Total grazing pressure includes your cattle and sheep...

... and feral goats (and rabbits)...

and native kangaroos.

Total grazing pressure is the key to sustainable land use; populations of sheep, kangaroos and goats have to be reduced if they get too high.

Managing total grazing pressure

'Total grazing pressure' reflects the total demand for feed from all herbivores—domestic, feral and native—relative to the herbage and browse available in your paddock. It is much higher than the grazing pressure from your stock, and all these animals have a significant effect on pasture composition and cover.

There are now about 3.5 million sheep, 0.3 million cattle, 2.6 million roos and 0.25 million goats in the mulga lands. This is equivalent to about 25 sheep, 12 kangaroos and 5 goats per square kilometre; there may be twice as many next to mitchell grass downs. Goat numbers have halved over the last few years as better prices are being paid, and the new goat abattoir in Charleville should provide a more reliable market. Some graziers are starting to rear—rather than harvest—goats, and have introduced Boer goat bucks to increase carcase size. Rabbits can be a local problem in the western mulga districts and along major rivers.

While you can control the numbers of your sheep and cattle, kangaroos know all the bounds and none of the boundaries; they graze where ever water and grass are available. Graziers often say kangaroos and goats are the main reason why they do not introduce systems of better grazing management; when they try to spell a paddock, large numbers of roos and goats invade.

Conservationists may claim that soft-footed macropods are more suitable for fragile country than hard-hoofed ungulates, but no-one can consider changing from running sheep to farming kangaroos until the latter is more profitable.

How much feed do roos and goats eat?

Three kangaroos eat about as much as two sheep, one goat eats as much as one sheep; grass is the main diet, and all will overgraze pasture when it is in short supply.

Roos are almost exclusively ground-herbage eaters, tending to browse less shrub than either sheep or cattle; goats on the other hand eat more browse. But all eat grass.

How can I manage the roo and goat problem?

Shooting. Shooting can turn a problem into a profit. Professional shooters are in business to make money from meat and hides, but have to operate on a roo quota set by the Federal government. Shooters prefer the large males, whose demise has negligible effect on

the population. Once the local population does drop, shooters move to more bountiful hunting grounds. Shooting for effective control of numbers may mean employing shooters specifically for that task.

Shooting may have most impact on the local roo population when their numbers are low during a drought; but by then the pasture has been damaged while the hides and carcasses are in poor condition and worth little. A better method is to concentrate harvesting at the end of summer and when going into dry times—standing pasture is conserved, and the animals are in good condition.

Shooting roos can be effective on open downs, but is less so in dense mulga country where vehicle access and visibility are poor.

Shooting is not an effective method of control of goats; it works against small mobs of less than five goats, but larger mobs or herds are better mustered by plane or trapped.

Trapping. Goat populations are best controlled by mustering with a plane, or by trapping, before selling the animals live for meat. It is illegal to trap roos.

Turn off the water. Capped bores or troughs can be turned off to spell a paddock if there is no other source of water. But roos and goats may travel up to 10 km to water.

Fence off reticulated waters. A roo-proof fence with swing or trap gates for cattle and sheep around your water point may persuade roos to drink elsewhere.

Finlayson trough. The Finlayson trough uses a strategically placed electric fencing wire to deter kangaroos from the water trough while allowing sheep access. It has not been found effective.

There is no easy method of effective management of roos. Some methods, such as restricting access to water supply, merely push the problem towards a neighbour unless a harvesting programme is initiated by a group of properties at the same time.

Shooting is still the most effective way to control roos.

Spear-traps may persuade roos to drink elsewhere.

Reducing the number of kangaroos should never mean their annihilation.

Stocking equivalents