



AWMS POSITION STATEMENT Use of Wildlife by Indigenous People

The lives of many Indigenous people are intimately linked to the wild animals and plants of the lands they share. Wildlife is the foundation of Indigenous peoples' economies and cultural identities. The wild animals and plants of Australia and New Zealand have provided Indigenous peoples with food, clothing, shelter, cultural and trade items for thousands of years. These wild resources continue to meet both material and spiritual needs of contemporary Indigenous societies.

Some wild resources have become extinct or been reduced to low numbers by past exploitation and resource management practice and some have been replaced by introduced species such as rabbits, buffalo, deer and feral pigs. However, many other species that are used by Indigenous peoples remain abundant and there is evidence that some species depend partly on Indigenous practice for the maintenance of populations. Wild resources, whether native or introduced, provide Indigenous people with options for commercial activity that can improve their socio-economic circumstances, while avoiding some of the severe environmental damage often associated with other, more intensive forms of land use.

On this basis, AWMS:

- **Recognises** the long associations between Indigenous peoples and wildlife, and respects the diverse human cultural values to which those associations have contributed.
- **Supports** the efforts of Indigenous peoples to maintain their cultures, including dependence on and continued use of wildlife.
- **Acknowledges** that use of wildlife remains critically important to many Indigenous people within contemporary society, and makes essential contributions to Indigenous economies.
- **Is concerned** that legal frameworks and codes of practice adopted to conserve biodiversity, manage wildlife, regulate uses and trade, bestow property rights and standardise methods of handling, often ignore traditional laws, practice, obligations, knowledge and cultural needs, and continue to be implemented without negotiation with Indigenous peoples.
- **Notes** that making a distinction between subsistence and commercial use may be meaningless in many Indigenous cultures and in itself makes no useful contribution to the achievement of sustainable practice.
- **Recognises** that the Indigenous peoples of Australia and New Zealand have played and will continue to play a pivotal role in conservation and use of wildlife, and in the development and implementation of sound wildlife management practice.
- **Acknowledges** that both Indigenous knowledge and practice and science-based knowledge can provide reliable information for the sustainable use of wildlife.
- **Encourages** sharing of Indigenous knowledge and scientific management techniques wherever possible in order to underpin wildlife management programs that reflect mutual respect, support and understanding among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and the different perspectives they bring to wildlife conservation, use and management.

AWMS recommends that:

- Sustainable use of wild resources be fully recognised as a basic right of Indigenous people.
- Indigenous harvests conform to ethical standards, noting that ethical conclusions about humane treatment are culturally based.
- Protecting Indigenous access to wild resources be a priority for other resource users and for governments, especially when new enterprises and industries are being developed.
- Restrictions on Indigenous people's harvest and use of wild resources, including the means of harvest, be imposed only with the full involvement of affected Indigenous people, where the restriction is necessary to ensure sustainable resource use or to protect wildlife at special risk.
- The focus for management should be sustainability of the harvest, not the technology used for harvest.
- Management of all commercial harvest of wild resources has the full involvement of the Indigenous people who have particular connections to the resource that is being harvested.
- Commercial use of wild resources be encouraged and supported by governments as a vehicle for economic development by Indigenous people, wherever that use is also supported by relevant Indigenous people and can be conducted sustainably.
- The needs and aspirations of indigenous peoples be given priority in government decision making about the development of industries based on wild resources for which those indigenous peoples have traditional responsibilities.
- Indigenous people not be precluded from acquiring wild resources through gifts or trade originating from sustainably managed sources, particularly where they are not able to harvest wild resources personally (eg because they live away from their traditional lands).
- Management based on traditional gathering and assessment techniques be accorded the same status in formal regulatory instruments as science-based techniques, provided that whatever technique is used management must be able to demonstrate sustainability.
- Governments and other research funding bodies encourage collaborative research between indigenous people and scientists into ways of sustaining uses of wildlife, managing wildlife habitats and enhancing the role of Indigenous practice in contemporary wildlife management programs.

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