatively low compared with that from commercial harvesting. However, there are no realistic figures for the number of kangaroos killed non-commercially as the official figures for culling numbers issued by each state come from the number allowed to be culled on each licence issued, not from the actual numbers killed. There appears to be no inspection of a licence holders operation, at least in Victoria, South Australia or Western Australia, nor any check on the actual numbers destroyed or on the methods used. Commercial shooters have some form of control upon their methods, either from the wildlife authorities or from the demands from the industry. This does not occur with non-commercial shooters. Although no actual figures can be placed upon the number of kangaroos that may be killed inhumanely by non-commercial hunters it is felt that the proportion would be far higher than that obtained from professional shooters.¹⁴

Illegal Killing

8.45 The RSPCA divided illegal shooting into three categories, based on the purpose of killing kangaroos. It concluded that the incidence of cruelty to kangaroos shot for the illegal commercial trade would be similar to that for commercial shooting. Kangaroos shot for dog food or for illegal population reduction purposes would be similar to that for legal non-commercial purposes, except that poison would not be used if kangaroos were being killed for food. The RSPCA went on to say:

"Fun" shooting appears to be a different matter. In this case, there appears to be a relatively high incidence of cruelty to kangaroos by this method of culling. The number of reports of wounded kangaroos and dead kangaroos with wounds from shotguns,

knives etc. in areas of the body other than the head would indicate that inhumane practices have been used.

Although illegal commercial culling can be considered relatively humane, the high rate of cruelty inflicted on kangaroos by "fun" shooters would give an overall high level of cruelty to illegal culling.¹⁵

Discussion

8.46 The RSPCA Australia in its study concluded that there was cruelty in all areas of kangaroo killing but that the incidence of cruelty was least in commercial killing and greatest in illegal killing with the non-commercial killing falling between the two. All the information received by the Committee confirms that conclusion.

8.47 Some of the cruelty has become institutionalised through the system of kangaroo management. Even the best marksman cannot maintain a perfect record of clean kills. There will always be some kangaroos which suffer wounds from ill-placed shots.

8.48 Under the present non-commercial system, there is considerably more cruelty than in the commercial operation. While some landholders shoot kangaroos with small calibre rifles or shotguns, and most without the marksmanship of professional shooters, there will be no diminution in the incidence of cruelty.

8.49 The Committee **RECOMMENDS** that the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service conduct or commission research to determine the nature and level of suffering of wallabies and non-target species which ingest 1080 poison or any other poison used to kill wallabies. Depending on the results of that research, a decision should be made by the Australian National

Parks and Wildlife Service and the Tasmanian National Parks and Wildlife Service on the future use of poison to kill wallabies in Tasmania.

8.50 The Committee **RECOMMENDS** that all methods of killing kangaroos other than by shooting be banned in mainland Australia. The Committee further **RECOMMENDS** that in Tasmania the use of poison to kill kangaroos be permitted only until such time as the research recommended by the Committee has been completed, provided that the research is carried out expeditiously.

8.51 Suggestions by the RSPCA to reduce cruelty in non-commercial shooting are discussed in Chapter 9.

RSPCA Australia's Tasmanian Study

8.52 The findings and conclusions of RSPCA Australia in relation to commercial and non-commercial killing of wallabies in Tasmania are set out below.

Commercial Shooting

8.53 The RSPCA concluded that:

The incidence of humane kills by commercial hunters was relatively high, but slightly less than that found in the survey on kangaroo killing on the mainland.¹⁶

At the four commercial shoots which the consultant to the RSPCA observed, 72 per cent of rufous wallabies and 82 per cent of Bennetts wallabies were killed cleanly.¹⁷

8.54 In those shoots, the percentage of observed instantaneous kills (related to ammunition type) was as follows:

- . rimfire (0.22 Magnum) 72 per cent; and
- . centrefire (0.22 Hornet) 95 per cent.¹⁸

8.55 As mentioned elsewhere, the RSPCA recommended against the use of rimfire rifles to shoot wallabies. A number of commercial shooters use rimfire rather than centrefire rifles.

Non-commercial Shooting

8.56 The RSPCA reported that most non-commercial shooters in Tasmania use shotguns and ammunition as specified in the Code of Practice. A few shooters use rifles to shoot wallabies.

8.57 The RSPCA consultant attended six shoots with non-commercial shooters, with the number of participants ranging from one to 17. The latter had a permit from the Tasmanian NPWS to hold a shoot with more than fifteen shooters. Dogs were used in most shoots to flush out wallabies from the scrub in which they were hiding. Dogs sometimes killed wounded wallabies, particularly those which were still mobile. At those shoots, which the RSPCA believed would have been among the best, less than 50 per cent of kills were considered to be humane.

8.58 The level of cruelty and the use of dogs moved the RSPCA to recommend the banning of shotguns to shoot wallabies. The RSPCA made favourable comments about the attitudes and behaviour of the participants in the shoots.

8.59 At present, the Director of the Tasmanian NPWS may permit a shooter, who is shooting under a crop protection permit, to shoot at night, use lights and shoot from a vehicle. Without that permission, shooting must be in daylight, without lights and be not within ten metres of a vehicle.

8.60 On the mainland, all commercial shooting is done at night with a spotlight. This allows the shooter to get well

within range and have a stationary target to maximise accuracy and minimise suffering. The RSPCA concluded that restrictions on this method of shooting in Tasmania leads to a higher level of cruelty.