

Snowy Brumby Coalition Fact Sheet May 2016

Snowy Mountains Bush Users Group & Snowy Mountains Horse Riders Association. Response to the Draft Wild Horse Management Plan - Kosciuszko National Park

The Draft Wild Horse Management Plan is a proposal for management of Brumbys within the Kosciuszko National Park by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. The general public have until the **19th August 2016** to make comment via submission.

Any individual or group of people can respond at engage.environment.nsw.gov.au/consult or email comments to kosciuszko.wildhorseplan@environment.nsw.gov.au

What are the issues?

The number of Brumbys within Kosciuszko National Park	
The draft report recommends culling the horse population from an estimated 6000 to a range between 400-800 within 20 years.	Response:- Based on regular observations within KNP a current population of 6,000 horses is unrealistically high and no reliable source reference has been offered in the report. In 2013 it was reported that ANU Adjunct Fellow Graeme Warboys a former manager of KNP stated there were 14,000 horses in the Pilot Wilderness alone. In 2009 Michelle Dawson forecast the brumby population would reach 13,800 by 2012. The methodology for counting the horses within KNP is flawed. Variations between estimated maximum and minimum numbers demonstrates the unreliability of the source data. To reduce the population to the target level will result in an unsustainable herd.
The draft report states on page 11 that "Mares are able to foal at one to two years of age" (Wagoner 1977).	Response:- Aside from the fact that normal horse gestation is 11 months and this statement is physically impossible enquiries have revealed that the Wagoner 1977 reference used in the report was either deliberately or inadvertently included in the report and according to the authors does not exist and therefore casts further doubt on the accuracy of numbers.
The draft report states on page 11 that "populations are likely to increase by between 6% and 17% per year."	Response:- Mortality rates of foals are ignored, they may be weaned by their mothers which may occur as often as every 2 years, taken by dogs which is referred to in the report as "anecdotal" when it is in fact a reality of significant proportions. Horse mortality is impacted by adverse weather conditions which are referred to in the report as 'snowfalls...are light and the winters are short' which conflicts with ANU reports and NPWS having to euthanase Brumbys trapped in snow during the past 2 winters and with mostly good seasons in recent years, droughts have not been taken into account. After a significant loss "compensatory reproduction" phenomenon has not been considered.
The proposal to ground shoot.	
The draft report recommends using trained and qualified shooters to ground shoot as an option to manage horse numbers.	Response:- Ground shooting is not acceptable as there is significant risk of wounding the target horse. Horses can and will travel great distances while mortally wounded. A fleeing wounded horse would be impossible to follow on foot for a humane death. This was the Guy Fawkes experience.

Other control methods proposed.	
Trapping and removal for domestication or knackery.	Response: This method has been successful and widely accepted by the community. However large numbers removed at one time cause “Compensatory reproduction”. Greater effort needs to be made to rehome horses suitable for domestic use.
Trapping and culling onsite.	Response:- Culling onsite not acceptable except in the event of a mortally injured horse.
Aerial or ground mustering.	Response:- Acceptable where all efforts are made to protect pregnant mares and foals from separation, injury or death. Aerial mustering by helicopter should only be considered with horse rider support in open areas.
Fertility control.	Response:- The report is vague and inconclusive in methodology and technology. Trials in the USA have been controversial, unsuccessful with the potential for genetic abnormalities.
Carcass disposal	Response:- There is no protocol for the disposal of carcasses proposed in the report and demonstrates a significant flaw in the proposal to ground shoot or cull at trap sites. The KNP is catchment for the Snowy Hydroelectric Scheme and ACT water supply creating risk of contamination. Carcasses left to “let lie” will result in an explosion of wild pigs and dogs population.
Brumbyrunning/roping ruled out	Resonse: There is absolutely no data to substantiate that this is severe on horses. Roping should be used by accredited riders for small numbers in isolated areas for the purpose of rehoming and training as is our heritage.
Brumbys cause damage to KNP	
Impact on waterways and bogs.	Response:- Horses will not go into a bog. They are instinctively fearful of the smell of a bog including peat bogs. Horses will seek to cross a waterway where the ground is firm. Horses do not create wallows in mud as pigs and deer are known to do.
Increase in weeds	Response:- Horses do not eat weeds. Horses are attracted to and eat native grasses. Their manure piles provide mulch and spread the seeds of native grasses. There is no scientific proof that horses are the cause of weeds in KNP.
Access damage caused by horses.	Response:- Horse trails are used by native animals and visitors. Horses will also use existing trails and roads. Some creek and bog crossings are only possible for visitors where horses have found a way.
Brumby grazing does not impact fire hazard control	
The draft report states that grazing does not reduce fire severity.	Response:- A map of the fire severity from the 2003 fires shows the areas grazed most heavily by horses was the least impacted by fire.

Cultural and heritage value of the Brumbys of KNP.

“The park is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and is...included on the National Heritage List in 2008.” The draft report recognises "the cultural heritage values of the wild horse population in the park...the assessment found that the wild horse population in the park is an 'attribute' associated with the cultural heritage significance of the park..." so if the Brumbys are a cultural heritage attribute that contributed to the National Heritage Listing they should be managed as a sustainable population.

A minimum 4,000 brumbies is required to retain a sustainable and viable population.

This document is authorised by Peter Cochran. President of the Snowy Mountains Bush Users Group.