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Abstract: The article offers information on the eating of kangaroo meat during Anthropocene. Topics discussed include reality television series "Love Island Australia" to raise kangatarian to trending status on social media; adoption of kangatarianism can be understood as a bargain struck to help to manage grief in the Anthropocene; and expansion of food restrictive diets in the Anthropocene.

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To Eat or Not to Eat Kangaroo: Bargaining over Food Choice in the Anthropocene

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Kangatarianism is the rather inelegant word coined in the first decade of the twenty-first century to describe an omnivorous diet in which the only meat consumed is that of the kangaroo. First published in the media in 2010 (Barone; Zukerman), the term circulated in Australian environmental and academic circles including the Global Animal conference at the University of Wollongong in July 2011 where I first heard it from members of the Think Tank for Kangaroos (THINKK) group. By June 2017, it had gained enough attention to be named the Oxford English Dictionary's Australian word of the month (following on from May's "smashed avo," another Australian food innovation), but it took the Nine Network reality television series *Love Island Australia* to raise kangatarian to trending status on social media (Oxford UP). During the first episode, aired in late May 2018, Justin, a concreter and fashion model from Melbourne, declared himself to have previously been a kangatarian as he chatted with fellow contestant, Millie. Vet nurse and animal lover Millie appeared to be shocked by his revelation but was tentatively accepting when Justin explained what kangatarian meant, and justified his choice on the grounds that kangaroo are not farmed. In the social media response, it was clear that eating only the meat of kangaroos as an ethical choice was an entirely new concept to many viewers, with one tweet stating "Kangatarian isn't a thing", while others variously labelled the diet brutal, intriguing, or quintessentially Australian (see #kangatarian on Twitter).

There is a well developed literature around the arguments for and against eating kangaroo, and why settler Australians tend to be so reluctant to do so (see for example, Probyn; Cawthorn and Hoffman). Here, I will concentrate on the role that ethics play in this food choice by examining how the adoption of kangatarianism can be understood as a bargain struck to help to manage grief in the Anthropocene, and the limitations of that bargain. As Lesley Head has argued, we are living in a time of loss and of grieving, when much that has been taken for granted is becoming unstable, and "we must imagine that drastic changes to everyday life are in the offing" (313). Applying the classic (and contested) model of five stages of grief, first proposed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her book *On Death and Dying* in 1969, much of the population of the western world seems to be now experiencing denial, her first stage of loss, while those in the most vulnerable environments have moved on to anger with developed countries for destructive actions in the past and inaction in the present. The next stages (or states) of grieving—bargaining, depression, and acceptance—are likely to be manifested, although not in any predictable sequence, as the grief over current and future losses continues (Haslam).

The great expansion of food restrictive diets in the Anthropocene can be interpreted as part of this bargaining state of grieving as individuals attempt to respond to the imperative to reduce their environmental impact but also to limit the degree of change to their own diet required to do so. Meat has long been identified as a key component of an individual's environmental footprint. From Frances Moore Lappé's 1971 *Diet for a Small Planet* through the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation's 2006 report *Livestock's Long Shadow* to the 2019 report of the EAT–Lancet Commission on *Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems*, the advice has been consistent: meat consumption should be minimised in, if not eradicated from, the human diet. The EAT–Lancet Commission Report quantified this to less than 28 grams (just under one ounce) of beef, lamb or pork per day (12, 25). For many this would be keenly felt, in terms of how meals are constructed, the sensory experiences associated with eating meat and perceptions of well-being but meat is offered up as a sacrifice to bring about the return of the beloved healthy planet.

Rather than accept the advice to cut out meat entirely, those seeking to bargain with the Anthropocene also find other options. This has given rise to a suite of foodways based around restricting meat intake in volume or type. Reducing the amount of commercially produced beef, lamb and pork eaten is one approach, while substituting a meat the production of which has a smaller environmental footprint, most commonly chicken or fish, is another. For those willing to make deeper changes, the meat of free living animals, especially those which are killed accidentally on the roads or for deliberately for environmental management purposes, is another option. Further along this spectrum are the novel protein sources suggested in the Lancet report, including insects, blue-green algae and laboratory-cultured meats.

Kangatarianism is another form of this bargain, and is backed by at least half a century of advocacy. The Australian Conservation Foundation made calls to reduce the numbers of other livestock and begin a sustainable harvest of kangaroo for food in 1970 when the sale of kangaroo meat for human consumption was still illegal across the country (Conservation of Kangaroos). The idea was repeated by biologist Gordon Grigg in the late 1980s (Jackson and Vernes 173), and again in the Garnaut Climate Change Review in 2008 (547–48). Kangaroo meat is high in protein and iron, low in fat, and high in healthy polyunsaturated fatty acids and conjugated linoleic acid, and, as these authors showed, has a smaller environmental footprint than beef, lamb, or pork. Kangaroos require less water than cattle, sheep or pigs, and no land is cleared to grow feed for them or give them space to graze. Their paws cause less erosion and compaction of soil than do the hooves of common livestock. They eat less fodder than ruminants and their digestive processes result in lower emissions of the powerful greenhouse gas methane and less solid waste.

As Justin of Love Island was aware, kangaroos are not farmed in the sense of being deliberately bred, fed, confined, or treated with hormones, drugs or chemicals, which also adds to their lighter impact on the environment. However, some pastoralists argue that because they cannot prevent kangaroos from

accessing the food, water, shelter, and protection from predators they provide for their livestock, they do effectively farm them, although they receive no income from sales of kangaroo meat. This type of light touch farming of kangaroos has a very long history in Australia going back to the continent's first peopling some 60,000 years ago. Kangaroos were so important to Aboriginal people that a wide range of environments were manipulated to produce their favoured habitats of open grasslands edged by sheltering trees. As Bill Gammage demonstrated, fire was used as a tool to preserve and extend grassy areas, to encourage regrowth which would attract kangaroos and to drive the animals from one patch to another or towards hunters waiting with spears (passim, for example, 58, 72, 76, 93). Gammage and Bruce Pascoe agree that this was a form of animal husbandry in which the kangaroos were drawn to the areas prepared for them for the young grass or, more forcefully, physically directed using nets, brush fences or stone walls. Burnt ground served to contain the animals in place of fencing, and regular harvesting kept numbers from rising to levels which would place pressure on other species (Gammage 79, 281–86; Pascoe 42–43). Contemporary advocates of eating kangaroo have promoted the idea that they should be deliberately co-produced with other livestock instead of being killed to preserve feed and water for sheep and cattle (Ellicott; Wilson 39). Substituting kangaroo for the meat of more environmentally damaging animals would facilitate a reduction in the numbers of cattle and sheep, lessening the harm they do.

Most proponents have assumed that their audience is current meat eaters who would substitute kangaroo for the meat of other more environmentally costly animals, but kangatarianism can also emerge from vegetarianism. Wendy Zukerman, who wrote about kangaroo hunting for *New Scientist* in 2010, was motivated to conduct the research because she was considering becoming an early adopter of kangatarianism as the least environmentally taxing way to counter the longterm anaemia she had developed as a vegetarian. In 2018, George Wilson, honorary professor in the Australian National University's Fenner School of Environment and Society called for vegetarians to become kangatarians as a means of boosting overall consumption of kangaroo for environmental and economic benefits to rural Australia (39).

Given these persuasive environmental arguments, it might be expected that many people would have perceived eating kangaroo instead of other meat as a favourable bargain and taken up the call to become kangatarian. Certainly, there has been widespread interest in trying kangaroo meat. In 1997, only five years after the sale of kangaroo meat for human consumption had been legalised in most states (South Australia did so in 1980), 51% of 500 people surveyed in five capital cities said they had tried kangaroo. However, it had not become a meat of choice with very few found to eat it more than three times a year (Des Purltell and Associates iv). Just over a decade later, a study by Ampt and Owen found an increase to 58% of 1599 Australians surveyed across the country who had tried kangaroo but just 4.7% eating it at least monthly (14). Bryce Appleby, in his study of kangaroo consumption in the home based on interviews with 28 residents of Wollongong in 2010, specifically noted the absence of kangatarians—then a very new concept. A study of 261 Sydney university students in 2014 found that half had tried kangaroo meat and 10% continued to eat it with any regularity. Only two respondents identified themselves as kangatarian (Grant 14–15). Kangaroo meat advocate Michael Archer declared in 2017 that "there's an awful lot of very, very smart vegetarians [who] have opted for semi vegetarianism and they're calling themselves 'kangatarians', as they're quite happy to eat kangaroo meat", but unless there had been a significant change in a few years, the surveys did not bear out his assertion (154).

The ethical calculations around eating kangaroo are complicated by factors beyond the strictly environmental. One Tweeter advised Justin: "'I'm a kangatarian' isn't a pickup line, mate", and certainly the reception of his declaration could have been very cool, especially as it was delivered to a self declared animal warrior (N'Tash Aha). All of the studies of beliefs and practices around the eating of kangaroo have noted a significant minority of Australians who would not consider eating kangaroo based on issues of animal welfare and animal rights. The 1997 study found that 11% were opposed to the idea of eating

kangaroo, while in Grant's 2014 study, 15% were ethically opposed to eating kangaroo meat (Des Purtell and Associates iv; Grant 14–15). Animal ethics complicate the bargains calculated principally on environmental grounds.

These ethical concerns work across several registers. One is around the flesh and blood kangaroo as a charismatic native animal unique to Australia and which Australians have an obligation to respect and nurture. Sheep, cattle and pigs have been subject to longterm propaganda campaigns which entrench the idea that they are unattractive and unintelligent, and veil their transition to meat behind euphemistic language and abattoir walls, making it easier to eat them. Kangaroos are still seen as resourceful and graceful animals, and no linguistic tricks shield consumers from the knowledge that it is a roo on their plate. A proposal in 2009 to market a "coat of arms" emu and kangaroo-flavoured potato chip brought complaints to the Advertising Standards Bureau that this was disrespectful to these native animals, although the flavours were to be simulated and the product vegetarian (Black). Coexisting with this high regard to kangaroos is its antithesis. That is, a valuation of them informed by their designation as a pest in the pastoral industry, and the use of the carcasses of those killed to feed dogs and other companion animals. Appleby identified a visceral, disgust response to the idea of eating kangaroo in many of his informants, including both vegetarians who would not consider eating kangaroo because of their commitment to a plant-based diet, and at least one omnivore who would prefer to give up all meat rather than eat kangaroo. While diametrically opposed, the end point of both positions is that kangaroo meat should not be eaten.

A second animal ethics stance relates to the imagined kangaroo, a cultural construct which for most urban Australians is much more present in their lives and likely to shape their actions than the living animals. It is behind the rejection of eating an animal which holds such an iconic place in Australian culture: to the dexter on the 1912 national coat of arms; hopping through the Hundred Acre Wood as Kanga and Roo in A.A. Milne's Winnie-the-Pooh children's books from the 1920s and the Disney movies later made from them; as a boy's best friend as Skippy the Bush Kangaroo in a fondly remembered 1970s television series; and high in the sky on QANTAS planes. The anthropomorphising of kangaroos permitted the spectacle of the boxing kangaroo from the late nineteenth century. By framing natural kangaroo behaviours as boxing, these exhibitions encouraged an ambiguous understanding of kangaroos as human-like, moving them further from the category of food (Golder and Kirkby). Australian government bodies used this idea of the kangaroo to support food exports to Britain, with kangaroos as cooks or diners rather than ingredients. The Kangaroo Kookery Book of 1932 (see fig. 1 below) portrayed kangaroos as a nuclear family in a suburban kitchen and another official campaign supporting sales of Australian produce in Britain in the 1950s featured a Disney-inspired kangaroo eating apples and chops washed down with wine ("Kangaroo to Be 'Food Salesman'"). This imagining of kangaroos as human-like has persisted, leading to the opinion expressed in a 2008 focus group, that consuming kangaroo amounted to "'eating an icon' ... Although they are pests they are still human nature ... these are native animals, people and I believe that is a form of cannibalism!" (Ampt and Owen 26).



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Figure 1: Rather than promoting the eating of kangaroos, the portrayal of kangaroos as a modern suburban family in the Kangaroo Kookery Book (1932) made it unthinkable. (Source: Kangaroo Kookery Book, Director of Australian Trade Publicity, Australia House, London, 1932.)

The third layer of ethical objection on the ground of animal welfare is more specific, being directed to the method of killing the kangaroos which become food. Kangaroos are perhaps the only native animals for which state governments set quotas for commercial harvest, on the grounds that they compete with livestock for pasturage and water. In most jurisdictions, commercially harvested kangaroo carcasses can be

processed for human consumption, and they are the ones which ultimately appear in supermarket display cases.

Kangaroos are killed by professional shooters at night using swivelling spotlights mounted on their vehicles to locate and daze the animals. While clean head shots are the ideal and regulations state that animals should be killed when at rest and without causing "undue agonal struggle", this is not always achieved and some animals do suffer prolonged deaths (NSW Code of Practice for Kangaroo Meat for Human Consumption). By regulation, the young of any female kangaroo must be killed along with her. While averting a slow death by neglect, this is considered cruel and wasteful. The hunt has drawn international criticism, including from Greenpeace which organised campaigns against the sale of kangaroo meat in Europe in the 1980s, and Viva! which was successful in securing the withdrawal of kangaroo from sale in British supermarkets ("Kangaroo Meat Sales Criticised"). These arguments circulate and influence opinion within Australia.

A final animal ethics issue is that what is actually behind the push for greater use of kangaroo meat is not concern for the environment or animal welfare but the quest to turn a profit from these animals. The Kangaroo Industries Association of Australia, formed in 1970 to represent those who dealt in the marsupials' meat, fur and skins, has been a vocal advocate of eating kangaroo and a sponsor of market research into how it can be made more appealing to the market. The Association argued in 1971 that commercial harvest was part of the intelligent conservation of the kangaroo. They sought minimum size regulations to prevent overharvesting and protect their livelihoods ("Assn. Backs Kangaroo Conservation"). The Association's current website makes the claim that wild harvested "Australian kangaroo meat is among the healthiest, tastiest and most sustainable red meats in the world" (Kangaroo Industries Association of Australia). That this is intended to initiate a new and less controlled branch of the meat industry for the benefit of hunters and processors, rather than foster a shift from sheep or cattle to kangaroos which might serve farmers and the environment, is the opinion of Dr. Louise Boronyak, of the Centre for Compassionate Conservation at the University of Technology Sydney (Boyle 19).

Concerns such as these have meant that kangaroo is most consumed where it is least familiar, with most of the meat for human consumption recovered from culled animals being exported to Europe and Asia. Russia has been the largest export market. There, kangaroo meat is made less strange by blending it with other meats and traditional spices to make processed meats, avoiding objections to its appearance and uncertainty around preparation. With only a low profile as a novelty animal in Russia, there are fewer sentimental concerns about consuming kangaroo, although the additional food miles undermine its environmental credentials. The variable acceptability of kangaroo in more distant markets speaks to the role of culture in determining how patterns of eating are formed and can be shifted, or, as Elspeth Probyn phrased it "how natural entities are transformed into commodities within a context of globalisation and local communities", underlining the impossibility of any straightforward ethics of eating kangaroo (33, 35).

Kangatarianism is a neologism which makes the eating of kangaroo meat something it has not been in the past, a voluntary restriction based on environmental ethics. These environmental benefits are well founded and eating kangaroo can be understood as an Anthropocenic bargain struck to allow the continuation of the consumption of red meat while reducing one's environmental footprint. Although superficially attractive, the numbers entering into this bargain remain small because environmental ethics cannot be disentangled from animal ethics. The anthropomorphising of the kangaroo and its use as a national symbol coexist with its categorisation as a pest and use of its meat as food for companion animals. Both understandings of kangaroos made their meat uneatable for many Australians. Paired with concerns over how kangaroos are killed and the commercialisation of a native species, kangaroo meat has a very mixed reception despite decades of advocacy for eating its meat in favour of that of more harmed and more harmful introduced species. Given these constraints, kangatarianism is unlikely to become widespread and indeed it should be

viewed as at best a temporary exigency. As the climate warms and rainfall becomes more erratic, even animals which have evolved to suit Australian conditions will come under increasing pressure, and humans will need to reach Kübler-Ross' final state of grief: acceptance. In this case, this would mean acceptance that our needs cannot be placed ahead of those of other animals.

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