

SE News
HD Luck turns feral goats into gold
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A thriving new business is revitalising Broken Hill
AT sundown, their horns sparkle like diamonds.

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Squealing, they charge in single file out of the dusty truck that carried them hundreds of kilometres across the red outback.
Covered in an unappetising slurry of their own creation, the goats shower anyone within a stone's throw of the **B**-Double with cheeky spite.
But it is futile. Goats that land at this property never get the last laugh. Their arrival at Kevin Stubing's Broken Hill holding yards is not good news. At least not for them.
Down the rusty **iron** gangway they trot unknowingly into the great goat gulag. With Aussie pragmatism, their human minders wrestle and shuffle them between gates, referring to them as "granny" and "matured meat".
There is beauty in the irreverence of the bush.
Today's haul is 441 live feral goats, worth about \$20,000.
Broken Hill, whose **mining** workforce has been decimated by machinery — has found a new way to make a buck.
Conservative estimates say the mines have only 10 years of minerals left in them. Pubs and **Chinese** restaurants tell that story better than most — brandishing "For **Sale**" signs to uninterested passers-by.
But the city famously built by its underground has discovered a precious new element above the surface. In Broken Hill, goat is the new **gold**.
Kevin Stubing is the town's only buyer. Station owners, sheep farmers and graziers from beyond every horizon flock to his network of gated pens to cash in.
In a good week he greets 12,000 head of goat and sorts them personally by gender and size. Like the patriarch of some remote meat mafia, he is the Goatfather.
"People in town ask me why I spend my days covered in shit," says Mr Stubing. "But to me it's the smell of money." The truck's arrival is followed by a heady chorus of goat gospel. Turn your back on them and you could be listening to a blooper reel from The Voice.
But as the seconds turn to minutes, like when the Titanic slipped into the Atlantic, the off-key yelps turn to silence.
"I like the ones with blue eyes," Kevin's wife Sonja says from beneath a baseball cap.

It's late afternoon in the Silver City and, on cue, the goat horns are shining. "It's just like digging up a **gold** nugget," Mr Stubing, an ex-miner, smiles. "**Oil** was once just black gooey stuff, now if you strike **oil** you think 'how lucky am I?' Goats were seen as vermin, now they're a commodity." The introduced species, feral from beard to tail, was once to the grazing land of Australia as beetles are to her cane fields.

The "born survivors" live up to both their legendary appetites and their horny visage. They eat like horses and breed like bunnies.

"If it wasn't for the goats, in the hard times there were people that wouldn't be able to stay on the land," says Mr Stubing. "For those that manage them, it's like money in the bank." Landowners across the endless hectares of western NSW simply sit back and wait for the sneezing, snorting paychecks to wander on to their properties.

John Blore, a local former sheep farmer, musters them up in staggering numbers using motorbikes and gyrocopters.

Others head out to the paddocks just before July and collect their bounty from the leader of the caprine Cosa Nostra Stubing. Goats keep the tax man happy in these parts.

Some locals spend half a day mustering and by sunset have enough money to buy a new vehicle.

Broken Hill Mayor Wincen Cuy, who likes his goat stewed, says without the grunting **gold** the town's population would have dwindled even further than it has (there were more people in Broken Hill in 1900).

"When we come into drought the goats are a form of stable income that can actually keep the people on the property," he says.

"They are a feral pest you can turn into an opportunity ... a way to instil an income in a very harsh environment.

"Basically a no-brainer." An exceedingly wise herd of feral goats has colonised a patch of **mining** ground near the local RSPCA office. They march, symbolically, over train tracks that used to service a flourishing industry.

About 5000 people were once employed by the mines of Broken Hill. There are now fewer than 600.

Street names like Oxide and Sulfide hint at the love once felt for the minerals below the Hillians' feet. Today, the slow-cooked goat curry on the menu at the Junction Hotel speaks more of the local vogue.

So prolific is the spread of wild goat mustering in the red centre, Australia has become the world's largest exporter of the meat. Roughly 30,000 tonnes is sent around the world each year, but some stays in Sydney.

In Granville, yet another customer chows down on a \$17.95 dinner of goat karahi from the Himalayas restaurant — oblivious to its outback origins.

Meanwhile, back at Kevin Stubing's yard, 900km to the northwest, another pack is weighed for transport to a Halal abattoir in Nyngan.

Content and carefree, the goats munch on dry grass under the last rays of sunlight.

"It never ceases to amaze me how many goats there are out there," Kevin Stubing says. He leans on rusted **iron** and drinks in the view of a good day's work.

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