



INQUIRY INTO THE PROPOSED AERIAL SHOOTING OF BRUMBIES IN KOSCIUSZKO
NATIONAL PARK

Animal Welfare Committee

Answers to Questions on Notice

Hearing: 27 March 2024

No. Question

1. Standard operating procedure amendments based on RSCPA feedback page 37

The Hon. WES FANG: The Hon. Emma Hurst asked you questions around the SOP development and the comments that were written on the draft SOP that was given to the RSPCA for comment. We have now been made aware, having compelled the documents under Standing Order 52, that there were suggestions put forward by the RSPCA that weren't adopted. The Hon. Emma Hurst has certainly put those questions to you today. But the Minister, the department and other stakeholders have continually pointed to the RSPCA's involvement as the difference between what occurred previously—say, around 2000 with that aerial culling program—and the program being implemented now. Given the involvement of the RSPCA in those SOPs, what changes were made by the National Parks and Wildlife Service on the feedback from the RSPCA? What we have seen is that things like foaling season, the cameras, and all the advice that they have been giving—and we can have the debate around what level of conversation you had around the cameras—has been ignored.

ATTICUS FLEMING: I'll say two things, Mr Fang. One, you're not correct to characterise that as the difference between now and 20-odd years ago. There are so many changes that have occurred in the last 20 years: we are using different helicopters, we are using different rifles, we are using different ammunition, we have got thermal gear, staff are trained to a higher standard. There are many changes that mean what we are doing now is very different to what was happening 20 years ago. What I would say, and have said, is that there is a very high level of transparency associated with this operation, and that includes having independent vets observing and having the RSPCA observing and auditing. As far as I know, that hasn't happened in any other program. I think your question about that—we have listened to the RSPCA and we have made changes in response to the RSPCA. The RSPCA were really raising questions, and so we have responded to the RSPCA concerns. The RSPCA flew around and observed the operation and came back and said, "This operation has been conducted in accordance with the SOP and there is no breach of relevant welfare legislation." I think the engagement with the RSPCA is both productive and appropriate.

The Hon. WES FANG: That doesn't quite answer the question.

ATTICUS FLEMING: I think it does answer your question.

The Hon. WES FANG: The question I asked was what were the changes? What changes did—

ATTICUS FLEMING: I'm happy to take on notice and give you some detail around the changes,

Answer:

The RSPCA NSW was consulted during development of all standard operating procedures (SOPs) currently in use for the wild horse control program in Kosciuszko National Park.

With particular reference to the aerial shooting of wild horses in the park, the RSPCA was consulted by the National Parks and Wildlife Service on both the draft SOP prepared for the preliminary program of aerial shooting in late 2023, and the draft SOP subsequently prepared for the ongoing aerial shooting of wild horses.

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The final approved SOP for the ongoing aerial shooting of wild horses was provided to the Committee by the Minister for the Environment at the first inquiry hearing on 18 December 2023.

Copies of the invitations to comment on the two aerial shooting SOPs and the responses from the RSPCA were provided to the Committee in response to supplementary questions arising from the second inquiry hearing on 5 February 2024.

In addition to the input provided by the RSPCA, NPWS also sought input from an independent vet. Furthermore, the results of the preliminary program were taken into account, including the report of the independent vet and the advice from the RSPCA (both of whom observed the program).

A number of amendments were made in relation to the SOP as a result of this overall process. The amendments include:

- clearer, specific directions about targeting the chest (heart/lung) and head (brain) only, including preferred locations for initial shots
- additional emphasis on applying a deliberate policy of 'insurance shots' to ensure an animal is dead
- clarification that thermal detection equipment must be available at all times to permit quick detection and follow-up of any non-fatally wounded horses at all times, and not only when operating in vegetated or steep areas
- additional documentation requirements for aerial shooting operations, including Officer in Charge, Principal Officer in Charge, and Aerial Shooting (FAAST) Officer in Charge checklists; and Checklist for approval to conduct aerial shooting
- clarification that the daily record or operations must include the number of animals killed, their locations and a log of the track flown
- a requirement to keep chase time to the minimum extent reasonably practicable, noting other requirements of the SOP (such as that all horses in a social group should be shot, where practical)
- clarification that a horse should only be shot at when the target anatomical zone can be clearly seen
- in relation to foals – increased emphasis that, to the extent reasonably possible, dependant foals should be shot first; a requirement for team members to be aware of and keep active lookout for the possibility of isolated foals; and clear direction that any isolated foals are to be shot (noting there are other provisions in the SOP that also minimise the risk in relation to abandoned foals, such as the fly back procedures and the requirement for thermal equipment). The planning and administration of the program takes into account the fact that foals are present all year, but can be in higher numbers at certain times of the year.

No. Question**2. RSCPA feedback on welfare concerns page 40**

The CHAIR: I have one last follow-up question to some of the questions asked by the Hon. Wes Fang. I know you mentioned that welfare provisions were put into place in regard to the fact that aerial shooting would happen during foaling season and that those welfare provisions were to be aware and vigilant to make sure that the foals were shot and to

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prioritise shooting foals before their mothers. Did you get further feedback from the RSPCA that that adequately addressed their major concerns around shooting during foaling season?

ATTICUS FLEMING: Off the top of my head I can't recall that, but I'm happy to take it on notice.

The CHAIR: If you could take on notice, first of all, whether the RSPCA were asked to give further feedback that that addressed some of those welfare concerns and, if they did give feedback, if you could also provide that feedback on notice as well, that would be good.

ATTICUS FLEMING: Yes.

Answer:

Please refer to the response to question 1 which highlights that RSPCA advice has been taken into account at multiple stages in developing and amending the SOP for aerial shooting.

In relation to this question. no additional written feedback was provided after finalisation of the SOP for ongoing operations. However, the RSPCA has an ongoing role to observe and audit compliance with the SOPs and relevant legislation. Any additional feedback from the RSPCA will be taken into account as the National Parks and Wildlife Service continues to deliver the highest possible animal welfare outcomes.