

Wildlife Management Review  
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We would like to make brief comment on the Queensland Government's Wildlife Management Review Discussion Paper. We do this in our capacity as policy researchers at the Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) in Canberra. In recent years, CAEPR research has looked at options for Indigenous Australians to reduce welfare dependency and build sustainable regional economies. One of the options that is available is through the sustainable harvesting of wildlife for both customary and commercial (which can include recreational enterprise) use. The viability of this option seems to be enhanced by s.211 of the *Native Title Act 1993* which suggests that customary use rights in resources were a common law right, a view that was reinforced by the *Yanner v Eaton* (1999) High Court decision based on a Queensland harvesting case.

In the past, CAEPR researchers have published on a number of issues of significance to the matters raised in your wildlife management review. To summarise four examples briefly:

- In 1992, we published a research paper 'Living off the land in national parks: issues for Aboriginal Australians' that specifically addressed issues associated with wildlife harvesting (Altman and Allen 1992).
- In 1996, in the post Mabo and native title era, we again raised issues about the use of wildlife by Indigenous Australians focusing on economic and policy perspectives (Altman, Bek and Roach 1996).
- In 1997, we made submission (No. 327) to, and appeared as witnesses before, the 1998 Senate Inquiry into Commercial Utilisation of Australian Native Wildlife (see Altman, Roach and Liddle 1997).
- In 2001 and 2002, in collaboration with the ARC Key Centre for Tropical Wildlife Management at the Northern Territory University we have written about the potential significance of the Indigenous customary economy (Altman 2001) and in a paper presented at the Savanna Landscapes Wildlife Conference in Darwin in July 2002 we looked at the issue of sustainable development in the Indigenous-owned savanna and the need for innovative institutional design for cooperative wildlife management (Altman and Cochrane 2002).

From our perspective, that recognises an Indigenous interest and property rights in wildlife, we are surprised that:

1. There is no reference to, or discussion of, Indigenous interests in wildlife harvesting for both commercial and customary use as an avenue to improving often marginal economic circumstances. The only mention we found to Indigenous interests was on p. 14 of the Discussion Paper that noted that the EPA issued other permits and authorities for wildlife ‘to Aboriginal and Islander custom authorities’ an ambiguous terminology that does not explain how these authorities might articulate with wildlife management. In our view this is a major oversight.
2. There is some reference to commercial harvesting of wildlife, however mainly in terms of tougher commercial harvesting regimes to prevent illegal trapping and poaching. The Discussion Paper is not very accommodating in terms of commercial use of wildlife and seems out of step with recommendations made in the Senate Report referred to above. There is no recognition that commercial use of wildlife can be undertaken in a sustainable manner and provide economic benefits to the community without adversely affecting the populations of harvested species. There is very little mention of enterprise development, or use of sustainable practices. There is also no reference to how the proposed Queensland regulations fit into National Strategies already in place at the Commonwealth level which have been endorsed by State governments and which include aspects of sustainable use of wildlife. These include the *National Strategy on Ecologically Sustainable Development*, the *National Strategy for the Conservation of Biodiversity*, the *National Strategy for Rangeland Management* and the *Wetlands Policy*.
3. In the section on Managing Human Interactions with Wildlife, the Discussion Paper covers the use of damage mitigation permits and how wildlife taken under such permit cannot be used for trade or commerce. Concerns about spreading disease, animal welfare and difficulties in monitoring and compliance have led the authors of the Discussion Paper to note that these issues are too complex and therefore no changes are proposed this time. This does not seem to be a good basis for making wildlife public policy. It is then noted on p. 37 that ‘... there may be opportunities in the future to more widely consider the conservation benefits of sustainable uses of native wildlife for commercial and/or recreational purposes, rather than killing by damage mitigation’. It is again noteworthy that other States appear to have managed to address this complex issue.
4. Overall, it seems to us that this review has been too focused on process and the recommendations are accordingly too narrow and reactive. The Discussion Paper assumes and then entrenches the attitude that use of wildlife is inherently very risky and requires substantial public expenditure to control it, despite the lack of any hard evidence Australia-wide for any wildlife conservation problems to be caused by direct use.

It seems to us that there are key underlying and highly contested values underpinning this Discussion Paper. First, there is a view that wildlife harvesting has the potential to reduce

biodiversity, when in fact the dominant view in the scientific community is that Australia's very poor record in species conservation and extinctions has been primarily a result of habitat loss or degradation. Second, while stakeholders consulted are not clearly spelt out, the tenor of the recommendations suggest that consultations were confined to those with whom wildlife enforcement officers regularly interact (traders, carers, etc.) rather than a broader cross-section of those who have a legitimate (indeed, in some instances, legislated) interest in the way access to wildlife is managed.

There is a growing body of research emanating, for example, from the ARC Key Centre for Tropical Wildlife Management, that suggests that robust Indigenous customary harvesting of wildlife coupled with land occupation and community-based natural resource management is resulting in sustainable harvesting and robust wildlife populations. We are rather surprised that the Discussion Paper does not look to interstate experience, particularly in the Northern Territory, nor to the role of Indigenous institutions, be they joint management of national parks or community ranger programs, to guide some innovative approaches to the management of wildlife in Queensland. In our view there is a great deal that can be learnt from such cross-cultural, arguably inter-cultural, best practice elsewhere—this review process has limited itself too much and it is difficult to see how it will have a positive impact on conservation outcomes in Queensland.

We would be happy to discuss these issues further and provide a list of the reference documents to which we have referred in this submission.

Yours sincerely

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Director

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## References:

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- Commonwealth of Australia 1999. *National Strategy for Rangeland Management*. Environment Australia on behalf of ANZECC & ARMCANZ, Canberra.