

# Speech at launch of THINKK

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The advocates and practitioners of the culling and harvesting of kangaroos are fond of drawing comparisons between the size of the human and kangaroo populations in Australia to emphasize the abundance of the latter. A figure of 50 million kangaroos (around two per person) is often used which is at the high end of the estimates for the commercial zones in the four states that allow kangaroo harvesting (the current estimate is about 27 million). There is also spin in this value since it is the sum of the populations of **four** species – eastern grey, western grey, red kangaroos and common wallaroos – not **one** like *Homo sapiens*. For comparison, the current sheep flock in Australia is 70 million. This is one of the lowest values for about a century and reflects a decade of drought, poor markets for wool and contentious welfare issues in wool production. The global population of sheep and their kind is about **7 billion**. This reminds me of a refrain from a [nursery rhyme](#) – *Mary had a little lamb. Its fleece was white as snow*. In fact every Mary in the world has a little lamb and so do you and I! The rhyme continues – *And everywhere that Mary went. The lamb was sure to go*. This reminds us that sheep have been spread across all continents, except Antarctica, for the supply of meat and fibre to people. These enormous sheep populations remind us of how facile it is to suggest that kangaroo meat could replace sheep meat, especially at a value that also accommodates for lost wool production (see THINKK report [Advocating kangaroo meat: towards ecological benefit or plunder?](#) for a detailed analysis of this issue).

However, let's return to the notion that there are about two kangaroos for every person in Australia and then explore who owns them. Effectively no one owns them but they are under the protection of the Crown. Betty Windsor is happy with her swans and devolves this responsibility to Australian governments, principally those of States and Territories and secondarily the Commonwealth (see THINKK report [Shooting our wildlife: An analysis of the law and policy governing the killing of kangaroos](#). for a detailed analysis of this and other legal and policy issues). As these governments are the servants of the people then each of us has a responsibility for the protection and use of our kangaroos, and an obligation to express an informed opinion about these to government representatives.

Some Australians want to take their kangaroos from out there to in here and eat a serve of meat with, say, a Quandong jus and a sprinkle of Tasmanian mountain pepper, or kick a goal with a pair of kangaroos skin boots, or hold up their pants with a kangaroo leather belt or feed kangaroo meat to their would-be champion greyhound to get extra hop past the post. Others want their kangaroos out there but no right here, colliding with their car, or eating their roses, or defecating on their golf course or favourite picnic area, or retaliating against their inquisitive dog. Yet others want their kangaroos out there and in Country providing many benefits. These include ecosystem services such as a natural reduction in fuel loads against devastating wildfire, the maintenance of diversity in our native grasslands and the grassy understories of woodlands and forests, and soil turnover and the creation of fertile patches in the hip-holes kangaroos dig. Indigenous people see their kangaroos as important elements of their connectedness to the land and may have strong totemic relations to them. Most Australians see kangaroos as iconic and authenticating the Australian experience. Thus kangaroos represent the best of the Australian spirit – resilience against hard times, exuberance in the good times including plenty of sex, supreme athleticism, individuals in a society where all ages

and sexes freely intermingle and so effectively one that is classless. The latter many benefits come from the living entities not their meat or hide.

Whatever you want for your kangaroos, you need to make that decision based on well-researched and proven facts not spin, dogma and the propaganda of a self-serving commercial kangaroo meat and leather industry, and graziers pursuing narrow production goals. The latter would always have kangaroos in 'plague proportions' branding them with that particularly evil term 'plague' reminiscent of the devastation of humans in biblical stories and the Middle Ages. If information is lacking, then you want the best minds to be sufficiently resourced to answer your questions in an unbiased manner. To assist you in your decision about your kangaroos I commend [THINKK](#) to you. This Think Tank of experts in kangaroo biology, sustainability, ethics and animal welfare, law and policy is working to ensure that the well-being of Australians is met by appropriate practices and policy to ensure the well-being of kangaroos.

Do we need to kill three million a year with a further discarded 'by-catch' of a million dependent young (pouch young and young-at-foot), in the process mining yet more resources from in Country as wildlife woodchips? If conflict arises with human interests then it can be managed on a much more modest case-by-case basis. In the meanwhile, kangaroos can get on with their lives, serving our well-being, and we can look in now and again on a 'watching wild kangaroos' tourism experience.

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