

# Fate of the wild donkeys on Kachana? – May 2018

## **PART 1 - Life in a bush setting and conducting landscape rehabilitation since 1992, lets us speculate:**

Feral donkeys must really have been a problem in areas of the Kimberley some decades ago. People do not just dream up a Donkey Program (read: “kill all donkeys”) without good reason; not in the cities, not in the bush. And even if they did, why would it have been publicly endorsed and funded at the time? We give credit where credit is due: People, in general, have good intentions and they like to make good decisions.



These animals that played pivotal roles in the building of the Northern Australia as we now know it, became obsolete with the advent of mechanised transport.

Rather than killing them, their owners and handlers presumably just let them go.

Survival for a donkey in the Kimberley was a part-time job. The species had after all adapted to semi-desert conditions, and the Kimberley was hardly a desert back then.

Time donkeys did not spend on surviving, was time that they could be harnessed for human use.

This donkey-time or rather “Donkey-Power” became free upon their release.

“Donkey Power” was soon reflected in growing populations and feral behaviour. Effects of their presence in the landscape became obvious, even to the untrained eye.

Something had to be done.

## **Part 2 - Working, walking and riding around in upper-catchment areas since 1985, we bear witness:**

On arrival in the Kimberley, donkeys were considered to be a pest and we had a source of cheap, high quality dog-food.

As donkey-numbers declined, dog-food took longer to get, but we were beginning to see things we had not noticed before. The predation on Donkeys was changing their behaviour.

We were already doing this intentionally with feral cattle. But Donkeys?

I did not like Donkeys. As a child I had to learn to ride on one.

(Skellem, the 26-year-old one-eyed pony was a great replacement and certainly a step up for me in the equestrian world!)

When we got to Kachana we had feral cattle that were fat after the wet and skinny during the dry.

We had feral donkeys that were in good condition all year round.

We did not have enough cattle to keep healthy the valley bases, let alone the ridges.

Harnessing “Cattle Power” seemed to be working well in the not so rough terrain. What about the unmanaged ridges that brought fires into our managed country on average every three years?

Was “Donkey Power” an option?



[The Kachana Wild Donkey Project](#) began to evolve when Dad (Bob Henggeler Snr.) offered to work with our donkeys.

Dad passed away early 2018. The Donkeys are not yet run intensively with the cattle herd, but they do a great job maintaining low-fuel zones around our model areas and assist us in wild-fire mitigation in the areas where we cannot justify the use of cattle.

We also observe a whole lot of other ecological benefits associated with their behaviour including the establishment of perennial ground-cover in areas that have been bare for at least three decades.

We are in communication with scientists who wish to research our work.

But here is the rub: What we are doing appears to be politically incorrect.

Powers that be, claim: “... ***we are unable to support the use of a declared species, in particular donkeys in any way as a landscape management tool.***”

### **Part 3 - We argue:**

In managed pastoral areas where donkey populations may have been too high some years ago, this no longer is the case. The Donkey Program could be viewed as having been successful.

However in over 60% of unmanaged areas that reliably get over 750mm of annual rainfall, the Donkey

Program has been a disaster.

Hasty removal of large numbers of severe grazers resulted in the build-up of senescent fuel-loads - nobody had told the grass to stop growing!

Extensive wild-fires resulted.

In turn, marsupial populations crashed.

With insufficient herbivores remaining in the landscape to process the annual growth of vegetation we ended up with a destructive wildfire on average every three years.

Biodiversity remains in decline.



Wetlands and sponges are being lost and much watershed-country remains in a downward spiral.

We presented our case in person on the 5<sup>th</sup> April and again in our correspondence of 6<sup>th</sup> April 2018  
[Please click here to view our correspondence of 6<sup>th</sup> April 2018](#)



8<sup>th</sup> May 2018, the official KRBA response arrived.

All donkeys are to be culled and therefore the Kachana Wild Donkey Project is to be terminated.

[Please click here to view correspondence](#)

**Part 4 – We conclude:**

The future of the Wild Donkeys of Kachana is no longer in our hands.

We seek public and official endorsement for our work and shall continue to do so.

[Please click here to view our response](#)

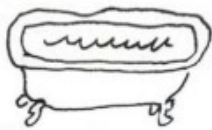
It is our hope that public input and open discussion will make it safer for a new generation of local officials to challenge some of the practices that may have been justifiable thirty years ago.

Time has moved on. Innovation has moved on. Challenges change. Science keeps opening new doors.



[The value of Australia's new megafauna](#) is already being recognised internationally.

BUT of course



*Nothing is obvious to the uninformed* ?

[Kachana Pastoral Company ad in the local newspaper 2018.05.24](#)