

Understanding people to improve wildlife management: Case studies  
in human dimensions research from New South Wales, Australia.

Guy-Anthony Ballard  
BSc (Hons) MEnvMgt, UNE

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## **Abstract**

Although research into the human dimensions of wildlife management has a substantial history elsewhere, in Australia it remains an emerging discipline that managers are yet to broadly embrace. Rather than actively seeking information about what the public thinks, feels and wants, Australian wildlife managers tend to collect such information in a passive-receptive way, thereby favouring the views of vocal individuals or special-interest groups. Despite this prevailing practice, many Australasian wildlife professionals believe that community opinions are important to consider when developing management, but resist more in-depth involvement, such as co-management.

This thesis aimed to address the gap between managers' apparent desire for information, and their lack of effective means to collect it, by testing methodology that might provide useful, scenario-relevant data about the public's views. To do this, the human dimensions of three real-world management case-studies were actively investigated in New South Wales. They were:

1. A previous significant conflict (between the public and the government wildlife agency) over wild-horse management in Guy Fawkes River National Park;
2. The chronic issue of Flying-fox management on the east coast of New South Wales; and
3. Interactions between people and kangaroos in peri-urban areas, which are likely to increase in the future.

In the case of the wild-horse scenario, results suggest that the large-scale conflict that arose following the October, 2000 aerial cull was avoidable. Active investigation of people's views of wild horses, and their preferences for management, would likely have allowed managers to pre-empt conflict, seek more appropriate control measures and refute spurious claims about the level of community opposition for the management action.

For the ongoing issue of NSW Flying-fox management, results offered valuable context for the views of commercial-fruit growers and also revealed popular support for solutions for conflict, e.g. Government subsidies for non-lethal crop-protection methods. Further, observed differences between three public groups that differed in their experience of Flying-foxes

suggest that any future increase in public contact with the animals may need careful management to avoid a negative public response developing.

Lastly, the application of human dimensions research to the growing peri-urban kangaroo scenario shows that ostensibly similar groups of stakeholders can have significantly different expectations for managers. Consequently, generic management of human-kangaroo interactions in peri-urban areas is unlikely to be appropriate due to variations in the way that residents from different communities want kangaroos and people managed.

These findings make it clear that an inquisitive approach to understanding the community could assist wildlife managers not only at various geographic scales but also across an assortment of issues, such as vertebrate pest management, threatened species conservation and direct human-wildlife conflict.

## **Certification**

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any other degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



Guy-Anthony Ballard

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