

© 2014 Universities Federation for Animal Welfare
 The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead,
 Hertfordshire AL4 8AN, UK
www.ufaw.org.uk

Animal Welfare 2014, 23: 1-10
 ISSN 0962-7286
 doi: 10.7120/09627286.23.1.001

The welfare ethics of the commercial killing of free-ranging kangaroos: an evaluation of the benefits and costs of the industry

D Ben-Ami^{*†}, K Boom[†], L Boronyak[†], C Townend[†], D Ramp[§], DB Croft^{‡§} and M Bekoff[#]

[†] THINKK, The Think Tank for Kangaroos, Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology, Sydney, PO Box 123, Broadway 2007, NSW, Australia

[‡] School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW 2052, Australia

[§] School of the Environment, University of Technology, PO Box 123, Broadway 2007, NSW, Australia

[#] Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0334, USA

* Contact for correspondence and requests for reprints: dror.ben-ami@isf.uts.edu.au

Abstract

The commercial killing of kangaroos provides multiple benefits to society, but also causes both deliberate and unintended harms to kangaroos. The ethics of the kangaroo industry is assessed in terms of whether the assumed benefits justify the welfare costs. An analysis of the stated benefits indicates that killing for damage mitigation is beneficial mainly during drought and not at current levels; that there is a commercial value, although considerably lower than previously estimated, and that demonstrable environmental benefits from commercial killing of kangaroos are lacking; and that the commercial kill may ameliorate the suffering of kangaroos during drought. Welfare practices are very difficult to assess and regulate due to the size and remote nature of the industry. A combination of empirical data on welfare outcomes and inferences drawn from behavioural and reproductive knowledge of the commercially killed species are utilised to assess harm. The welfare costs include deliberate and indirect harm to dependent young (a by-product of the commercial kill), and a number of unintended harms to adult kangaroos, including increased mortality during drought, inhumane killing of a portion of adult kangaroos, and a disruption of social stability and the evolutionary potential of individuals. Furthermore, a substantial gap exists between the intended welfare standards of the code of practice governing the kangaroo industry and the welfare outcomes for both dependent young and adult kangaroos. We found that, on balance, the benefits are lower than expected and the welfare costs are likely to be considerably higher than acceptable. More research, particularly at the point of kill, is necessary to verify and assess the extent of harms. A number of improvements are suggested to the code of practice to improve welfare outcomes.

Keywords: animal welfare, commercial, ethics, harvest, industry, kangaroo