



# *An explanation of* **game management**

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**Given the current raucous over the imminent kangaroo cull in Canberra, the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA) Inc thought it would be helpful to look at the broader picture and distribute a cool-headed essay on what game management actually means.**



Science-based harvesting quotas ensure that grey kangaroos are not over harvested.

**A** term often used by hunters and some landowners in Australia is 'game management'. Until recently, however, it wasn't widely used by government departments. There are, of course, some notable exceptions, but by and large the state departments historically responsible for wildlife management in Australia have not had a game management focus. This has changed dramatically in the past decade for Tasmania, Victoria and New South Wales and incrementally for South Australia. The Northern Territory keeps putting game management in the national news with its attempts to get federal approval for safari hunting of crocodiles.

Most of our ideas about game management have come from other continents. The best way of illustrating this fact is to examine how wildlife management is taught at a tertiary level in Australia. Have you ever heard of an Australian tertiary-level training program for potential game management professionals? To the best of my knowledge, there aren't any or at least there hasn't been any until now. Of course, in many other areas of the world game management is a part of wildlife management and is widely offered as a formal qualification. If we think of tertiary institutions as reflecting the research and training needs of a society, then until now, Australians haven't believed they needed or wanted game management in a formal capacity. Perhaps the recent changes in some state departments reflect a change in Australians' attitudes to game management.

In response to the increasing amount of formal game management taking place in Australia, in 2007 the University of Queensland started offering a 12-week short course in Game Management. It was believed to be the first course of its kind in Australia and is offered externally to anyone, regardless of their background. The course is offered through the University's School of Animal Studies, which also offers a three-year Applied Science degree in Wildlife Biology. The school has a long

history of research in the area of vertebrate pest management with 2008 marking the beginning of specific game management research projects.

Around the world there are many kinds of wildlife management paradigms. Some have been around for a long time, while some are more recent. Many government-based wildlife management policies in use today are science based. This doesn't mean that most government-based wildlife management policies are the same; in fact, they couldn't be more varied. Vastly different policies and practices can be based on good science. In practice, the effectiveness of a wildlife management policy has more to do with cultural setting and political landscape than the science it is based on. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, the cultural setting and/or political landscape is such that there can be no effective wildlife management. In other parts of the world, there may be a formal policy on wildlife management, but how it is conducted is very different to that formal policy.

You may be wondering what any of this has to do with game management. Well, quite a lot, for game management is a science-based wildlife management paradigm. The science behind effective game management is basically the same the world over. The implementation of game management, however, is unique to every location where it is practised.

So now that we have established that game management in practice could be many things, it is important to define what exactly we are referring to. To do this, we first need to define the term 'game'. Game is a group of animals that have traditionally been hunted for recreational purposes. It usually includes certain mammals and birds and in some instances reptiles (such as crocodiles) that provide a challenge when hunted. The details of which animals are classed as game has everything to do with the cultural background of the people involved. In many places, certain kinds of fish are considered game species due to the challenge they provide to catch, hence the pastime 'big-game fishing'.

It is useful to note here that the term 'game' came from the Old English *gamen*, which is equivalent to the Old German *gamen*, both of which mean 'amusement'. The Oxford Dictionary defines game species as "wild mammals or birds hunted for sport or food". The Webster Dictionary provides slightly more detail, to wit, "animals under pursuit or taken in hunting; especially wild animals hunted for sport or food".

The idea that game species are wild is widespread and yet in Great Britain and some other parts of the world, gamekeepers are responsible for breeding, rearing and releasing birds to be hunted. The birds are virtually no different to their domestic poultry for most of their lives,



National icon, agricultural pest and sustainable resource - the red kangaroo can be many things to many people.

yet they have the status of game. Game ranching or the keeping of game species behind wire fencing has become widespread throughout the world. Although the animals aren't usually husbanded in the same way domestic stock are, they are clearly no longer truly wild.

Both of the aforementioned examples demonstrate that the definition of game is entirely subjective. For our purposes, however, we need to know exactly what we are talking about, therefore game will be defined as '**animals of any kind that are managed using game-management principles**'. This then means that fish, cattle, goats or even cane toads could be classed as game species if managed accordingly. What is important here is not the specific species (which is cultural based), but the paradigm under which the species is managed and how that management is implemented (science based).

Game management is **the manipulation of wildlife populations through population monitoring, habitat management and sustainable utilisation**. This definition then provides the underlying philosophy of how to manage a wildlife population using game-management principles. There are undoubtedly many people reading this who have preconceived ideas of what constitutes a game species and what game management is and therefore may disagree with the definitions given here. That's fine and it is important to state that this definition is not meant to challenge anyone's opinions or ideas about what is or isn't game. As stated, that is culturally based and therefore, all opinions are right. These definitions are given in the hope that they are broad enough to encompass everyone's culturally-based ideas. The important message here is that the science of monitoring a population and working out what level of yield from the population will achieve what effect is not cultural. ●

**For facts on the kangaroo harvesting industry, visit the Kangaroo Industry Association of Australia website at [www.kangaroo-industry.asn.au](http://www.kangaroo-industry.asn.au)**

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