

CHAPTER 9

KANGAROO MANAGEMENT - A SUMMING UP

Introduction

9.1 In this chapter, the Committee draws together and considers the issues which have been raised in evidence and in the public debate dealing with the management of kangaroos. The long public debate has been marked by emotional and sometimes acrimonious outbursts from both sides. Inevitably, the claims and counter-claims have caused the public to become concerned and confused.

9.2 It should be remembered that the kangaroo occupies an important place in our cultural heritage. The kangaroo, with its special physical characteristics, evokes considerable interest and affection in Australia and overseas. It is, however, more than just an attractive animal. It is used as a symbol to identify Australia and Australians. It is included in Australia's Crest. It adorns Qantas aircraft and a pugilistic version captured the spirit of Australia II's successful challenge for the America's Cup in 1983. With millions of kangaroos being killed every year, it is no wonder that the public has become concerned.

9.3 Given the nature and tenor of the debate on kangaroos, it has not always been clear where there is agreement and where there are differences of opinion. Areas of agreement are identified by the Committee and the issues on which there is disagreement discussed, conclusions drawn and recommendations made.

Kangaroo Populations

9.4 It has often been alleged in the public debate that the National Plan of Management for Kangaroos will deplete the species being killed to a point where one or more of those species will become endangered. The long-term viability of the species was also a subject about which both the United States' Fish and Wildlife Service and the Environment Committee of the European Parliament were concerned in their respective inquiries.

9.5 In Chapter 2, the Committee, after careful consideration of the evidence, concluded that none of the species subject to killing is threatened with extinction at present and there is no indication that any will become extinct. There is no evidence at present, using current methods of estimating population size and dynamics, that provides grounds for the Committee to reach any other conclusion.

9.6 The Committee warned against complacency and argued that continual monitoring is essential to ensure that populations are kept at safe levels over all of their present ranges. Monitoring should not be restricted to aerial surveys of red and grey kangaroos. Despite greater difficulties, surveys of other species, which are legally killed, should also be conducted regularly. Some of these species may be more at risk than either red or grey kangaroos both from killing and habitat destruction in the long term.

Habitat Loss

9.7 The National Plan of Management for Kangaroos, which was endorsed by CONCOM on 30 May 1985, included as one of its objectives: 'to maintain populations of kangaroos over their natural ranges'.

9.8 Throughout the history of Australia, there has been a continuous extension of urban and rural development which has destroyed or adversely affected large areas of kangaroo habitat. Without adequate cover, the kangaroo cannot exist. In areas which have been given over to intensive agriculture, few kangaroos now survive because their habitat has been cleared.

9.9 The extension of agriculture into areas that either have not been developed or have been used for extensive grazing, has resulted in the further destruction of the habitat of kangaroos and other wildlife. This extension of human land use places more pressure on the remaining habitat. The newly created agricultural areas also suffer from the predation of kangaroos from the surrounding woodlands, resulting in the need to kill more kangaroos.

9.10 The Committee is not advocating a policy of no further development. Such a policy is untenable and contrary to the interests of the nation. The Committee is, however, concerned about unfettered development which, in this case, may have significant adverse effects on the existence of wildlife in some areas.

9.11 There are many examples of land degradation resulting from overstocking of livestock. The Western Australian Department of Agriculture and the Agriculture Protection Board of Western Australia explained the difficulties faced by the Western Australian Government in coping with severe land degradation in the pastoral lease area of the State. Similarly, the clearing of land for agriculture in areas unsuited to that activity has resulted in severe erosion. There are now restrictions placed on agricultural development in some areas for environmental reasons, such as in the Western Division of New South Wales. Fauna conservation is no less important than land conservation and it should also be taken into account in developmental proposals. Although the killing of native wildlife is prominent in the

debate on animal welfare, the real threat to wildlife is the destruction of habitat. Without safe habitat, wildlife species cannot survive. The extent of the habitat largely determines the size of the population of wildlife species. The Federal and State Governments, in their endorsement of the objectives of the National Plan of Management for Kangaroos, agreed to conserve kangaroos across their natural range. Although fauna authorities are often excluded from land use considerations, they should, in fact, be allowed to play a more active role in this area. It is difficult for fauna authorities to manage and conserve kangaroos when factors which impinge heavily on their ultimate survival are completely outside the control of those authorities.

9.12 Land management is often regarded with emotional fervour as 'creeping socialism' or as something which should be avoided at any cost. Critics who vigorously espouse such notions would realise, after some thought, that land development is largely controlled now by one or another level of government. It is not a new concept for restrictions to be placed on the way in which land is used. The Committee wishes to add fauna welfare and conservation as factors in such land management and to ensure that government authorities with responsibility for fauna conservation and management take part in the decision-making process.

Kangaroo Damage

9.13 Having established to its satisfaction that kangaroos subject to legal killing are not endangered at present, the Committee examined the evidence that kangaroos did cause enough damage to properties to justify the issue of permits for their destruction. Animal welfare organisations had repeatedly pointed out that there was little or no documented evidence of damage to properties to support the killing of millions of kangaroos every year. It should be emphasised though, that they acknowledged

there was some damage done to properties. They contended, however, that the amount of damage was far less than that which would justify the level of killing carried out.

9.14 Before the Committee began its inquiry, there was little information available on the extent and nature of kangaroo damage. During the course of the inquiry, some information has been released or has been brought together in literature surveys. This information was examined in Chapter 3.

9.15 The Committee concluded in Chapter 3 that kangaroos do cause various forms of damage to rural properties, principally to crops and pastures, but also to fences and water holes. No estimate was considered reliable enough by the Committee to stand as an accurate financial assessment of the total cost of that damage. It is fair to say, however, that that cost is not inconsiderable. The Committee also concluded that the level of damage being caused by kangaroos to some properties is enough to justify action being taken to contain that damage, including the killing of kangaroos.

9.16 The then Australian Bureau of Animal Health advocated the establishment of a detailed study of the nature and extent of kangaroo damage to reconcile the level of killing of kangaroos with the level of damage actually done to properties. The NSW NPWS argued that such a study would have to reflect geographical and climatic differences as well as many other factors. Such a study would be difficult, lengthy and very expensive.

9.17 The Committee agrees that it would be both difficult and expensive to conduct a study which would provide more detailed information on the subject. The data would also have to be collected over a long period of time to reflect the good and bad seasons of Australia's harsh and variable climate. However, the results of such a study would be invaluable to scientists and fauna authorities. Although the Committee is not persuaded that

such a study is essential in determining the future of the National Plan of Management for Kangaroos, the Committee believes that a long-term study on the damage to properties by kangaroos should be undertaken.

Principles of Kangaroo Management

9.18 In Chapter 4 the Committee examined the basis of kangaroo management in Australia. Throughout Australia, the kangaroo is a protected native animal except as provided by State or Territory law.

9.19 The Committee strongly supports the retention of the kangaroo's fundamental protected status. This status was never seriously questioned throughout the inquiry. It is the premise on which the Committee has based its conclusions and recommendations.

9.20 As a protected animal, the kangaroo has the right to be left alone except in certain legally defined circumstances. In the opinion of the Committee, there are only two grounds for allowing the killing of kangaroos: property protection and research. The question of research has not been considered in this study. It falls within the scope of the animal experimentation inquiry. Therefore, for the purposes of the kangaroo inquiry, the only reason for killing kangaroos is to contain their deleterious effects on properties and other human land use.

9.21 The National Plan of Management for Kangaroos requires the maintenance of populations of kangaroos over their natural ranges. The ranges of all the species subject to legal killing cover wide areas of pastoral and agricultural lands. The Plan in effect requires some form of co-existence between landholders and kangaroos. Many landholders enjoy having kangaroos on their

properties while others simply regard them as pests. A point is reached, however, where the effects of kangaroo grazing on pastures or crops affect the viability of those properties. Either the size of the populations or the nature of their depredations upsets the equilibrium of co-existence and it is then that the landholder has a right to protect his property.

9.22 Landholders should not simply resort to killing kangaroos when they perceive that the balance between kangaroos and human land use has been upset. At times, there are other ways of dealing with the deleterious effects of kangaroos. These will be dealt with later. As a principle, shooting should be a last resort and not the first option.

9.23 It should also not be left to the perceptions of the landholders to determine the effects or potential effects of kangaroos on their properties. Officers of fauna authorities should, in most cases, assess the level of damage and offer advice before issuing licences and permits to kill kangaroos on those properties. Because of a lack of resources, this is not being done in many instances.

9.24 The Committee believes that kangaroos should only be killed to contain damage to properties. The Committee repudiates the notion contained in the 1986 Queensland KMP (but since deleted) that a commercial kangaroo industry exists in its own right and not just as a tool of kangaroo management.

9.25 The Committee also believes that the killing of kangaroos for sport, as occurs in Tasmania with respect to the Bennetts and rufous wallabies, is anathema to the kangaroo's status as a protected animal. If such shooting is necessary to contain the adverse effects of grazing on pastures, crops or other land uses, permits should be issued accordingly to landholders of affected properties or their agents.

9.26 The use of open seasons in some States is also not countenanced by the Committee. This system is too open-ended for effective control to be exercised by the fauna authority.

9.27 The Committee **RECOMMENDS** that, as a fundamental principle, the kangaroo remain a protected animal. However, its deleterious effects on human land use must be taken into account.

Kangaroo Management a National Issue

9.28 The management of kangaroos, with its welfare implications, is a national issue. As such, it should be treated in a national way. Although responsibility for kangaroo management resides with the States, that should not preclude co-operation among the Commonwealth and the States to pursue a national approach to kangaroo management.

9.29 There is a National Plan of Management for Kangaroos approved by CONCOM. However, a more comprehensive plan is needed to cover all species and all aspects of kangaroo management. It should cover kangaroo population size and dynamics, ecology, protection of habitat, programmes to curb kangaroo damage to properties and commercial and non-commercial kill quotas. The plan would reflect the different environments and circumstances occurring in the different regions of Australia and take into account local as well as national needs. There would be, however, one set of objectives and a uniform approach to kangaroo management even if there are different practices to reflect the diversity of species and environments.

9.30 Ideally, a comprehensive national kangaroo management plan should be administered federally rather than by the States and Territories individually. There are, of course, enormous constitutional and political problems associated with the transfer of State responsibilities to the Commonwealth. Although

it has been suggested to the Committee that the Commonwealth should take over responsibility for wildlife, the Committee does not believe that such an approach is available. The Committee suggests a co-operative approach being taken over time whereby arrangements for national management of kangaroos would be worked out between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories. Therefore, the Committee **RECOMMENDS** that the Commonwealth and the States and Territories work out on a co-operative basis over time a system for national management of kangaroos.

Approach to Kangaroo Management

9.31 Under the National Plan of Management for Kangaroos, fauna authorities depend mainly on shooting to keep kangaroo damage under control. Fauna authorities have asserted that shooting is the most effective method available to them for this purpose. It is also the most cost effective method, particularly as fauna authorities have to manage all their operations with very restricted resources.

9.32 Although shooting is effective in some areas, it is not in others. The Committee received evidence from landholders that in some wheat growing areas, especially in southern Queensland, some farms suffer badly from the depredations of kangaroos and wallabies. Similarly, in areas of Tasmania, such as around Avoca, improved pastures have been ravaged by wallabies. Shooting does not appear to be the answer to these problems. However, fauna authorities have offered no other solution for the problems other than, in the case of Tasmania, the use of cruel methods such as poison and snares.

9.33 In some areas where kangaroos have been numerous and perceived to be destructive, shooting or poisoning (in Tasmania) on a large scale only relieved the pressure for a short time. The only way to control the populations by killing is to kill all the kangaroos in a district or region, something which would be

difficult to do and which, in any event, would be contrary to the NPMK. That Plan requires the conservation of the kangaroo across all of its natural range.

9.34 Dr P. Jarman in evidence to the Committee outlined a different approach to kangaroo management. He believed that each property that had a kangaroo problem should be assessed by officers of the fauna authority as to the most effective method of combating the problem. Shooting would still be an option but it would not be resorted to as a reflex action as it has been. He related his experience in the northern tablelands of New South Wales where shooting had often been ineffective in protecting crops or pastures from kangaroos or wallabies, particularly in areas in which professional shooters were not operating.

9.35 Dr Jarman suggested that in some areas, electric or special non-electric fences might be more effective in protecting crops. Other methods included buffer zones, differently shaped fields of crops or even capture and transfer of wallabies, although the last method would only be used for endangered or uncommon species.

9.36 Fauna authorities will need more resources to reduce their reliance on shooting as virtually the sole method of kangaroo management. More staff will be needed to make the extra inspections to assess and advise on the most suitable form of kangaroo control. It is time that both landholders and governments reassess their approach to kangaroo management. Government authorities have managed to placate landholders' criticisms by handing out shooters' permits and tags rather than by addressing the more difficult and expensive topic of adequate protection of crops or pasture from the ravages of kangaroos or wallabies. Some landholders are suffering because of this single-minded approach to kangaroo management by fauna authorities. The palliative of shooting has not been the cure for

their complaints. More shooting would probably be not much more effective.

9.37 The Committee also took an interest in an electronic device that emits a high-pitched sound to scare kangaroos away from crops or pasture. The device works on the dual basis of sound and pain. Animals suffer pain from the noise after a short time within range of the device. At the time of a demonstration for the Committee early in 1987, the device had not then been perfected. However, the Committee understands that the device has undergone further development and if such a device could be perfected and tested over a period of time to ensure that kangaroos did not become used to the noise and pain, it has the potential to solve some problems of kangaroo management. Although its use would be most effective in small areas, it could be used on the large pastoral properties, for example, to keep kangaroos away from water holes. This device can also be fitted to motor vehicles to help avoid collisions with kangaroos.

9.38 The Committee **RECOMMENDS** that fauna authorities conduct inspections of properties where kangaroos are allegedly causing an unacceptable level of damage to assess the extent of the problem and to advise landholders on methods of coping with the problem. The Committee also **RECOMMENDS** that the killing of kangaroos be permitted by fauna authorities only where non-lethal methods of containing kangaroo damage are impracticable.

9.39 The Committee notes that fencing may be the most feasible method of containing kangaroo damage in some circumstances. The Committee **RECOMMENDS** that funds be made available by the Commonwealth for research into kangaroo proof fences.

Shooting of Kangaroos

9.40 Despite the many differences of opinion between animal welfare organisations on the one hand and government authorities, landholders and the kangaroo industry on the other, there was one fundamental point on which there was almost unanimity of opinion; that, with the permission of the fauna authorities, landholders can resort to the destruction of kangaroos where those kangaroos cause unjustifiable levels of damage and no feasible alternative method is available to contain that damage. Most animal welfare representatives conceded that kangaroos were not inviolable and that there were circumstances which precluded the use of other methods of controlling them. Those representatives emphasised that this did not constitute an endorsement of the present system of kangaroo management.

9.41 There is no doubt that the shooting of kangaroos by professional shooters is the most humane way of killing kangaroos. The RSPCA found much higher incidences of cruelty in shooting by non-professionals, most of whom do not have the marksmanship of a professional shooter. In addition, many licensed landholders use inappropriate firearms to kill kangaroos - mainly rimfire rifles or shotguns. It is therefore desirable for the shooting of kangaroos to be conducted by professional shooters.

9.42 Representatives of animal welfare organisations have acknowledged the relative skills of professional and non-professional shooters. It is the commercial aspects of the kangaroo industry which the animal welfare movement abhors, where they believe decisions are made on the basis of commerce and not on animal welfare or conservation grounds.

Commercial Killing of Kangaroos

9.43 The animal welfare movement has suggested that the government should employ professional shooters to kill kangaroos rather than allow an industry to carry out that work.

9.44 In a statement to the House of Representatives on 7 June 1984, the then Minister for Home Affairs and Environment stated that such a proposal was impractical and too expensive. He indicated that such an arrangement would cost about \$50,000,000.

9.45 The ANPWS provided further information on this figure. An officer of the ANPWS told the Committee that:

The costs per full time shooter, which we suggested were derived to give an indication of the amounts involved in such an exercise, and the data presented could also be used to give pro rata estimates of costs for other forms of shooting, such as part time, government or contract shooting, noting that vehicles and equipment will still need to be maintained by the Government or the contractors. I think the figure we got, which you may have thought on the low side, was something like \$47,000 per full time person, when one took into account support requirements, vehicles, administrative support and so on. What we were trying to suggest was that that formulation could be adjusted depending on the assumptions that you made about the kinds of people whom you needed, how busy you would expect them to be and how many kangaroos you would want them to remove.¹

9.46 The Committee is not convinced that the costs allocated to a full-time shooter would amount to the \$47,000 mentioned above. According to Young and Delforce, average net income of professional shooters in New South Wales from 'trapping' of kangaroos and feral animals in 1982-83 was \$9,361.14 after deducting costs of \$9,891.28. Shooters also obtained on average an extra net income from non-shooting occupations of

\$5,931.61. Average gross income was therefore about half of the cost suggested by the ANPWS. It would be unreasonable to attribute an amount similar to gross income for administrative support.

9.47 If government shooters were engaged at any time, the Committee envisages that professional shooters would be offered contracts and not employed as public servants with their normal conditions of service which would be quite inappropriate for the task of shooting kangaroos.

9.48 It was pointed out to the Committee that commercial shooters have an incentive to kill kangaroos efficiently and humanely. Every bullet wasted is a cost which the shooter has to bear himself. The time taken to despatch wounded kangaroos is itself a cost. If a professional shooter were paid by the government, there would be less incentive to contain costs and maintain maximum efficiency. This would lead to fewer clean kills. The shooter would also not be constrained by normal commercial considerations such as the size of the animal. This might lead to the killing of more does and young animals.

9.49 It has been argued that governments have paid for many services to the rural community, such as soil conservation and predator control (the dingo fences and locust management) and that kangaroo management is a similar service. Protected wildlife is the property of the government and although landholders have some obligation to allow wildlife to live on their properties, many, if not all, believe that the government has a responsibility to keep the adverse effects of wildlife within tolerable proportions. Governments largely do this now except that they have used the commercial kangaroo industry to keep government costs to a minimum. There will be, however, some cost to government in whatever system of management of kangaroos is used.

9.50 An alternative to government funding of non-commercial professional shooters would be a system of charges levied against landholders for the service of reducing kangaroo populations that are causing damage to their properties. There are many examples of landholders paying for services rendered by government authorities, including levies for inspection services, research and marketing.

9.51 Whereas it is relatively easy to implement a system of levies for various other services carried out by government, it is likely that landholders would opt to kill kangaroos themselves by a variety of methods, most of which would be cruel, rather than pay for the service to be done by someone else. There is enough anecdotal information available to indicate that many landholders already illegally kill kangaroos inhumanely. There would be a strong temptation to sidestep additional costs, especially in hard economic times.

9.52 Shooting is probably the only method of containing kangaroo damage in many of the pastoral areas, when that damage is actually a problem. The size of properties in these areas usually precludes fencing as a practical option. Other methods, which might offer solutions in areas of higher density of livestock, would not work in these wide, open spaces.

9.53 The important question to be addressed is the manner and extent of shooting. The commercial kangaroo industry requires a certain number of kangaroos to be taken to satisfy its markets. The shooters, chiller operators and processors will therefore operate to fulfil their commercial needs within maximum quotas set by the Federal Government. The only other constraint on shooters is the density of kangaroos in the operational area. The shooter needs to kill a certain minimum number to meet his operational costs for the night. A low density of kangaroos would preclude the shooter from achieving that minimum number. It is therefore argued that the commercial shooting of kangaroos

depends upon density and not on actual damage or competition with livestock.

9.54 Landholders argued that it is preferable to keep kangaroo populations at reasonable levels even when competition and damage are negligible. This strategy prevents a build-up of kangaroos which might cause severe problems in drier periods, both for the landholder, by competing with livestock for scarce food and water and also for themselves, with greater numbers dying lingering deaths from starvation and dehydration.

9.55 Non-endangered species of native wildlife are normally left to fend for themselves in nature. In this way, natural selection helps to create a strong and viable species able to withstand the rigours of the environment. Inevitably some of the species will succumb in natural disasters, including prolonged droughts. To some extent, the environment has been changed by human development. Some areas are now denuded of cover and carry no kangaroos while in others, extra water has increased the kangaroo populations. In addition, the dingo fence has kept that predator away from kangaroos in sheep country. The density of kangaroos is far lower on the other side of the dingo fence. However, except perhaps in some cases where kangaroos are confined in relatively small areas, kangaroos should not be killed to reduce potential suffering in droughts. Kangaroos should only be killed to protect human land use.

9.56 At present, there is minimal supervision of commercial kangaroo killing. New or unusually high requests for tags might prompt the fauna authority to inspect the areas to assess the perceived kangaroo problem but there is little inspection beyond this. The fauna authorities lack the resources to extend its supervisory operations. There is little doubt that some kangaroos are killed when there is no need to kill them. Within the quota, the number of kangaroos killed depends largely upon commercial and climatic factors. The demand for kangaroo products will

dampen or increase incentive to kill fewer or more kangaroos. Bad weather will also affect the ability of shooters to operate. Prolonged wet weather will result in few kangaroos shot during that period.

9.57 Young and Morris in their final Report to the NSW NPWS advocated a more deregulated and commercial basis for the industry in that State but at the same time providing for the conservation of kangaroo species across their respective ranges. An essential element of their management scheme was the retention of commercial shooting of kangaroos.

9.58 Although ideally all kangaroos should only be shot by professional shooters who do not have a commercial interest in the killing, the Committee does not believe that such a proposal, if recommended, would be practicable at the present time. Any scheme involving the use of professional shooters engaged under contract to government would be prohibitively expensive.

9.59 The Federal Government's involvement in kangaroo management depends on its constitutional power over exports. By legislating under this power, the Federal Government has managed to gain some control over the management of kangaroos and the total number killed commercially in those States where there is commercial shooting. Without commercial killing and hence exports of kangaroo skins and meat, the Federal Government has no basis for any authority over the killing of kangaroos.

9.60 If the Committee recommended a ban on commercial killing, and the Federal Government accepted that recommendation, exports would cease and the Federal Government would lose any control it has over kangaroo management. It would be left to each State Government to deal with kangaroo management in its own way. The example of Queensland in 1986 following the temporary export ban is indicative of the reaction to such a recommendation. The

moderating influence of the Federal Government would be gone, which would be to the detriment of animal welfare.

9.61 The Committee **RECOMMENDS** that commercial shooting of kangaroos continue to be permitted in areas where there is a need to reduce populations of kangaroo for damage mitigation purposes.

9.62 Although the Committee recommends the continuation of commercial shooting of kangaroos, it does so provided that there is more supervision of kangaroos killing by fauna authorities. At present, there is minimal supervision exercised because of scant resources available for the task. More resources must be devoted to inspections to assess damage or potential damage by kangaroos before tags are issued. The Committee does not press for inspections of properties for all applications for tags, but for a much greater proportion of inspections overall.

9.63 Young and Morris recommended various measures which would deregulate to some degree kangaroo management in New South Wales. The Committee does not wish to debate the details of those recommendations but comment on their thrust. It seems that Young and Morris have taken an economic and conservation approach rather than one based on animal welfare. The Committee strongly opposes any measures to increase the size of the commercial kill for economic reasons instead of for the necessary control of damage to human land use. The concern of this Committee and of many people in the community is that too many kangaroos are killed unnecessarily each year simply for commercial purposes. Both the size and the manner of the kill are important.

9.64 Red and grey kangaroos are surveyed extensively and regularly but not much has been done to establish the size and population trends of other species subjected to killing in one or more States. The Committee notes that research into these species is increasing. There is no evidence that these species are likely to be threatened across their respective ranges from shooting or

land use developments, but a lack of information hampers long-term planning. It should be a prerequisite for the killing of species that population studies be done to establish their long-term status. Although there are anecdotal reports of their proliferation in some areas, this is not enough on which to base a management programme that includes killing a number of them.

9.65 The kangaroo industry deals in carcasses (or sometimes butts) or skins only. The RSPCA found a higher degree of cruelty associated with skin-only shooting as there was not the same financial incentive to head shoot as there was for the carcase trade. In some States, chiller operators and processors penalised shooters who offered carcasses bruised by bullet wounds to the chest or other parts of the body. Sometimes carcasses with bruising from bullet wounds were rejected outright.

9.66 Young and Morris in their study found that there was more scope for opportunistic shooters entering the market in times when prices for skins were high and then moving out again as prices declined. This affected the livelihood of long-term professional shooters who had to take the good seasons with the bad. It must be assumed that these opportunistic shooters would not have the same marksmanship skills of long-term professional shooters and nor would they be likely to act as responsibly, either in cruelty or conservation terms.

9.67 There also are more difficulties in policing skin-only shooting. There are no chillers that can be inspected to ensure that the species killed are among those allowed to be killed and that tags have been attached. The anecdotal information on an illegal skin trade probably refers mainly to skin-only shooting because of the few controls over its operation. It would be fairly easy to conceal untagged skins in a large consignment of skins or to mix kangaroo skins with those of livestock. There are practical and constitutional difficulties in apprehending people

involved in the illegal interstate transportation and export of skins.

9.68 There are obvious difficulties in maintaining a carcase trade in remote areas from which it would be difficult to market the meat. In those circumstances, skin-only shooting should be allowed. However, where it is possible to maintain or establish a carcase trade, skin-only shooting should be banned.

Non-commercial Shooting

9.69 The RSPCA highlighted the cruelty involved in the non-commercial shooting of kangaroos on the mainland and in Tasmania. It provided evidence of inappropriate firearms used to kill kangaroos and of poor marksmanship. It also uncovered a level of illegal killing of kangaroos by use of cruel methods such as poison, snares, dogs and drives for damage mitigation purposes. Such acts of cruelty should not be associated with wanton acts of cruelty perpetrated by drunken or sadistic people who shoot animals for the devilment of it.

9.70 The Standing Committee of CONCOM noted the comments of RSPCA Australia on non-commercial killing of kangaroos. In its response to the RSPCA, it went on to say:

Farmer organisations state that most farmers make every effort to operate humanely.

Few landholders are deliberately cruel in their efforts to reduce kangaroo populations on their properties. The fact remains that there is an unacceptable level of cruelty that takes place. This needs to be addressed and something done about it. Simply offering a bland statement such as the one quoted above, is quite unacceptable. The fault mainly lies in the system of management

by fauna authorities and, particularly, by governments and not in the efforts of landholders to protect their livelihood.

9.71 The RSPCA in its conclusions stated:

Cruelty associated with non-commercial kangaroo culling is neglected by the authorities and there is no control over the number of kangaroos killed and the methods used.

The Standing Committee of CONCOM in its response to RSPCA stated:

Not true. States have the capacity to control the taking of kangaroos for damage mitigation as they are protected by law. Destruction of kangaroos can only take place legally under permits to which regulatory conditions apply. The issue of cruelty is of concern to all States and they are addressing it through progressive implementation of the Code and other means as appropriate.

9.72 Although there are laws in place, fauna authorities do little to police the killing of kangaroos in the non-commercial areas mainly because they have not been given the resources by government to carry out such functions, other than in the most cursory way. No States have demonstrated satisfactory programmes of control or of 'implementation' of the Code. Codes of Practice have been distributed but that is not, in the opinion of the Committee, effective enough in reducing the level of cruelty. The RSPCA would probably have been more correct in saying 'little control' rather than 'no control'.

9.73 The Code of Practice seems to be set upon a pedestal by fauna authorities as the panacea of all evil associated with the killing of kangaroos. The Code, by itself, will do little to bring about the humane killing of kangaroos. Changes will only occur when government and industry back the Code with educational programmes and with some form of penalty to ensure adherence to

it. There are many people who do kill kangaroos humanely but there are others who, through ignorance, inexperience or inhumanity, wreak far more suffering than is tolerable.

9.74 This level of unintentional cruelty is of concern to the Committee. Hundreds of thousands of wallabies are shot in this way in Tasmania each year. A large number of kangaroos and wallabies were shot in Queensland in 1986 during and after a short-term ban on commercial shooting, following the release of an adverse report by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal against the 1985 Queensland KMP.

9.75 Fauna authorities have no reliable estimates of kangaroos shot non-commercially by landholders on the mainland (some sampling is done in Tasmania). Although the number of kangaroos permitted to be shot is recorded, there are few records of the numbers actually shot. Each landholder may happen to shoot more or fewer kangaroos than his permit entitles him to shoot. If he perceives a threat to his livelihood, he is likely to keep shooting until the threat disappears or is under control. It is unlikely in most of such cases that the landholder will adhere strictly to the terms of his permit. The landholder is probably aware that there are no checks by fauna authorities to ensure adherence by landholders to their permits and that securing evidence for a conviction in a court is difficult.

9.76 A major part of RSPCA Australia's solution to the problem of cruelty in the non-commercial killing of kangaroos was to recommend the appointment of 'Wildlife Controllers' who would be paid by the government from revenues collected from royalty tag fees. It is stated in the report of RSPCA that:

Each state and territory will appoint its own Wildlife Controller who should be an officer with adequate policing powers. This officer would keep a "register of professional shooters" and have a 008 telephone number

which would allow farmers and those affected by large numbers of kangaroos to contact his state Wildlife Controller for the price of a local call. The officer after checking that a permit has been issued would then arrange for a professional shooter or shooters to carry out the necessary culling. He would receive payment for his time at an appropriate level including allowances and expenses under the same terms as that provided to a State or Territorial Public Servant.

The funding of the "Wildlife Controllers" would come via the current royalty tag arrangement at 10 cents a carcass, which was originally implemented to be used for the Conservation of Wildlife but appears to be simply fed into consolidated revenue in each State.²

9.77 The intention of the RSPCA was to introduce a system of killing kangaroos in non-commercial areas that was less cruel than the current system of allowing landholders or their agents to shoot kangaroos on their properties. Many of these people use inappropriate firearms and lack the marksmanship of professional shooters. The RSPCA had concluded that shooting by professional shooters was the least cruel method of killing kangaroos. However, there was no incentive for professional shooters to operate in non-commercial areas.

9.78 If kangaroos are to be killed in non-commercial areas, there is a responsibility on the government to ensure that such killing is done with the least possible cruelty. It is not enough for the government to make arrangements for such killing that are the least expensive to it without adequate provisions to minimise cruelty. A balance has to be reached between practicality and the minimisation of cruelty. The present system is too heavily weighted towards cruelty and, from an animal welfare point of view, needs to be redressed. Either the level of cruelty by non-commercial shooters must be decreased or a system similar to that suggested by the RSPCA be introduced, or both.

9.79 The Code of Practice specifies the use of centrefire rifles to kill kangaroos other than the smaller wallabies. The RSPCA in its first report found that many non-commercial shooters used inappropriate firearms, such as rimfire rifles or shotguns, to shoot red or grey kangaroos or euros. There is little point in having the Code of Practice if its provisions are ignored and no action is taken by fauna authorities to encourage landholders or their agents to adhere to the Code. It should be a requirement of any permit or licence that the shooting of kangaroos be carried out with a firearm specified in the Code of Practice.

9.80 Some landholders or their agents have an adequate standard of marksmanship to minimise cruelty while shooting kangaroos. However, many do not. Landholders who apply for a permit to shoot kangaroos should undergo a test of marksmanship before permits are issued to them. If an agent is nominated by a landholder, that agent should undertake the test. Fauna authorities should arrange the tests or perhaps arrangements could be made with firearm clubs to give tests. A person who passes the test need not undergo another test for three years.

9.81 Some people might object to having to pass a test of marksmanship in order to obtain a permit to shoot kangaroos. Yet the same people would probably not complain about taking driving tests prior to the issue of driving licences. Both cars and firearms can be lethal in the wrong hands. Although kangaroos may be perceived as pests by some landholders, they are protected species except where a permit is obtained from the relevant authority to kill a specific number for damage mitigation purposes. It is incumbent on that authority to ensure that in permitting kangaroos to be killed, it also ensures that they suffer as little as possible. It is therefore not unreasonable for the fauna authority to insist on certain requirements to be met to protect the welfare of the animals.

9.82 Where a landholder does not own an appropriate firearm or does not pass a test of marksmanship, the fauna authority should arrange for a professional shooter to reduce the kangaroo population on the landholder's property, provided that the authority is satisfied there is a bona fide problem of kangaroo damage. The professional shooter should be remunerated for his travelling expenses and be allowed to keep the skins for sale to the industry. In addition, the landholder should pay a nominal charge, say one dollar for each skin, to the shooter. The landholder would have incurred some costs had he done the job himself, apart from the time saved by handing the task to a professional shooter.

9.83 This scheme does not involve 'government shooters'. It is extending the commercial operation to areas where there is presently no commercial shooting. However, because a full commercial operation would not be viable in those areas, a government assisted operation is recommended instead. It should be emphasised that this scheme would only apply where a landholder or his agent is not equipped to do the task himself.

9.84 By using a professional shooter, animal welfare will be improved. There is no doubt that of all shooters, professional shooters kill kangaroos the most humanely.

9.85 The scheme would not be an unfettered extension of commercial shooting because in each case the professional shooter would be asked to do the job by the fauna authority after the authority was satisfied that the problem warranted a reduction in the kangaroo population. There is, therefore, control over the operation by the authority.

9.86 The landholder would have the kangaroo problem dealt with at a minimal cost to himself. Although a nominal fee would be paid to the shooter per kangaroo shot, in any event that fee would have been put to expenses, such as ammunition. In addition,

the landholder would not have to spend valuable time shooting kangaroos. By paying a fee per kangaroo shot, the landholder would have a record of the number shot (the shooter would have to show evidence of the number shot) and there would be an incentive for him to keep a balance between the number shot and the perceived damage.

9.87 The shooter, by selling the skins and receiving both the fee from the landholder and some assistance from the authority, would be making his normal income. In addition, it would give him greater security of employment in his trade which, in normal circumstances, through the vagaries of the weather and other factors, makes professional shooting an uncertain job.

9.88 This scheme would increase skin-only shooting, something about which the Committee had expressed concern elsewhere in the report. However, on balance, the benefits of replacing poor shooters with professional shooters overrides that concern.

9.89 The Committee does not suggest that special 'wildlife controllers' be appointed to administer this new function. The Committee envisages that it would be done through the central or district offices of the fauna authorities.

9.90 The funding of the scheme would be by normal allocation of funds to fauna authorities by governments. There is no particular need to set aside royalty payments from commercial shooters to fund this new function.

9.91 The Committee **RECOMMENDS** that in a non-commercial area, where a landholder does not possess an appropriate firearm or does not pass a test of marksmanship, the fauna authority arrange and subsidise the use of a commercial shooter to contain kangaroo damage, provided that no non-lethal method is practicable.

9.92 The Committee RECOMMENDS that fauna authorities be allocated more resources to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities for the management and protection of kangaroos and other wildlife.

9.93 The fact that this scheme or a variation of it will cost more money is not a reason for governments to reject it out of hand. Governments have to come to terms with the need to improve animal welfare in this and other areas. For too long animal welfare has been relegated to a position of low priority but changing community expectations are requiring governments to give it more attention.