

## Setting the scene

Like feral animals, native animals may also be pests where they conflict with human interests. Native animals rarely cause environmental problems unless they have been moved to a place where they do not occur naturally, or where the environment has been altered, such as vegetation clearing to provide better grazing, or the provision of water.

Skippy Range is 2500 hectare national park surrounded by farms and a busy freeway. The park contains a diverse range of birds, reptiles and marsupials native to the area. Tourists flock to Skippy Range each year in particular to observe the large numbers of kangaroos.

Nearby farms have been established in the area for several generations. The farm land has been cleared for grain production and livestock. Each farmer maintains several large dams on their property. During harvesting time the freeway is busy with large trucks and trailers transporting grain, wool and live animals out of the area for processing.

Skippy Range and surrounding farms have been experiencing drought conditions for the past three years. Many farmers have removed stock from paddocks to reduce the impact of grazing on drought affected land. A bushfire has recently burned the northern area of the national park and a large number of kangaroos are now leaving the park in search of food and water.

Several problems, generated by the increase in kangaroo numbers, need to be addressed:

- ▶ Large numbers of kangaroos are causing damage to important native habitat and grassland within the national park and a tourist has recently been attacked by a kangaroo after they tried to pat it.
- ▶ Farmers are frustrated by kangaroos decreasing their resource production and profit margin compared to previous years. They are angry that kangaroos are eating the grass cover that they have tried to protect by removing stock during the extended drought.
- ▶ Kangaroos are frequently crossing the nearby freeway to get to the farms and occasionally come to grief with commercial traffic.

A meeting has been called at the local town hall to discuss how the kangaroos can be better managed.



## What to do

- ▶ Work together as a group. Select nine students to represent the concerns of the following people.
- ▶ Before the meeting begins each person must stand up, introduce themselves and state their concerns.
- ▶ Remember each person has a valid point of view and must not be ignored.
- ▶ Record all view points, concerns and issues that arise during the meeting.

Often difficult meetings employ a mediator to maintain cohesion. Your class teacher will act as mediator during this meeting.

As a group, can you come up with a solution to the kangaroo problem that will please everyone? If not, is there a compromise solution that all can live with?

### James Woolley — FARMER

Mr Woolley has been asked to represent local farmers. He is a third generation farmer and remembers as a child shooting roos with his father. He and many other farmers are concerned that kangaroos are damaging their fences and eating the remaining fodder in their paddocks where stock have already been removed due to the drought. Mr Woolley estimates that the kangaroos who frequent his farm are reducing his income by up to 10%. He considers a kangaroo a pest animal which competes with livestock and affects grain production.

### Bill Branch — NATIONAL PARKS OFFICER

Mr Branch has worked at Skippy Range for the past 7 years. He views the kangaroos as part of a unique ecosystem not seen anywhere else in Australia.

Mr Branch is aware of the pressure kangaroos put on the farming community. He is concerned that a large reduction in the number of kangaroos will affect the amount of income the national park generates from visiting tourists keen to see Australian wildlife up close. However, he is also aware that kangaroo numbers have increased in the area due to greater availability of pasture and water and are now damaging endangered native grassland within the park.

### Janet Pickle — CONSERVATIONIST

Ms Pickle is a keen conservationist who has lived near Skippy Range most of her life. She is a passionate advocate for sustainable living and the environment. Ms Pickle believes that all native animals need to be appreciated and protected. They are part of the Australian landscape and should be treated with respect.

### Sally Bunsen — RESEARCH SCIENTIST

Dr Bunsen researches kangaroo reproduction and has a field site located in the national park. She considers the Skippy Range kangaroo population is a unique study animal. Dr Bunsen has built up valuable data over an extended period of time and is concerned that some of her study animals may be shot if a culling program commences. This would affect her data and limit her ability to publish scientific papers and apply for research funding. Dr Bunsen's research indicates that there may be a way of managing kangaroo numbers with fertility control methods but more time and research is needed.

### Helmut van Beethoven — INTERNATIONAL TOURIST

It has taken Mr van Beethoven many years to save for his trip to Australia. His travel agent told him the best place to see a kangaroo in the wild is Skippy Range. He thinks it is disturbing that Australians would want to eat their native animals. A kangaroo is a cute Aussie icon that needs to be protected. Mr van Beethoven is particularly keen to interact with some hand reared kangaroos which are known to frequent a scenic lookout in the national park.

### Jacky Tonka — COMMERCIAL DRIVER

Jacky supplies a regular transport service to farmers. Return business is extremely important and she prides herself on transporting goods in the region in a timely manner ensuring transport fees for farmers are kept to a minimum. Jacky drives mainly at night to avoid the heat of the day. The only time delays occur is when a car or van hits a kangaroo or she gets a flat tyre. Jacky views kangaroos as a pest animal which can damage her vehicles causing unnecessary expense and delays in transporting goods which could ultimately affect her livelihood.

### Paul Buck — BUSINESS OPERATOR

Mr Buck retired from the military ten years ago and now owns a successful kangaroo culling business. He views kangaroos as a plentiful resource that should be harvested for commercial gain. Mr Buck uses a high power rifle and is an extremely good shot. This ensures that the kill is a clean one and that he makes a tidy sum of money each time he works at night. Farmers are keen to have Mr Buck operate on their property assuming that kangaroo numbers will be reduced.

### Ricky Sweet — GOURMET CHEF

Ricky has recently moved to a town located close to Skippy Range. He is passionate about food and wants to open a bush tucka restaurant to attract tourists to his business. Since the onset of the drought the price of beef and lamb has sky rocketed and many chefs are interested in looking at alternative sources of protein. Kangaroo meat is a cheap alternative to beef or lamb and due to the lack of fat in the meat it is considered an extremely healthy meat to eat. Ricky is interested in putting kangaroo meat on the menu and would like to buy from a local source.

### Bunny Galore — NATIVE FAUNA RESCUER

Bunny rescues and hand rears kangaroo joeys. It is an expensive and time consuming job which Bunny enjoys immensely. When the kangaroo is ready for release Bunny will often take it to Skippy Range. She believes that if a person has close contact with an animal they are more likely to appreciate and understand the animal and its home. Ms Galore's hand reared kangaroos offer tourists a unique hands-on experience that they will cherish forever. She is concerned tame kangaroos will be shot if a culling program commences.

Once the role play is complete, answer the following questions:

- ▶ Was a successful outcome achieved at the conclusion of the meeting?
- ▶ Was every body satisfied with the eventual outcome of the meeting?
- ▶ Would the same passionate reactions occur from people if a less iconic or cute animal was involved?
- ▶ Can the presence of scientific evidence assist decision making processes on issues such as managing pest animals?
- ▶ Describe how different people view the same event or issue differently according to their perspectives.

What happens if a person's views or beliefs are ignored or not addressed?

### Feral fact

Native animals that have been moved to new habitats can also become pests. Two Western Australian examples are Laughing Kookaburras, which were introduced as a useful snake killer, and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, originally brought to the west as pets. Both have spread and compete with local species for scarce nest hollows in trees, and the cockatoo is also an agricultural pest. As a result, Western Australia has strict legislation to control the import of potential pests, including many native animals, from east of the Nullarbor plains.

The approach to managing native pests is similar to that for introduced pest animals but it is usually more complex because of public concern about the balance between conservation and control of native wildlife. The preferred strategy for native pests is to attempt to manage the damage they cause by habitat manipulation or other non-lethal techniques.

Source: Penny Olsen. Australia's Pest Animals: New Solutions to Old Problems, Bureau of Resource Sciences and Kangaroo Press, 1998.