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A COOP FOR KANGAROOS? A KANGAROO MANAGEMENT MODEL OFFERING BENEFITS FOR STAKEHOLDERS AND SUSTAINABILITY

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainable use of wildlife has become widely accepted in recent years as a strategy to secure conservation outcomes at the same time as supporting human livelihoods (CITES 1992; IUCN 2000; CBD 2004). Use of wild resources, it is argued, can generate incentives for conservation of wild species and ecosystems, and these incentives can counteract the powerful drivers currently operating for conversion of biodiverse natural landscapes to intensive production (Webb 2002; Hutton and Leader-Williams 2003; CBD 2004). In Australia, many writers have highlighted the potential benefits of sustainable use of wild fauna and flora and called for its wider adoption (Grigg, Hale and Lunney 1995; Wilson 1995; Senate RARATR Committee 1998; Lunney and Dickman 2002; Webb 2002; Archer and Beale 2004). Much of the attention has focussed on kangaroos, with repeated calls for landholders in the Australian rangelands to manage and earn income from the kangaroos on their land, and move away from sole reliance on non-native stock species (Grigg 1989; Grigg 1995; Ampt and Baumber 2006). Potential benefits include more effective management of total grazing pressure, reducing stocking densities, reduced land degradation, incentives for habitat and vegetation retention and rehabilitation, and diversified income streams for landholders (Grigg 1989; Grigg 1995; Ampt and Baumber 2006). A further benefit of increased reliance on kangaroo production is the trivial greenhouse gas emissions they produce, compared to the very large methane emissions involved in sheep and cattle production (Diesendorf 2007).

Despite almost two decades of such calls, they have gained little traction. Today landholders remain almost completely uninvolved in kangaroo management, and kangaroo use generates precisely no incentives for habitat conservation among the landholders who manage land. One reason for this is that little attention has been paid to the question of exactly how landholders could be involved and gain economic benefits. What roles would they carry out? How would they influence management? How would they work with the existing kangaroo industry – the harvesters and processors? How would they derive income? Different models have sharply divergent consequences for relationships among major stakeholders, for kangaroo management, and in terms of the incentives they provide. For instance, a simple model of landholders requiring payment from harvesters to enter their properties to shoot kangaroos would antagonize harvesters, would probably fail if harvesters had other properties to harvest, would contribute nothing to managing kangaroos across the landscape scale at which they move, does nothing to add value to kangaroo product, and leaves both landholders and harvesters (as now) as isolated individuals with effectively no bargaining power with kangaroo processors (Cooney In Review).

This paper presents a model for landholders and harvesters to collaborate in kangaroo management, harvest and processing, in a manner that delivers benefits to landholders and harvesters, enables cross-property management at a landscape scale, gains collective bargaining power with processors, and lays the basis for long-term development of a differentiated, high-value kangaroo product. It was developed to address the needs and priorities of the Maranoa Wildlife Management Conservancy, a Sustainable Wildlife Enterprise sponsored by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, established by the Mitchell and Districts Landcare Association, Qld, in conjunction with local harvesters. It is therefore tailored to the regional conditions, regulatory framework, and kangaroo management prevailing in that area.

THE MODEL

Outline

This model involves the establishment of a trading cooperative under the *Cooperatives Act 1997*(Qld), here called the Maranoa Kangaroo Harvesters and Growers Coop (“the Coop”). A cooperative is owned and controlled by those for whom it was established and who use its services. Membership of the Coop would be limited to those who support the business of the Coop – in this case landholders (who produce kangaroos on their land) and harvesters (who harvest and field dress them and transport them to chillers). While a variety of organizational forms could be used to achieve collaboration, cooperatives have traditionally had considerable success in facilitating collaboration and gaining the benefits of collective bargaining for primary producers.

The Coop’s primary activities would be kangaroo management, processing and marketing (with processing understood here to include operation of chiller boxes). Its major activities would initially focus on collective bargaining with processors on behalf of its members; chilling and holding of kangaroo products produced by its members; and quality assurance. In the future, the aim is to expand into development of premium products, badged on the basis of environmental standards (e.g. organic, land management, biodiversity), regional identity, and/or landholder involvement; and potentially into processing and marketing to buyers further toward the consumer end of the chain. A visual representation of the Coop’s functioning is set out in Fig 1.

Key benefits for landholders and harvesters from establishing a Coop would be:

- the greater negotiating power of the Coop in relation to processors,
- the establishment of cooperative, long-term relationships between the groups, and
- the potential for development of high-value niche products reliant on landholder involvement.

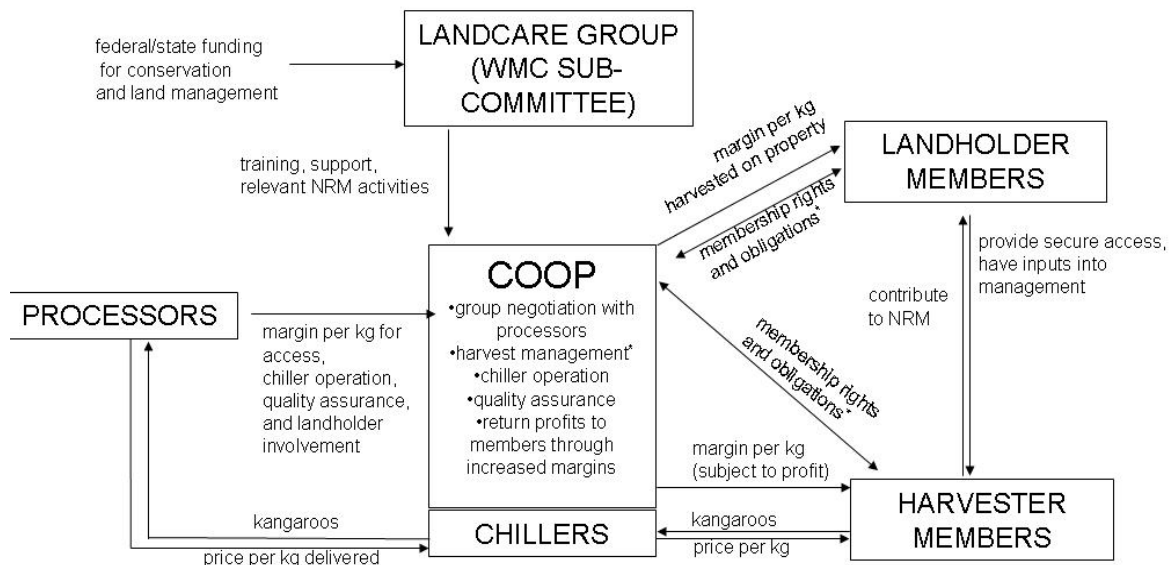


Fig 1. Visual representation of the Maranoa Kangaroo Harvesters and Growers Coop

How would it work?

The Coop would own/lease and operate one or more chiller boxes, and Coop harvesters would supply the chiller boxes with kangaroos harvested on Coop landholders’ land. The Coop would play an active role in developing and implementing best-practice quality standards of carcasses produced, which could include

standards of animal selection, harvesting, field dressing, transport, and chilling. Crucially, negotiations with kangaroo processors would be carried out by the Coop on behalf of the group as a whole. The Coop can offer processors:

- exclusive access to product from the properties of landholder members,
- consistent high-quality product, and
- no use of “damage mitigation permits” to shoot kangaroos by landholders.

In return the Coop would seek an additional margin per kg from processors, on top of the standard prevailing market price/kg.

Landholder and harvester members of the Coop would each have rights and obligations. The major obligation for landholder members would be that they provide exclusive access to Coop harvester members to their properties for harvest. They would not allow harvesters who are not members to harvest on their land – if their current harvester is not willing to become a member, they would no longer be able to harvest there. Member harvesters would be given secure and exclusive access to country – no other harvesters would be allowed on against their will. A further obligation for landholders would be that landholders do not use the “damage mitigation permits” that are currently widely used for non-commercial culling of large aggregations. This would benefit the Coop by increasing future offtake. The major obligation for harvester members would be that kangaroos harvested on Coop member properties are supplied exclusively to the Coop chiller box, up until its capacity is reached. Additionally, they would agree to implement any best-practice standards of harvesting and field dressing practice developed by the Coop.

The Coop would maintain a close working relationship with its “parent” Landcare group, which could retain responsibility for elements of kangaroo management that fall within its remit, such as supporting landholders in integrating kangaroo management within property management, training and support in EMS implementation, gaining scientific input to guide harvest strategies, or carrying out kangaroo surveys.

Harvest management

A key aim of this arrangement would be to promote better, more integrated kangaroo harvest management that meets priorities of the Coop, the landholders, and the harvesters, as well as contributing to sub-catchment and catchment level NRM objectives. Major objectives are likely to include better management of TGP and ensuring consistent high production. The plan should be based on sound scientific advice and could address timing of harvest, location of harvest, sexes, ages and species targeted.

Profits and incentives

The profits of the Coop would be returned to its members on the basis of their contribution of kangaroos to the Coop. Landholders would benefit on the basis of the amount of kangaroo harvested on their land, and harvesters on the basis of how much they have delivered to the chiller. The generation of income for landholders from kangaroos would mean that kangaroos start to become for them a resource, rather than a pest, with consequent incentives for decreased stocking rates, and vegetation and habitat retention and rehabilitation (see (Ampt and Baumber 2006).

Marketing and environmental labeling

The Coop could develop strategies for raising the value of its product through improving quality and labeling it on the basis of environmental attributes. Chudleigh *et al.* (in review) suggest a potential market niche for environmentally branded, gourmet kangaroo products of high quality. Some labeling/marketing options include: the environmental benefit of eating kangaroo due to its lesser contribution to global warming than domestic stock (Diesendorf 2007); highlighting the Sustainable Wildlife Enterprise, which has objectives of better land management and biodiversity conservation; the Landcare affiliation of the landholders; or implementation of an Environmental Management System.

CONCLUSION

This model offers considerable benefits over current practice for the stakeholders involved, and for long-term rangeland sustainability. Landholders gain better TGP management and a return from kangaroos, harvesters gain secure access to country and potentially better returns, processors gain a secure supply of high-quality product, and all potentially gain from the development of innovative new high-value products. Environmental benefits are gained through better TGP management and the generation of incentives for reduced stocking rates and improved land and habitat conservation. Government regulatory practice could change to support this model in a number of ways, such as through allocating the group its own harvest quota to allow it manage how and when quota was allocated across harvesters and properties.

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