Oxford Word of the Month –
June: kangatarian

noun: a person who eats kangaroo meat but avoids eating other meat. Also as adj.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

In early 2010 a number of news organisations, both in Australia and internationally, reported on a new diet trend happening in Australia:

There’s a new semi-vegetarian wave emerging in Australia: people who exclude all meat except kangaroo on environmental, ecological and humanitarian grounds. They call themselves kangatarians and are slowly growing in numbers. (Sydney Morning Herald, 9 February)

A number of these reports referred to a group of university students who were actively promoting this new diet:

Then, about 12 months ago, one group in Sydney decided to begin spreading the word about the benefits of kangaroo meat. ‘They coined the phrase kangatarians, it was a bit of a joke initially’, said Peter Amt, a lecturer at the University of Sydney and a kangaroo meat advocate. (Calgary Herald, 13 February)

The evidence suggests the term is linked to these stories from early 2010.

Kangatarian is modelled on the word vegetarian. The -arian suffix means ‘having a concern or belief in a specified thing’. Vegetarian is also the model for other recent neologisms such as pescatarian ‘a person who eats fish but avoids eating meat’, and the jocular meatatarian ‘a person who eats meat as a significant part of their diet’. The kanga- element in kangatarian of course comes from kangaroo, a name for any of the larger marsupials of the Macropodidae family, with kangaroo entering English via the Guugu Yimithirr language of north-eastern Queensland.

Some of the appeal of eating kangaroo meat in preference to other meat is because it is thought to be healthier (it is a naturally lean meat), but kangatarians chiefly find the diet appealing on environmental grounds, because it does not rely on large-scale husbandry practices as other meat production does. Attempts to encourage a reluctant Australian public to eat more kangaroo meat, however, would probably entail the adoption of some of these practices.

Achieving the objectives of the review, then, would require the kangaroo industry to shift to farming techniques, but this would be in breach of kangatarian values. And a CSIRO report has dismissed kangaroo husbandry as a tedious and costly endeavour, on account of the animals’ nomadic habits, their low reproduction and slow growth rate, and behaviour patterns that generally prevent herding. (Crikey, 2 May 2012)

The reference to ‘kangatarian values’ illustrates that the term does not simply denote a dietary behaviour but, like vegetarianism, is often based on a set of ethical choices. Indeed, the word kangatarianism is also making its way into the Australian lexicon:

noun: the state or practice of being a kangatarian.
City newspapers and foodie magazines are swooning over the new wave of semi-vegetarianism that is emerging in Australia—Kangatarianism—excluding all meat except kangaroo on environmental, ecological and humanitarian grounds. (Alice Springs Centralian Advocate, 12 February 2010)

Kangatarian (and kangatarianism) will be considered for inclusion in the next edition of the Australian National Dictionary.

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