

All sticks and no carrots?

Regulatory and policy barriers to conservation through sustainable use of wildlife in Australia

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This study focussed on three forms of use: recreational hunting, harvesting, and commercial sanctuaries

1. Sustainable use of wildlife can be an important strategy for conservation

People tend to conserve what they value – whether this be for economic, social or cultural reasons. However, wildlife typically has little value for many people who make land-use decisions, as there are few options for them to derive benefits from it. Conservation through sustainable use (CSU) is based on the recognition that the economic or other benefits from *use* of wildlife can motivate people to conserve and sustainably manage it. CSU has received increasing international attention, is supported by an increasing array of successful examples around the world, and has been endorsed within key conservation fora including the CBD, CITES, and IUCN. In Australia, however, conservation through sustainable use remains largely unfamiliar in conception and limited in implementation.

2. Objectives and method

Through desk based review and stakeholder interviews, I examined the the policy and regulatory environment affecting the implementation of conservation through sustainable use in Australia to identify whether there were significant constraints and barriers to conservation through sustainable use. I focussed on three major forms of use: harvesting wild species; recreational hunting; and commercial wildlife sanctuaries.

3. Barriers and constraints on conservation through sustainable use in Australia

Policy analysis and interviews highlighted the following barriers:

Objectives for wildlife use are unclear and inconsistent in biodiversity and NRM legislation and policy - use is treated variously as a commercial opportunity, a potential conservation strategy, or a threat.

There are inflexible prohibitions on many forms of wildlife use, even where there appears no clear conservation rationale.

Property rights in wildlife (particularly animals) are frequently unclear or incompletely specified, or the Crown owns all wildlife.

Regulatory frameworks for wildlife approvals and licensing are frequently highly complex, onerous, and duplicated or uncoordinated across levels of Government.

There is little clear information or guidance, and a high level of uncertainty surrounding issue of many approvals required for forms of wildlife use.

Rural institutions and policy remain primarily focussed on agriculture, including leasehold conditions and subsidies.

Lack of enabling mechanisms There are few or no policy mechanisms to proactively support and enable those forms of wildlife use which offer potential conservation benefits.

Furthermore, a number of underlying assumptions that mitigate against CSU appear to shape and underpin policy and decision-making, including that the State is the best protector of species, and that conservation and commerce is incompatible.

Further information

For the full report contact the author on rosie.cooney@unsw.edu.au.

The FATE Program (Future of Australia's Threatened Ecosystems) at UNSW is exploring a wide variety of situations in which the commercial use of Australian native species can lead to improved conservation and land-use outcomes. Enterprise options being explored include involving landholders in kangaroo harvesting, carbon trading, small mammal reintroductions for tourism, wild plant harvesting and agri-forestry.

For more information on FATE and its activities see www.fate.unsw.edu.au.

4. The consequence

Conservation through sustainable use is in many respects difficult, costly, time-consuming and uncertain. Arguably, this supports the maintenance of current agricultural practices which have already caused widespread degradation; and reinforces views of native animals as pests.

5. An enabling regime for conservation through sustainable use? Insights from abroad

A survey of leading international policy and practice on CSU suggests four avenues for attention:

Policy coherence and coordination: the creation of a policy “pathway” which allows sustainable use of a resource to proceed without unnecessary impediment, while enabling timely and effective responses to unsustainable use;

Adaptive management: enabling well-monitored, reversible, adaptive management interventions involving wildlife use to increase understanding of the impacts of use, while recognising that all management (including the *status quo*) must necessarily proceed under a level of uncertainty;

Devolution of management rights and responsibilities: development and trial of policy mechanisms to devolve a level of rights and responsibilities for wildlife management to the landholders who live with wildlife, in order to strengthen incentives for conservation and sustainable management;

Biodiversity offset mechanisms: exploration of the potential for biodiversity offset mechanisms to yield sustainable revenue for conservation to landholders, with particular attention to integration of sustainable harvesting of wild resources within management frameworks for such offsets.