

MINORITY REPORT

Senator Norm Sanders

Most of the Committee members have agreed on recommendations which essentially maintain the status quo in the kangaroo management program. This is in spite of the fact that major doubts remain about the present system.

The majority took pains to frame recommendations which were politically inoffensive. I feel that the recommendations should not have been based on pragmatism, but instead should spell out what is needed to best benefit the welfare of kangaroos.

This is, after all, the Animal Welfare Committee. As such it has a duty to place the welfare of kangaroos first. Numerous other committees look after the interests of industry and farmers.

Any wildlife management program should be organized to err on the side of conservatism. Such is not the case with the kangaroo program. During the entire hearing procedure, not one witness was able to give a firm number for kangaroo populations. In addition, no firm numbers were presented for the illegal kill of kangaroos. Some witnesses estimated that illegal slaughter could equal the legal kill.

It was revealed in evidence that Section 92 of the Constitution effectively renders the task of ascertaining the extent of domestic trade in kangaroos an impossibility. Victoria's action in abandoning her import/export permit system

in 1985 has allowed a free flow of kangaroo products into that State without any monitoring.

At least 32 State and Federal Government bureaucracies are involved in the kangaroo industry. The task of compiling proper domestic statistics has not been addressed. Evidence of alleged illegal activities within the industry has not been investigated with any diligence.

Kill statistics do not provide proper biological data on the population dynamics of the species included in the National Kangaroo Management Program.

Faced with these uncertainties, it would seem logical to curtail or cease the legal kill until data were available. The excuse for not doing so was generally the following: "Since legal kill numbers can be maintained every year, the population must be stable or increasing." In other wildlife management situations, experience has shown that this attitude has led to drastic population crashes. It could happen with kangaroos.

The major driving force behind kangaroo killing at present is the kangaroo meat and hide industry. The industry was originally conceived as a clever means of providing a self-financing method of kangaroo management. Such management was supposedly for the benefit of farmers and the kangaroos themselves.

Many witnesses from bureaucracies and farmers' groups have testified that the kangaroo is killed to prevent damage to crops. If this is the case, it is difficult to understand why kill quotas are set in advance of perceived damage. In any event, the Committee has not received any data on crop damage which would justify a kill of more than 26 million kangaroos and wallabies over the last seven years. The industry is the obvious beneficiary of such high quotas.

Queensland has stated that the kangaroo industry exists in its own right. Kangaroo killing has become a means of providing income for bankrupt rural communities rather than operating as a wildlife management exercise.

There has been a massive push this year to legalize kangaroo meat for human consumption, a dangerous threat to any wildlife population.

The tail is now wagging the dog and the industry has developed its own political clout. Management considerations have become secondary to the maintenance of a viable meat and hide trade.

For the welfare of kangaroos, the industry should be closed. Kangaroos should be left unmolested whenever possible. If farmers can demonstrate crop damage to a responsible wildlife management official, subsidies should be paid for loss or for the installation of electric fencing. Farmers should be discouraged from clearing marginal areas, now kangaroo habitat, for cropping.

If any kangaroos must be killed for crop protection or population management, professional shooters should be employed by the government.

It should be noted that proposals such as the above have prompted farmers to threaten a "Bloodbath" of kangaroo shooting and poisoning. Some management personnel have used this threat as a justification for the continuation of present practices. This is a mistake. We should not be blackmailed into inaction by threats of terrorism.

Kangaroo management should be the responsibility of a national body with access to all relevant statistics, including both domestic and export data. Information on all aspects of the operation of the national body should be publicly available.

Conservation representatives should have regular input into the body and its management program.

The kangaroo debate must be removed from the province of experts defending special interest groups and opened up to the broader community.

Many of the States have actively fought any public criticism or close examination of their activities. Queensland was taken before the Administrative Appeals Tribunal by private citizens concerned by breaches of that State's own lax regulations.

The failure of the States to draw up uniform wildlife legislation is another compelling reason for a national body.

Such a body should also be involved in educating the public on the role of wildlife in the eco-system. Farmers and bureaucrats should be taught the merits of protecting indigenous wildlife rather than adopting wholesale slaughter options which have long-term effects on the human and animal populations.

The rest of the world views the massive killing of our unique macropods with disgust. The European Parliament has taken steps to ban the import of all wallaby species and will place the Red, Eastern, and Western Grey kangaroos on Appendix 2 of the EEC/CITES listing. The U.S. has long maintained the same three species on the threatened list in spite of pressure by the Australian Government.

Australia is regarded in most respects as an advanced and technologically adept nation. However, the continuing decimation of our unique wildlife demonstrates to the world that we are unwilling to address our international responsibilities.

The welfare of the kangaroo, our national animal, must be placed ahead of commercial interests and inept bureaucrats. The present slaughter must cease.