



Position Statement by
The Ecological Society of Australia

Sustainable Commercial Use of Wildlife

The Ecological Society of Australia and Position Statements

Occasionally there are broad issues of public interest in relation to which most ESA members have formed a similar view, based on their professional expertise. In these cases the Society may formulate and endorse a Position Statement which is intended to inform public debate and policy action. While there may be minor variation of members' opinion in relation to technical details encompassed within a Position Statement, there is widespread general agreement concerning both the importance of the issue and the major points raised within the Statement.

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The Sustainable Commercial Use of Wildlife *Position statement by the Ecological Society of Australia*

Background

The ESA recognises that there is a place for the sustainable and commercial use of wildlife, particularly in the light of the potential to encourage and provide a greater understanding of the ecology and interactions occurring in the environment.

The Society acknowledges that the commercial use of wildlife is an established practice and that it can encourage the conservation of species and their natural habitats. The Society also recognises that over-exploitation, which may be associated with poorly regulated commercial use, can threaten the population viability of native organisms.

This Position Statement has been based on an integrated ecological ethic over an anthropocentric, animal-liberation or monoculture ethic with regard to the environment.

Definitions

- Wildlife is used to encompass undomesticated marine and terrestrial native plants and animals, including invertebrates, fungi and protozoans. It includes populations of species that are regularly harvested from the natural environments as an economic resource. It does not include populations of native species that are farmed in isolation from their natural habitats.
- Sustainable use is a rate of harvest within the capacity of species and their habitats to maintain themselves. Sustainable use can be non-consumptive or consumptive.
- Commercial use is defined as the management of native wildlife for profit. The terms utilisation and use are interchangeable.

Based on the above, the Ecological Society of Australia (ESA):

- Acknowledges that the people of Australia and New Zealand place a high value on their unique environment, plants and animals and that controversy exists among governments, scientists, conservation groups and animal rights organisations as to the degree to which commercial use of wildlife is appropriate. As a result decisions made about sustainable use will continue to be based on responses to both scientific facts and social values.
- Is concerned that, despite wide recognition of the importance of native habitats, these continue to be lost due to land use priorities that promote their destruction.
- Agrees that policies relating to the commercial use of wildlife must be developed with an emphasis on the application of rigorous scientific method.
- Supports the concept of sustainable wildlife use and opposes the concept of non-sustainable use of wildlife. Harvest of native wildlife provides an alternative to traditional

- agricultural practices that could allow natural habitats to provide an income to landowners, and hence an economic incentive to conserve native wildlife and their habitats. Sanction of a harvest or other use should take into account potential costs and benefits to the conservation of the target species, associated species and their habitats.
- Recognises the need to develop guidelines to ensure that commercial use of species and habitats is sustainable within the social, economic and ecological context in which the utilisation occurs and remains sufficiently flexible to account for any fluctuations in all these variables.
 - Accepts that commercial interests can and do encourage the conservation and investment of resources into protecting the wildlife that is economically valuable.
 - Recognises that determining the level of use which is sustainable is an important and complex task.
 - Is aware that it is technically and scientifically possible to sustain the commercial harvest of some wildlife species, without endangering their populations or supporting ecosystems.
 - Recognises that people value wildlife in a variety of ways and the acceptability of commercial harvests will vary within Australian society. Unanimous acceptance of commercial harvest is unlikely and decisions about the harvest of native species will have to be made on a case-by-case basis. The Society recommends that scientific advice receive primary consideration in regulatory decisions.
 - Promotes the application of rigorous scientific methods by decision-makers in the regulation of commercial harvesting. These methods encompass the fields of demographic analysis, population modelling and risk assessment. The Society recommends application of the precautionary principle to harvesting and management decisions.
 - Accepts the rights of indigenous Australians to harvest native animals.
 - And stresses that market values of wildlife in no way diminish or exclude other values, for example ecological or intrinsic values of species or habitats.

Recommendations

Accordingly, ESA recommends that:

- Commercial use is restricted to those species, or environments, with a capacity to sustain commercial levels of harvest. The goal should encompass the conservation of native habitats and ecosystems, as well as the species subject to harvesting. The potential impacts of decreases or increases in abundance of the harvested species should be addressed in a management plan.
- Commercial use must not be to the detriment of the species and their habitats. The focus should be on the conservation of the ecosystems and to ensure that any use of

natural resources is ecologically sustainable. In the case of non-consumptive use, impacts on species and habitats should be minimised in order to protect and preserve existing ecosystems.

- Uses operate within a clearly defined regulatory framework that ensures no detriment to the conservation of species and habitats is caused by harvesting.
- Rigorous scientific methods be applied to all decisions in the regulation and management of commercial harvesting. These methods encompass the fields of demographic analysis, population modelling and risk assessment.
- The public acceptability of specific commercial uses of wildlife be determined through a process of consultation and education. The community should be made aware of the important role of experimental analysis and scientific decision-making tools, such as population viability analysis, in assessing sustainability of harvest and alternate management options.
- Commercial uses have a management plan that includes monitoring, assessment, public reporting and accountability, which is reviewed every five years or less. The management plan should include the development and implementation of appropriate experimental analysis, which includes the collection of suitable biological data to determine the effects of commercial use of the species on the environment prior to the implementation of any commercial use. This management plan should also outline how such analysis is to be evaluated in the light of current scientific knowledge.
- Management plans be structured so that the maximum share of profits is returned to landowners and the local community. Such an approach encourages continued understanding and investment in protecting and enhancing the integrity and diversity of native habitats.
- Management plans be adaptive, flexible, precautionary and based on scientific principles and the best available knowledge. Traditional knowledge must be respected.
- Care must be taken to avoid impact upon species that may be taken incidentally, mistakenly or deliberately.
- Harvesting of animals must be done in accordance with community expectations concerning animal welfare and laws pertaining to animal welfare. The importance of scientific decision-making tools in assessing alternative methods of harvesting and the sustainability of these methods should be emphasised in both the developmental and ongoing stages of any program.