



**Australian Government**

**Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts**

# Background Information

## Commercial Kangaroo and Wallaby Harvest Quotas

### **Government roles in kangaroo and wallaby harvesting**

While Australia's laws concerning wildlife trade are some of the most stringent in the world, they are not intended to obstruct the sustainable activities of legitimate organisations and individuals. Instead, they have been designed to demonstrate that, when managed effectively, wildlife trade contributes to and is entirely compatible with the objectives of wildlife conservation.

Under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), the Australian Government has responsibility for providing for the protection of the environment, promoting ecologically sustainable development and the conservation of biodiversity.

Both the Australian Government and state governments have a role in the conservation of kangaroo and wallaby populations, including ensuring that any commercial use of kangaroos is managed in an ecologically sustainable way. The states have further responsibilities in terms of regulating the harvest and processing industry, while the Australian Government controls the export of kangaroo and wallaby products through the approval of kangaroo and wallaby management programs and the granting of export permits.

Under the EPBC Act, the Australian Government has approved management plans for the harvest of six kangaroo and wallaby species in five states; Queensland (Qld), New South Wales (NSW), South Australia (SA), Western Australia (WA) and Tasmania (Tas). The management plans include the requirement for an annual quota. Each state monitors the population numbers of the commercially harvested species and sets sustainable quotas.

Before approving any management plans that allow for the commercial harvest and export of kangaroo and wallaby products, the Australian Government carefully considers factors such as the biology, population size and trends and conservation status of the species. Management plans must demonstrate that they do not have a detrimental impact either on the harvested species or their ecosystems.

The principal aim of these plans is to ensure the conservation of kangaroos and wallabies over their entire range. They describe how the activities of shooters and dealers are regulated, how the size of the population is monitored, the regulations and checks which detect illegal harvesting or over-harvesting and any other measures to ensure conservation of the species.

The commercial kangaroo and wallaby harvest industry in Australia is one of the world's best wild harvest operations because management goals are based firmly on principles of sustainability.

### **Commercial harvest of kangaroos and wallabies**

The species to be harvested for commercial export in 2009 are:

- red kangaroo (*Macropus rufus*) in areas of Qld, NSW, SA, and WA
- eastern grey kangaroo (*M. giganteus*) in areas of Qld and NSW
- western grey kangaroo (*M. fuliginosus*) in areas of NSW, SA, and WA
- common wallaroo or euro (*M. robustus*) in areas of Qld, NSW, SA and WA
- Bennett's wallaby (*M. rufogriseus rufogriseus*) in areas of Flinders and King Islands, Tasmania.
- Tasmanian pademelon (a species of wallaby) (*Thylogale billardierii*) on Flinders Island, Tasmania.

Red, eastern grey and western grey kangaroos are the most abundant species and make up approximately 90 per cent of the commercial harvest. Their combined population size has fluctuated between 15 and 50 million animals over the past 25 years, depending on seasonal conditions. These estimates only include the harvested areas of Australia and are considered to be very conservative. The six species subject to commercial harvesting are common and none are endangered or vulnerable species.

Products derived from kangaroos and wallabies include meat for human consumption and skins for leather products. Four states (NSW, Qld, SA, and WA) are involved in the commercial harvest of kangaroos for export purposes. Some skin and meat is used domestically, with the remainder exported to more than 55 countries.

Tasmania is the only state involved in the commercial harvest of wallabies for export purposes. The harvest is approved only for Flinders and King Islands. The harvest of wallabies for the export market is a developing industry. There is a potential market for the export of meat, furs and perhaps skins.

### **Quota setting**

All quotas are set on an annual basis. Quotas for the mainland states are set on a calendar year basis and the Tasmanian quotas on a fiscal year basis (1 July to 30 June of the succeeding year). Quotas are a scientifically estimated sustained yield and represent an upper harvest limit independent of industry demand. To ensure there is no detriment to any species in any region, each state is divided into zones for monitoring and quota-setting. Commercial harvest (cull) figures for a year rarely amount to the approved quota as these are directly linked to market demand, and the capacity of the industry to harvest the quota level. State-wide quotas are rarely met although they may be met for a particular zone. Over the last 7 years (2001-2007), the numbers of kangaroos harvested have been on average 69.5 per cent of the annual quotas.

Each state provides the Australian Government with a submission outlining their proposed kangaroo or wallaby harvest quota. In preparing their submission, each state considers a range of factors. These generally include:

- current population trends
- review of previous harvest
- climatic conditions
- the non-commercial harvest and its significance
- the proportion of the population not subject to harvesting
- information on other forms of mortality apart from harvesting, and
- reports of damage to primary production.

Once the quota has been set, each state is required to report to the department on the numbers of kangaroos or wallabies harvested.

The quotas for mainland kangaroos are set at a proportion of estimated populations, established by the individual states. Survey methods vary between and within states depending on the geography of the survey site and are outlined in the state management plans. Survey methods and frequency also vary between species.

Wallabies are monitored on Flinders and King Islands (Tasmania) using annual spotlight surveys carried out along roadsides. Since population densities further away from the road differ from those near the road, densities estimated by roadside surveys cannot be extrapolated into an estimate of absolute population size. An estimate of absolute population size is not essential, as quotas are not based on a calculated proportion of the population, but rather on population trends and historical harvest levels. Additional information on monitoring and quota setting is outlined in the Flinders and King Island management plans.

#### **The 2009 commercial kangaroo harvest quota (mainland states)**

The 2009 sustainable harvest quotas for kangaroos commercially harvested on the mainland have been set at just over 4 million. This figure is 13 per cent higher than for 2008 and the increase is related to the easing of drought conditions nationwide.

The 2009 sustainable harvest quota represents about 15.3 per cent (ranging from 10 per cent to 20 per cent depending on species and state) of estimated populations of the four kangaroo species that are commercially harvested on the mainland. The scientific community and state management agencies consider that annual harvest levels in the order of 15 per cent of the populations for grey kangaroos and wallaroos, and 20 per cent of red kangaroo populations, are sustainable.

In addition to the sustainable harvest quotas, NSW and SA also have a 'special quota'. Special quotas are only used when a management zone's commercial quota has been utilised and a continuing damage mitigation need has been demonstrated. Its purpose is to ensure that kangaroos that would have been shot by landowners under non-commercial licences and left in the field are now utilised by the industry. The total special quota for SA (all three harvested species) is 11 000. The NSW special quota is 107 557. The actual number killed under special quotas is actually much lower and in recent years has not been utilised.

Australia has undergone severe drought in recent years, and because the primary driver of kangaroo populations is rainfall, overall kangaroo numbers in Australia have declined as a result. Improving conditions are being reflected in kangaroo populations however, with most species and areas experiencing population density increases since 2005.

Kangaroos have been harvested and monitored for over 25 years during which time kangaroo populations in Australia have demonstrated a strong capacity to recover from the regular occurrence of drought. For example, the drought of 1981-3 drove kangaroo populations in harvested areas down to almost half of the estimated pre-drought population, from which they recovered to exceed pre-drought figures within seven years. In response to the drought of the early 1990s in Qld, kangaroo populations also went through a period of decline, before recovering following good rainfall. Throughout this period, kangaroos in Qld were harvested at rates close to 20 per cent, demonstrating that the harvest did not impede the kangaroos' natural ability to recover quickly following drought.

Harvesting may depress populations further than if they were not harvested during drought, however historical data clearly demonstrates that this does not influence the long-term viability of kangaroo populations within the harvested areas of Australia.

#### **The 2008-09 commercial wallaby harvest quota (Flinders and King Islands)**

The combined 2008-09 commercial harvest quotas for Flinders and King Islands total 26 000 based on a maximum harvest quota of 70 000. The maximum harvest includes the non-commercial quota. The management plans and quota applications include a provision for varying the commercial quota provided the non-commercial quota is adjusted and the maximum harvest limit is not exceeded.

#### **Humane harvesting practices**

Animal welfare considerations are a priority of the EPBC Act. The Act requires the government to ensure proposals for the sustainable use of wildlife observe strict welfare requirements.

Kangaroos and wallabies are harvested by being shot by skilled professional shooters. All commercial shooters must comply with the *National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Commercial Purposes* which outlines an achievable minimum standard of humane conduct in regard to the shooting of kangaroos and wallabies. The code was developed after a long process of consultation involving industry, government, animal welfare groups, the scientific community and the public.

Furthermore, all states and territories have legislation concerning animal welfare matters and are able to prosecute offenders.

#### **Further information**

For more information on Australia's wildlife protection measures, contact the department's Community Information Unit on:

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Last revised : 1 June 2009