

Submission to the Review of Victorian Wildlife Act

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Incentives for landholders to conserve wildlife.

The following paragraphs are from summaries of recently published papers which propose alternative ways of managing Australian wildlife. We have proposed them because what Australia is currently appears to us to not be working. In that situation, why do we keep doing it? We suggest it's time to trial alternatives

Common species

The larger kangaroos (*Macropus giganteus*, *M. fuliginosus* and *Osphranter rufus*) are widely distributed and have a national population which fluctuates around 40 million in response to changes in grass growth. Most kangaroos are outside parks and reserves and on pastoral properties, particularly on the rangelands of southern Australia.

High numbers compromise regenerative agriculture, pasture conservation, revegetation and stewardship programs, and can have significant financial impacts on landholders by lowering livestock production and damaging sustainability.

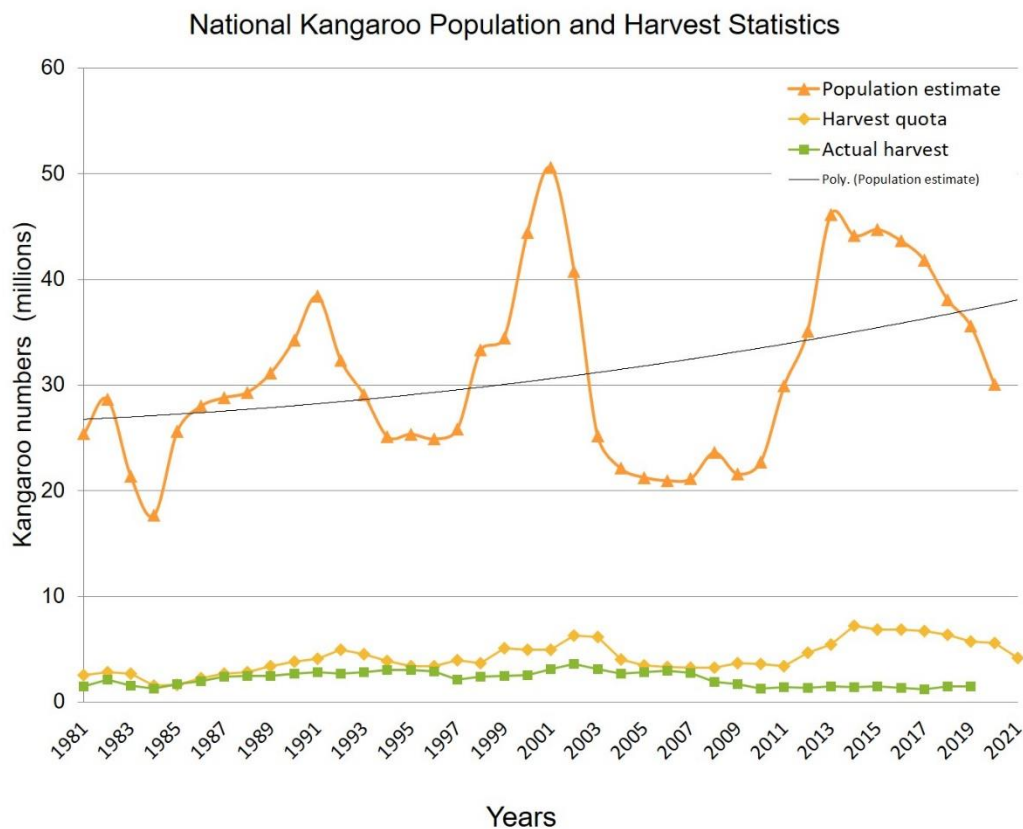


Figure 1 Figures shows commercial harvest is in consequential and that populations crash (starve) at times that coincide with drought

Paradoxically, kangaroos have a wide range of potentially valuable production attributes and are unique, which should be a global comparative advantage. The kangaroo industry is established with a small domestic and international market, although demand has been falling in recent years. Non-commercial culling is rising, which results in millions of carcasses being wasted and left to decompose in the field. (Wilson and Edwards 2019) Indigenous communities abhor such waste and its cultural implications.

A stronger kangaroo industry would be a better solution to managing overabundant kangaroos than pest culling and exclusion fences.

Because kangaroos move from property to property, populations need to be managed on a regional basis. A form of proprietorship over this mobile resource would encourage landholders to play a role in creating greater demand for kangaroo products. We have proposed a mechanism for this called 'regional property-based kangaroo production'. (Wilson and Edwards in press)

Such changes would give landholders an incentive to raise the value of kangaroos. Through innovative harvesting they could deliver high quality, environmentally branded, accurately described, gourmet, differentiated products integrated with other livestock industries. They could establish cooperatives and embark on promoting regional kangaroo products. Policy improvements are needed to achieve these production systems.

Doing so would diversify their enterprises, convert a liability already on their properties into an asset, create employment, enhance rural economic resilience, and improve animal welfare and conservation outcomes while earning them carbon credits. These opportunities become even more profound as climate change progresses.

The urgency for reconsidering the way Australia including Victoria, manages kangaroos comes from the observation that during the recent drought millions died. This is not only an animal welfare disaster and a national disgrace but is also damages sustainability of primary production, affecting other biodiversity and potentially threatening the social licence of rangeland pastoral industries. It happened on pastoral lands and alternative management arrangements are needed to reduce the chances of a repeat.

Threatened species

A large proportion of the world's extinctions have occurred in Australia, and threatened species lists continue to grow, notwithstanding government and philanthropic efforts. Most losses have been on private land, so relying on national parks and reserves is not enough to reverse trends and meet Australia's responsibilities. This submission is based on a proposal in (Wilson *et al.* 2020) for a model that could increase abundance and distribution of Australia's biodiversity, while providing financial incentives to private landholders to do so. It addresses the question, can landholder management of wildlife, and a form of private ownership, remedy shortfalls in government funding for biodiversity conservation and the resulting consequences of vast biodiversity losses? Landholders currently invest in propagating introduced livestock species, but they are prevented by current regulations from investing in a similar manner in threatened Australian native species.

Market-based incentives could increase the distribution and abundance of species on private land and help protect the habitat of other biodiversity.

The enabling changes would be contentious to some people but are consistent with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Sustainable Use policy. Different versions of wildlife privatisation have been successfully applied internationally: there is urgency for Australia to draw on these experiences and develop its own model to encourage and support wildlife on private freehold land.

The model we have proposed focuses on

- identifying locally overabundant populations or captive-bred populations as sources of supply;
- finding landholders and philanthropists who would like to have custodianship of species;
- enabling entrepreneurs to respond to demand; and
- bringing the two together where there is scope for a market-based sharing economy.

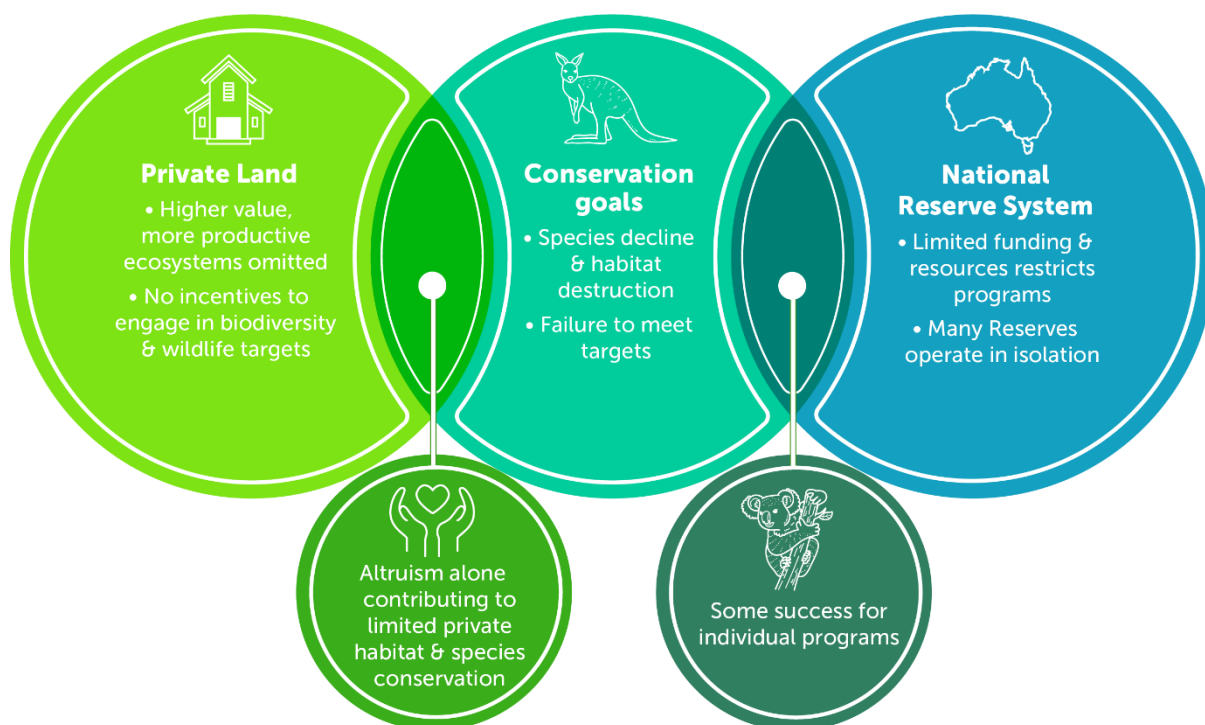


Figure 2 Under current incentives the role of private land in assisting attainment of conservation goals is limited

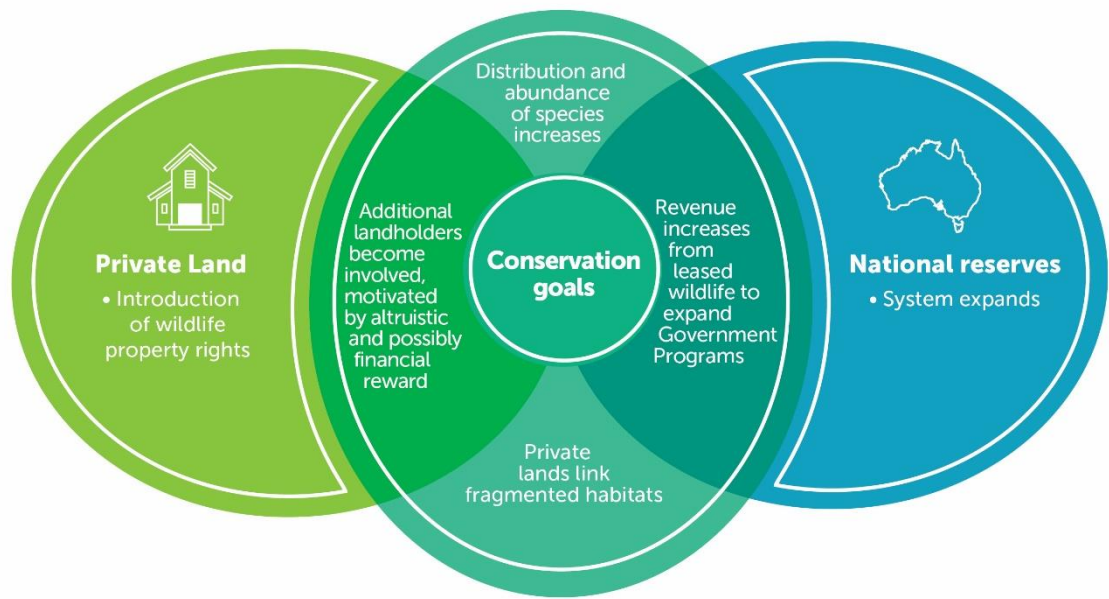


Figure 3 Wildlife custodianship of nominated species on private lands could motivate landholders available to contribute to an effective expansion of the National Reserve Scheme and attainment of conservation goals (reproduced from Wilson et al. 2018).

Encouraging wildlife custodianship on private freehold land would be mutually beneficial, as it would not only result in an increase in biodiversity, but the economic value of wildlife could provide an income to landholders as well as enhancing Australia's conservation system.

Wilson, G., Edwards, M. and Byron, N. 2020. Custodianship of wildlife on private land to support conservation – an Australian model. *The Rangeland Journal* **42**: 309-321.

Wilson, G.R. and Edwards, M. 2019. Professional kangaroo population control leads to better animal welfare, conservation outcomes and avoids waste. *Australian Zoologist* **40**: 181-202. 10.7882/az.2018.043.

Wilson, G.R. and Edwards, M. in press. Options and rationale for incorporating kangaroos into production strategies. *Ecological Management & Restoration*.