

2006 State of the Environment Report

Commercial harvesting of kangaroos

Two indicators are particularly useful in relation to this issue. Firstly Indicator BD-23 Some selected nationally significant native terrestrial species subjected to harvesting and population trends reports data on the number and types of land animals commercially harvested. Data appear to be available only on kangaroos and waterbirds (in Queensland only). It concludes that:

“No data that would give an indication as to whether harvesting is sustainable, for example, data on population trends, population structure or distribution of harvested species, appear to be available. “

Indicator LD-20 Total grazing pressure relative to net primary productivity is more relevant to the “pest control” killing of kangaroos undertaken by farmers or government “culling” operations. Using data compiled by commercial harvesting advocates, and various estimates of “dry sheep equivalents” (i.e. how much vegetation an animal eats compared to a non-lactating sheep), it estimates the “grazing pressure” of kangaroos relative to sheep and cattle. **It concludes that the grazing pressure of kangaroos, across the continent is no more than 8%, and may be as low as 1%, of the total grazing pressure on Australian pastures. Cattle are responsible for between 63% and 68% of total grazing pressure and sheep for between 28% and 31%.**

Naturalised populations of introduced grazing animals and other native animals are omitted from the analysis because of lack of data on their numbers.

The indicator also notes that this analysis is based only on how much kangaroos eat, relative to sheep and cattle. It notes that, *“aside from dry sheep equivalents, which is a way of comparing only how much vegetation animals consume, not other aspects of their impacts, the impact per animal of native herbivores on the environment is also considerably lower than that of introduced herbivores. Native animals are better adapted to the Australian landscape than introduced grazers.”* (Presumably this refers to the fact that they do not have the hard hooves of introduced herbivores and they do not graze down to ground level unless they are unable to move out of an area.)