

Eastern Grey Kangaroo: Controlled Native Species Management Plan

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About the draft management plan:

1. Why is the plan needed

The Eastern Grey Kangaroo is an important—and iconic—part of our natural environment. We need a plan so we can manage kangaroo welfare, interactions between humans and kangaroos, kangaroo densities and captive populations.

ACT lowland grasslands and woodlands no longer contain the large predators that were present historically. In the absence of these predators, populations can get out of balance with their environment. This overpopulation endangers other animal and plant species in these ecosystems, including some endangered species, and can lead to starvation among the kangaroo population in times of drought. It can also impact on the viability of rural businesses.

2. What changes to current kangaroo management are proposed?

The draft management plan does not propose any fundamental changes to the approach to kangaroo management in the ACT as outlined in the 2010 Kangaroo Management Plan. The draft plan provides updated information on the research conducted since 2010 and amends policies to make reference to the current codes of practice and *Nature Conservation Act 2014*. Additional policies relating to management of kangaroos at greenfield development sites and on agisted and unleased land have been included. The plan focuses only on Eastern Grey Kangaroos as this species has been declared a controlled native species.

3. What legal changes have occurred that impact Eastern Grey Kangaroos in the ACT?

The *Nature Conservation Act 2014* commenced on 11 June 2015. It contains a provision for the Minister for the Environment and Heritage to declare a species a Controlled Native Species. Once a species is declared as such, the Conservator for Fauna and Flora may prepare a Controlled Native Species Management Plan.

4. What is a declared Controlled Native Species and what is a Controlled Native Species Management Plan?

The Minister for the Environment and Heritage declares a species to be a Controlled Native Species if he/she is satisfied the species is having, or is likely to have, an unacceptable environmental, social or economic impact (s. 157 of the *Nature Conservation Act 2014* [NC Act]). A Controlled Native Species is not considered a pest, nor treated as a pest.

A controlled native species management plan outlines how the Controlled Native Species may be appropriately managed. It is based on best practice management of the species and must be consistent with relevant codes of practice, including those under the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*. It may incorporate requirements under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. The Conservator must consult the public about the plan for at least six weeks.

The Conservator and the custodian of public and unleased land can authorise people to implement the plan.

5. Why have Eastern Grey Kangaroos been declared a Controlled Native Species?

Eastern Grey Kangaroos can reach densities where they have unacceptable environmental or economic impacts. Abundant populations can impact on other native species, including those that are threatened, and on the viability of rural leases.

The draft management plan outlines the impacts. In summary:

The environmental impacts include excessive grazing pressure on native grassy ecosystems resulting in degradation of the natural integrity of those ecosystems and in loss and degradation of habitat critical to threatened species of grassy ecosystems.

The economic impacts include the effects on the viability of rural businesses and increased management costs for other lands.

6. Why have a Controlled Native Species Management Plan for Eastern Grey Kangaroos in the ACT?

The management plan will guide ACT land managers to maintain a sustainable kangaroo population within established goals, principles and policies. It outlines the research underpinning the need for management and sets out the approach to be adopted in maintaining wild populations of Eastern Grey Kangaroos while managing their impacts—and ensuring their welfare.

The management activities focus on:

- managing environmental impacts in grassy ecosystems through conservation culling, and indirect measures such as fencing, and continuing to support fertility control research
- managing kangaroo populations on rural lands so densities do not seriously impact on the economic viability of rural properties

7. Have any other species been declared as Controlled Native Species in the ACT?

No, Eastern Grey Kangaroos are the first species to be declared.

8. What are the goals of kangaroo management in the ACT?

The primary goals of kangaroo management are to:

- maintain kangaroo populations as a significant part of the fauna of the 'bush capital' and a component of the grassy ecosystems of the Territory
- manage and minimise the environmental, economic and social impacts of those kangaroo populations on other plants and animals, grassy ecosystems and primary agricultural production.

9. Since 2010, what research has been conducted into the impacts of kangaroos?

Since 2010, eight studies on the effects of kangaroo grazing on biodiversity, based on work carried out in the ACT, have been published. The papers evaluate a number of the ecological relationships between the kangaroo population, the pasture and the inhabitants of the pasture such as plants, insects, reptiles and birds. Collectively the eight studies provide strong evidence that high densities of Eastern Grey Kangaroos can negatively impact a range of species in the ACT.

The studies cover:

- research on vegetation at Goorooyaroo and Mulligans Flat nature reserves
- the effect of reducing grazing on beetle diversity
- population decline of endangered Grassland Earless Dragons
- the benefits of coarse woody debris in ecosystem recovery under different levels of grazing
- impacts of grazing on ground-dwelling reptiles
- restoration of eucalypt grassy woodland
- habitat preferences of the threatened Striped Legless Lizard
- the effect of grazing on bird communities in grassy habitats.

See a summary of these studies at:

http://www.environment.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/987466/ACT-conservation-research-the-effects-of-kangaroo-grazing-and-biodiversity.pdf

The draft management plan also details this research and its implications for kangaroo management in the ACT.

10. Will a licence still be required to undertake the cull?

The Conservator for Flora and Fauna or the Custodian of public and unleased land will need to authorise any person culling kangaroos in accordance with the plan. Authorisations will be in line with the policies and principles outlined in the management plan, and be guided by the National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Non-commercial Purposes. If a person is authorised to undertake an activity under the management plan they are not required to have a licence under the *Nature Conservation Act 2015*, but they are required to hold a firearms licence and kangaroo shooter accreditation.

11. What is the life of the management plan?

A Controlled Native Species Management Plan must be reviewed by the Conservator for Flora and Fauna at least once every five years.

12. Where can I get more information about kangaroo management in the ACT?

More information about kangaroos can be found at:

<http://www.environment.act.gov.au/cpr/conservation-research/research>

About kangaroo culling:

13. Why do kangaroos need culling?

Research indicates that conditions in the ACT region are very favourable for Eastern Grey Kangaroos and, as such, their population has continued to increase to the extent that various nature reserve areas of the ACT have some of the highest densities of kangaroos per square kilometre in Australia. This increase is due to the relatively stable environment, reduction of natural predators like dingoes, reduced hunting and shooting and reduced or eliminated competition from grazing livestock in many grasslands now reserved for conservation.

The high population of kangaroos combined with dry conditions leads to overgrazing in areas, destroying precious ecosystems and threatening the survival of some local flora and fauna species, including some listed as threatened.

14. How is the number of kangaroos to be culled for conservation purposes calculated?

Population control is based on scientific knowledge supported by ongoing research, appropriate regulation and monitoring, and codes of practice as outlined in the draft management plan. Different methods are used to calculate the numbers of kangaroos that need to be culled for conservation purposes and for rural purposes.

The number of kangaroos to be culled for conservation purposes in each nature reserve is assessed annually on a reserve by reserve basis using a formula. Culling is conducted in a minority of reserves.

The formula takes into account the current knowledge on the density required to support the desired conservation environment in average pasture growth conditions in different vegetation types. For example, in grassland one kangaroo per hectare allows for the conservation of small animals such as the Striped Legless Lizard.

The number of kangaroos that are sustainable for a site is subtracted from the actual population, making allowance for population growth in the interim to the next cull. This number is reviewed by government ecologists and adjusted if necessary to compensate for environmental variables such as rainfall and pasture growth.

Four different methods are used to count kangaroo populations depending on the site:

- direct counts of individual kangaroos
- sweep counts by a line of people walking through the area
- walked line transect counts
- pellet counts, particularly in wooded areas where kangaroos are difficult to see.

For more information, see a fact sheet on calculating the cull at

[http://www.environment.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/576715/Calculation_of_the_number_of_kangaroos_to_cull .pdf](http://www.environment.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/576715/Calculation_of_the_number_of_kangaroos_to_cull.pdf)

15. What is the difference between the ACT's culling program and harvesting programs elsewhere?

Kangaroo culling in the ACT is conducted to reduce kangaroo numbers with the aim of either protecting conservation values in nature reserves or to mitigate damage on rural leases. Elsewhere in Australia quotas are set for the sustainable harvesting of kangaroos for commercial purposes, including for human consumption and pet food.

The ACT is the only state or territory to designate a culling season (March to July). The prescribed culling season has been shown to be effective in protecting young kangaroos at an age when they are vulnerable to being orphaned by the shooting of the mother.

16. Are there alternatives to culling?

All currently available methods of fertility control require each individual to be captured and handled, so are suited to small, contained populations. For example, surgical fertility control has been used since 1992 for the enclosed population at Government House. For efficiently treating free-ranging populations of kangaroos, a long acting contraceptive and a remote delivery system is required. The ACT Government is trialling a new method of remotely delivering GonaCon Immunocontraceptive Vaccine via a dart to female kangaroos. If effective, this fertility control method may be able to reduce the number of kangaroos culled each year in some sites in the ACT. At this stage, shooting remains the most humane effective option.

Kangaroo fencing has been used at several ACT sites (e.g. the front of Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve) to reduce the number of kangaroos culled on rural properties but is not always the most appropriate tool.

Translocation is not a feasible option due to the lack of available relocation areas, and concerns about survival rates during and following relocation. The translocation of kangaroos may only serve to shift the problem elsewhere. It could cause enormous stress to the animals and put them at risk of starvation by releasing them into an ecosystem that is unlikely to support additional grazing pressure. The ACT policy against translocation as an alternative to culling is common to all Australian states and territories. For more information, see the draft management plan.

17. Why are rural culls necessary?

Rural culls reduce competition with domestic stock, manage total grazing pressure on agriculture and ensure the land is managed sustainably. The maximum number of kangaroos that a rural lessee may cull in a year is set by a formula. Depending on their management needs, the lessee may apply for—and cull—less than the maximum number.

18. Do rural lessees have to get a licence to cull kangaroos?

Rural lessees need to apply to the Conservator for an authorisation to cull kangaroos on their property in accordance with the Eastern Grey Kangaroo: Controlled Native Species Management Plan. This will replace the requirement for rural lessees to apply for a culling licence under the *Nature Conservation Act 2014*. The application process and conditions of the authorisation will be similar to those of a licence and the person undertaking the shooting will still be required to hold a firearms licence and kangaroo shooter accreditation.

19. Why has the number of kangaroos allowed in the rural cull increased so much in recent years?

As with Victoria and NSW, the ACT has experienced strongly increasing demand for rural culling licences during the last decade in response to increasing kangaroo abundance in rural areas.

The numbers to cull largely reflect environmental conditions, which have a significant impact on overall kangaroo numbers. Eastern Australia was significantly impacted by the millenium drought, with dry conditions prevailing until September 2010. Because of the dry conditions, and consequent lack of grass, kangaroo populations were lower. Since 2010, wetter or normal rainfall conditions have dominated, increasing ground cover and, consequently, kangaroo numbers. This has increased the numbers of kangaroos culled on rural lands.

20. Why is culling needed when there is a lot of grass around?

The idea is to balance the population. By culling a population annually, rather than delaying for years or reacting to damage, fewer animals are culled over the long term and environmental damage can be avoided. Culling is based on need, considering the landscape condition. Not all areas are culled every year.

21. Why are there discrepancies between the numbers licensed to be culled and the numbers reported culled?

Rural lessees apply for a licence to cull some months prior to the culling season. In some years, they later find that they do not need to cull so many because pasture growth is sufficient because of summer rain, or the weather may preclude the culling action.

22. What support is there in the community for culling?

Surveys conducted in 2008, 2011 and 2015 indicated there is growing support for the ACT Government's approach to managing kangaroo populations. The 2015 survey indicated that 86% of ACT residents agreed that culling kangaroos is appropriate under certain circumstances, 76% supported kangaroo culling for conservation of other native species while 7% are against culling under any circumstances. The support for culling has grown from 59% in 2008.

23. How do you ensure kangaroo culling is humane?

Kangaroos are culled according to the relevant National Code of Practice. The cull method, shooting, is recognised by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and RSPCA Australia as the most humane method of culling. Kangaroo shooters in the ACT have to pass a marksmanship accuracy test, overseen by an accredited Australian Federal Police Firearms Instructor. Additionally shooters must pass tests on the National Code of Practice and a macropod identification test to be accredited. The ACT is the only jurisdiction to test and accredit non-commercial kangaroo shooters and the testing process was made even more stringent and rigorous through improvements made in 2014.

An experienced veterinarian conducts an audit of the conservation cull in ACT nature reserves. An audit of compliance undertaken by an independent veterinarian in 2015 found that 'the percentage of kangaroos rendered immediately insensible (98%) was higher than for other published studies of night shooting'. No kangaroos observed to be non-fatally wounded in this study.

24. Are they being culled because they are pests?

Eastern Grey Kangaroos are not considered as pests, or treated as pests. Grazing is important to the conservation of grassy ecosystems and the kangaroos are central to the healthy functioning of these ecosystems. However, it is critical to manage the kangaroo population so the kangaroos and other grassland and woodland species can live sustainably. The aim of the conservation culling program is to moderate grazing, not eliminate it.

25. What happens to the kangaroos that are culled?

A proportion of kangaroo meat resulting from the conservation cull in ACT nature reserves is processed into baits for use within the ACT Government wild dog and fox control programs. The remaining kangaroo carcasses are buried. It is not feasible to process the carcasses for commercial purposes.