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Aussies told: save the planet - eat more 'roo

Greenpeace claims Australians can dramatically reduce their nation's carbon footprint by cutting down on beef

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"Throw another 'roo on the barbie, we're saving the planet tonight." These are the words Greenpeace hope will soon be echoing around Australian backyards as the nation responds to the latest suggestion of how it might reduce its carbon footprint: eat less beef and more of the local wildlife.

This is not good news for Skippy. In the last five years drought has halved the kangaroo population to 25 million, and already about 10 per cent of these are harvested every year for their skin and meat. Nevertheless, Greenpeace is serious in urging Australians to eat their national emblem.

They base their case on a report that says that cutting beef consumption by 20 per cent and substituting it with kangaroo steaks would reduce the nation's greenhouse gas emissions by 15 megatonnes within 12 years.

The reduction, says the report's author Dr Mark Diesendorf, comes from less land clearing and, especially, fewer flatulent cattle releasing methane.

And, Dr Diesendorf adds, kangaroo meat is a healthy alternative to beef, being low in fat and high in protein, iron and zinc. It may, in short, put a spring in your step.

While eating kangaroo on an industrial scale may be a novel idea, trying them as a tasty change from lamb or beef is not.

Kangaroos are commercially farmed and about 30m kilos of meat is produced each year. Australians eat about 10m kilos of it a year, as opposed to 70m kilos of beef. And there is a growing export market, sending about 20m kilos overseas.

It is sold in a few British outlets, France, Belgium and Germany all import it, but the main market is in Russia, which consumes as much kangaroo meat as Australia itself.

Australians' attitudes to kangaroo meat range from the horrified to the enthusiastic. One blogger, called "Aussiehog", rated it as "dog food". While "Andy of Dandenong" wrote: "Roo is a beautiful meat ... very tender, a little gamey, very lean, kangaroo steak seared with a garlic and tomato sauce over the top ... mmm."

Some southern hemisphere gourmands swear by it, and there are websites with recipes for kangaroo hot-pot, kangaroo tail soup, and, from celebrity chef Benjamin Christie, kangaroo lasagne with bush tomato chutney and lemon myrtle.

Nearly all say that kangaroo meat is best served rare or medium rare, and praise its low-fat content.

And if Australia does expand its taste for unusual meat, then there are lots of other potential meals flying, walking, running and even swimming around the Outback. Anyone for possum pie or kookaburra fricassee?