

POLICY STATEMENT NO. 23

**CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT
OF EMUS**

MAY 1990

1. BACKGROUND

The Emu *Dromaius novaehollandiae* occurs throughout most of Western Australia. It is abundant, reaching highest densities in the pastoral zone, particularly along river systems, and where large areas of cover allow successful breeding. Areas of intensive agricultural use and arid areas not used for pastoralism support use and arid areas not used for pastoralism support lower densities. Numbers fluctuate considerably according to seasonal conditions. Aerial surveys yielded population estimates of 110,000 in 1981, 73,000 in 1984 and 92,000 in 1987 in surveyed areas of Western Australia (see Appendix A). Emus occur in many national parks, nature reserves and State forests.

The Emu is highly mobile and may concentrate temporarily in response to localised high rainfall when food and water are scarce in pastoral areas. Studies have shown that Emus make regular seasonal movements or migrations in Western Australia, to the south west in spring and to the north east in autumn, in certain regions. Good seasonal conditions in the pastoral zone can lead to population increases and, in some years, migrations of large numbers of Emus towards the agricultural zone, but the State barrier fences prevent mass invasions of the agricultural zone.

Emus are omnivorous, eating a variety of plants and insects. They can cause damage to crops (through feeding and trampling), pastures (through feeding) and fences. The amount of damage varies and, when it occurs, it is often localised. Damage in the pastoral zone is normally insignificant, except when there are large populations buildups. Damage in the agricultural zone occurs on farms containing or adjacent to tracts of native vegetation harbouring Emus. The extent of damage has not been quantified.

The Emu is protected under the Wildlife Conservation Act but is also declared to be a native pest bird in the whole of the State under the Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act. The declaration under category A7, means that a management program should, in the opinion of the Agriculture Protection Board, be approved and published by the Board and implemented. The Board is responsible for the maintenance of the State barrier fences.

The management program which is in place is that a damage licence will be issued under the Wildlife Conservation Act for the taking of Emus where necessary to control damage to primary production. Where the level of damage is particularly significant and authorisation of control on a case-by-case basis through the issue of damage licences would be an inadequate response to the level of damage, an open season may be declared by the Minister for Conservation and Land Management.

Shooting of Emus is the preferred method of control. The Department does not favour poisoning as a means of Emu control largely because of the potential for killing non-target fauna. However, in recognition of the Agriculture Protection Board's view that poisoning is the only practical form of control in some circumstances, poisoning may be permitted subject to strict guidelines and supervision.

Because of the value of Emu leather, oil, eggs and other products, an Emu farming and processing industry is developing in Western Australia, aimed at both domestic and overseas markets. Emu farming, if properly managed and controlled, is not a threat to the conservation of Emus in the wild.

Export overseas of Emu products must be in accordance with the Commonwealth Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act, which requires that the products must be either from animal taken in accordance with a management program approved under the Act or from animals which are bred in captivity. The Regulations under that Act specify stringent requirements for approved management programs and breeding in captivity (Appendices B and C).

The commercial utilisation of Emus will be permitted based on breeding in captivity in licensed farms. The taking and disposal of Emus from the wild for commercial purposes is prohibited unless the person is the holder of the necessary licence under the Wildlife Conservation Regulations, and the royalty tags are affixed. However, the development of a commercial industry based upon the taking of Emus from the wild will not be permitted for the following reasons:

- (i) Given the generally low densities of Emus and the sporadic and localised nature of the damage problem, there is no justification, on damage mitigation grounds, for ongoing widespread control of Emus by the commercial industry.
- (ii) The generally low densities of Emus would give rise to concerns about overharvesting.
- (iii) Development of an industry based on regarding wild Emus as a renewable resource would require good knowledge of the biology of the Emu, the regular monitoring of population trends and appropriate administrative and regulatory arrangements, to safeguard the conservation status of Emus in the wild. Furthermore, given that the industry would involve export of products, it would be necessary to produce and implement a costly management program meeting the requirements of Commonwealth legislation.
- (iv) Wild-taken Emus may yield products of uneven quality which could jeopardise quality standards aimed for by the Emu farming industry. Furthermore, among wild-taken Emus it is likely that there would be considerable wastage (e.g. of scarred leather) as well as lower yields of oil and meat when Emus are in poor condition.
- (v) Allowing the commercialisation of wild-taken Emus in the absence of an approved management program under the Commonwealth legislation, while at the same time allowing Emu farming, would increase the possibility of illegal activities (e.g. seeking to export products from wild-taken Emus as being from captive-bred Emus) and would jeopardise the future of Emu farming because of problems in identifying the origin of products to be exported.
- (vi) The intention is that the Emu farming industry should meet the demand for Emu products entirely from captive-breeding on farms.

Notwithstanding any of the above, Section 23(1) of the Wildlife Conservation Act provides that Aboriginals may take Emus sufficient only for food for themselves their families, but not for sale. This applies to Crown land or any other land, other than nature reserves, but where land is owned or occupied the consent of the owner or occupier is required. National parks, State forest and other lands managed by the Department are "occupied" land for this purpose and Aboriginals therefore require Departmental permission to take Emus on those lands. In addition, *Wildlife Conservation Regulation 40A* provides that Aboriginals (but not non-Aboriginals) may be licensed to take Emu eggs.

Considerable research has been conducted into various aspects of Emu biology and conservation, particularly by CSIRO scientists in Western Australia. Because of Emus in the State, the limited resources available for the long-term viability of wild Emu populations, the Emus, nor are there any current plans to institute such a program. Research into Emu farming and the industry, rather than the Department, to pursue.

2. OBJECTIVE

To conserve Emus in the wild throughout their natural range in Western Australia, to provide for control of Emus causing damage to primary production and to provide for the commercial farming of Emus.

3. POLICY

The Department will:

- 3.1 Seek to maintain viable populations of Emus throughout their natural range.
- 3.2 Permit control of Emu numbers and where Emu numbers when and where Emus cause damage to primary production.
- 3.3 Permit the commercial farming of Emus, subject to appropriate.
- 3.4 Prohibit the commercial utilisation of wild Emus, except for the sale of eggs taken by Aboriginals who hold *Wildlife Conservation Regulation 40A* licences.
- 3.5 Carry out, cause to be carried out or promote research on Emus as necessary.

4. STRATEGIES

To accomplish the Department's objective and policy the following strategies will be implemented:

- 4.1 Emus will be completely protected on lands managed by CALM, except where permission is given:
 - to control Emus where required for the maintenance of a balanced ecosystem;
 - to Aboriginals to hunt Emus and collect eggs;
 - to take Emus for scientific purposes.
- 4.2 Where Emus moving from lands managed by CALM onto adjacent lands are causing damage, control measures will normally be carried out on those adjacent lands by the landholders. In exceptional circumstances control may be permitted on lands managed by CALM and will be carried out under Departmental supervision.

- 4.3 On lands other than those managed by CALM, the Department will seek to maintain viable Emu populations compatible with the land-use purpose and the maintenance of balanced ecosystems. This will involve liaison with the Agriculture Protection Board, primary producer organisations and landholders.
- 4.4 The Department will provide for primary producers to be able to take appropriate action to control Emus causing damage to crops, pastures and fences, through the issue of damage licences. In addition, an open season may be declared for a specified area and duration where warranted. The development of a commercial industry based upon the taking of Emus from the wild, will not be permitted.
- 4.5 Shooting is the preferred form of control. Poisoning will be authorised in accordance with *Wildlife Conservation Regulations 54(1)* only when extreme damage is occurring and numbers cannot be controlled effectively by shooting, and where it is demonstrated that non-target fauna will not be significantly affected. The authorisation will specify the conditions under which poisoning may be carried out and all poisoning is to be under the supervision of the Agriculture Protection Board. If an unacceptable level of poisoning of non-target fauna occurs, the authorisation to carry out poisoning will be discontinued.
- 4.6 The Department will provide for the orderly development and operation of an Emu farming industry in Western Australia in accordance with Government policy and the Wildlife Conservation Act, and based upon the following considerations:
- the Department will license the farming and processing of Emus for their leather, oil, meat, eggs and other products;
 - the taking of limited numbers of Emus from the wild for initial stocking purposes and to facilitate product research and development; which was permitted during the establishment phase of the Emu-farming industry, will no longer be permitted unless there is express Ministerial approval;
 - the taking of Emus from the wild will be limited to replenishment of breeding stock as necessary for the addition of new genetic material;
 - Emu farms will be required to demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the Department, their capability to properly care for and manage Emus;
 - Emu farms will need to meet the requirements of the Commonwealth Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act in relation to captive breeding, in order to export products overseas.
- 4.7 The Department will keep under review the need for research on Emus and will carry out, cause to be carried out or promote such research as necessary. Emu counts will be undertaken during aerial surveys conducted as part of the kangaroo management programs.
- 4.8 The Department will develop a management program covering all aspects of emu conservation and management in Western Australia, updating Wildlife Research Bulletin No. 4 ("The Management of the Emu *Dromaius novaehollandiae* in Western Australia" by Dr TL Riggert, 1975).
- 4.9 All aspects of emu conservation and management will be monitored by Departmental staff as part of their normal duties.
- 4.10 Action will be taken to inform landholders and the general public of Departmental policy on the conservation and management of Emus.

4.11 The taking of Emu eggs by Aboriginals pursuant to Regulation 40A licences will be monitored and, if necessary, restricted. Any exports overseas if eggs taken from the wild will need to meet the requirements of the Commonwealth Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act in relation to approved management programs.

Syd Shea
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Distribution Lists: A, B, D, E, H