



A MODEST MEMBER

The Australian Financial Review, 26 January 1973

Open season on kangaroos makes sense

In December 1971 I complimented the Parliamentary Committee on Wild Life Conservation on the quality of their report on kangaroos.

Even Fred was surprised that MPs could write so simply and sensibly; he had been dreading another verbose and half-baked barrage of sentiment.

Many people contend that there are more kangaroos in Australia than were here when the white man came because the pastoralist has provided water where there was none before.

Sturt and Stuart and other explorers were unable to find kangaroos to shoot for the pot when going through areas where there are now many.

The station owner has provided the water to make it possible for kangaroos to live there.

I will now quote several paragraphs from the committee's report:

That in view of its acceptance of the scientific opinion that no large species of kangaroo is at present under threat of extinction the committee sees no immediate need for a nationwide closed season on kangaroo harvesting.

That the imposition of a Commonwealth ban on the export of kangaroo products would not of itself ensure the conservation of kangaroos. Reduction of numbers would still be necessary.

If not carried out by the industry this would need to be done by property owners, or by State wildlife authorities at public expense.

That the base justification for the kangaroo industry's continued existence is that kangaroos are, at certain times and in some places, sufficiently numerous to be regarded as pests and that it is justifiable to permit reduction of their numbers.

This being the case, the greatest possible use should be made of those destroyed.

Summing it up, the committee recognised that if the numbers of kangaroos were not controlled then they would eat themselves out of tucker and this would limit their numbers.

So, as they have to be controlled, it was foolish and wasteful not to sell their skins.

There was one recommendation with which Fred did not agree.

The committee said that no kangaroo skins should be exported until Australian manufacturers who use kangaroo skins, such as koala bear toymakers, were able to buy all the skins they wanted.

Fred cannot see why those people couldn't buy all the skins they want if they were prepared to pay for them. He cannot see why they should get them cheaper than overseas users.

He says you might just as well claim that our wool textile industry should get wool cheaper than the true price to give them an advantage over their overseas competitors.

But, apart from this rather queer recommendation, he is full of praise for the committee's report.

He is now completely baffled at the action of the Government which will prohibit, after April 1, the export of all kangaroo skins.

About 400,000 kangaroo skins are now used in Australia and 700,000 are exported. It is clear that Australian industry cannot hope to use all these exported skins.

There is also the problem of quality. The koala bear manufacturers want a furry skins, ie, a winter skin. What's to be done with the summer-killed skins if they cannot be exported?

So, from April 1, kangaroo skins will be of little value, so fewer kangaroos will be shot — so more will be eating grass and competing with one another or with sheep for the limited amount of feed available.

The result will be that more kangaroos will starve, or will limit their own numbers in some other way.

One of the reasons given for this precipitate and ill-considered action is that overseas companies were said to be making too much money from kangaroo skins.

This seems a funny reason. Perhaps we ought to stop exporting wool for this reason also.

Fred says that it is a pity that so many sentimental people talk so much nonsense about conservation.

He instanced how stupid it was to prohibit the export of galahs, however luxuriously crated, yet we can shoot them in thousands.

And it is evidently acceptable to wring a chicken's neck, but you mustn't export a galah in a cage.

True conservationists know that the surplus kangaroos have to be harvested. That's what conservation is all about, the wise use of resources so that they are not wasted.

But the cause of conservation is damaged by these "bleeding hearts" people who feel deeply about things, but think hardly at all.