

'Nature' - somewhere between 'wild' and 'dead'

from tangible to intangible; from knowable to unknowable

Ruminations by Chris Henggeler, Kachana, Kimberley, Australia – December 2021

Busy modern lifestyles possibly do not leave much time to invest in reflection on these matters, but of course humans too, are nature! From conception right until the moment when we die, for better or for worse, we display human nature.

Over 7,913,450,000 of us consciously, subconsciously as well as unconsciously, now influence every aspect of life on the planet. - Over 5,040,143,000 of these joined me during my lifetime!

As with so much else that we deal with, the temptation persists to compartmentalise nature:

wild – tamed - domesticated – feral – dead

- **wild** - we cannot control what is wild; thus, it is often considered to be a threat
- **tame** – what was wild, now no longer seems as dangerous
- **domesticated** – what we believe to have under control
- **feral** – what eludes our desire for control (or our definition of control)
- **dead** – something that is dead will not get up and surprise us; it is no longer a threat

It stands to reason that with 25,788,215 people living on a dehydrating continent there is need for structure and coordinated approaches to servicing basic needs as well as personal and collective wants. The extraction and export of nutrients (even off-shore), and the dividing and sharing of privileges must not be uncontrolled. In Australia therefore, adopting regulation that evolved in other environments where humans learned to exploit nature's wealth seems a reasonable proposition.

To this day many city-based cultures still resort to the strategy: **Tame, domesticate and control.** (N.B. History can teach us much about the domestication and control of human nature as well.)

At the cutting edge, where wild nature (*remaining subject to natural laws*) meets domesticated nature (*regulated and "controlled" by humans*) we find activities like fishing, agriculture, pastoralism, forestry and mining. Such activities sustain civilisation. **Dangerous 'wild' and uncontrollable 'feral' nature must not threaten the viability of 'domesticated' nature** is the notion that appears to be acted out. In the interest of self-preservation city-based civilisations therefore strive to "control" such nature.

What appears to set our dehydrating island-continent apart from most other continents is that long before modern humans commenced exercising modern forms of "control", the functioning of most of Australia's landscapes was already heavily reliant on human inputs. Aboriginals may not have controlled the land per se, but anybody in command of fundamental environmental literacy today acknowledges that Australian landscapes were managed long before Europeans came along. - How earlier migrants to Australian shores may have transitioned from being "future eaters" to becoming custodians of the land is argued eloquently in Tim Flannery's book: *The Future Eaters*.

Allowing for the context of early waves of European settlement, little imagination is required to appreciate that a 'no nonsense' world-view like: **'wild – domesticated – dead'** did in fact pay off handsomely in a number of areas for nearly two centuries.

The Australian Stockhorse and the Australian Cattle Dog are two prime examples.

On both accounts, uncompromising selection for desired traits produced animals that would pass on desired behaviour even though resulting genetics did not always coincide with pure breeds!

The Merino too, was selected for within contexts where certain functions were rewarded.

When contexts change, so do challenges. Producers followed the money, resulting in selection criteria shifting from function to fashion. Purchasing a Blue Heeler or a Kelpie today, no longer is a guarantee for a good working dog. As for stock-horses, in the country that I need to work in..., give me a brumby or a tough little Yarrie Pony over a horse with papers any day!

Mechanisation and automatization both imposed seismic shifts within contexts of production systems. In such systems, misbehaviour that cannot be brought under control swiftly, may rapidly eat into profit margins.

As a consequence, where time equals money, a common focus is on **'domesticated – dead'**. More often than not, efficiency-thinking then dictates that **'feral – dead'** is more cost-effective than **'feral – redomesticated'**. – All too often this approach comes with collateral damage in the form of collapsing effectiveness in ecosystem-function! (*This is not obvious to those who adhere to linear scripts.*)

As we advance in a new millennium, contexts appear to be again changing. Production limits are being tested, and ecological awareness is becoming fashionable. In recent months I have heard many plausible cases for “re-domestication” as alternatives to ‘feral’ or ‘dead’. Such arguments were not presented by industry players. They came mainly from people who either presented ethical considerations or were exploring regenerative options.

On Kachana we have been exploring regenerative options in our minds since 1985; documented experimentation in landscape settings then began 1992.

Whilst learning to better mimic natural processes, our experiences have led us to offer two broad viable options for “putting to work” Australia’s new megafauna.

1. In intensively managed areas: **'domesticated – feral – redomesticate'**
 2. In extensively managed landscapes where intensive management is not financially justifiable: **'domesticated – feral – rewild'**
- ([LINK to a 2020 essay: Challenging North Australian landscape management paradigms](#))

The first approach serves to keep more animals alive, and to protect biodiversity whilst reducing senseless slaughter and waste. **This approach however does not adequately address problems related to escalating dehydration in many of Northern Australia’s high-rainfall landscapes.** (*Watch Northern Australia’s weather-related news during summer months!*)

The second approach capitalises on wild nature’s inherent capacity to self-regulate. It leverages on diversity and complexity whilst building on potentially ubiquitous (known and unknown) natural processes. (*These are issues we cover in the RegenNarration Podcasts [linked] below.*)

In both contexts, management needs to remain attuned and responsive to synergistic opportunities as they arise. A significant opportunity being the **capitalising on renewable biological energy.**

I remain convinced of the importance of educating the public about the ethical, ecological and economic benefits of rehydrating landscapes. (I.e., landscapes that offer zero immediate commercial potential.) Instead of becoming/remaining ecological liabilities, rehydration could occur in line with how nature had built and self-regulated landscape productivity in the first place.

Without such understanding growing significantly and fast at community and political levels, I cannot see how we can slow down the annual feeding of flames on vast tracts of Northern Australia.

Not having addressed such challenges in recent decades has only served to make directly linked floods, droughts, feral weather and economic losses less affordable.

One must surmise that for millennia most parts of Australia would not have been associated with ‘self-regulating wild nature’ in the absence of regular human inputs. Yet this has become a glaring option in the face of the favoured European approach of **'domestication and associated eradication of what does not tick the boxes'**. The latter mindset became very obvious to me in during a stop-over in Perth (November 2021), but it is easy to understand why it can persist within such settings.

Whilst this approach has proved to be commercially justifiable in production areas, my observation is that it leads to much ecological dysfunction in extensively managed areas that remain largely out of sight and out of mind. It is for such areas that for well over twenty years now, Kachana Pastoral Company PL has been exploring **“re-wilding” as an alternative to ‘feral’ or ‘dead’**.

We remain most thankful to the Allan Savory inspired Holistic Management network, Danny Carter and Anthony James for in 2021 giving us clean slates on which to sum up our message without needing to be defensive about anything.

- [Wanted: LAND-DOCTORS!](#) (Video)
- [How to Heal Country?](#) (Video)
- [“Custodianship is core business.”](#) (Video)
- [#100 Wanted Land Doctors — The RegenNarration](#) (Podcast)
- [#100 Extra - Crunch Time for this Great Regeneration Story - The RegenNarration](#) (Podcast)
- [#100 Part 2 - The Value of Life — The RegenNarration](#) (Podcast)



*“Move away from plants and water, and you will experience the sun's heat.
Move even further away from plants and water, and you will find the sun's heat unbearable.
When there are no plants to manage heat and water, the sun's energy destroys everything. It creates cycles of extremes. Do we realise that fire is the sun's energy packaged up by plants?”*

Peter Andrews

