Submission No 41

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED AERIAL SHOOTING OF BRUMBIES IN KOSCIUSZKO NATIONAL PARK

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 11 September 2023

I write in support of the proposal to utilise aerial culling of feral horses in Kosciusko National Park (KNP). I have a PhD in equine welfare and decades of experience working with horses as a horse trainer as well as working with various industry organisations in the field of animal welfare assessment including of horses. I am currently undertaking a post doctoral fellowship investigating equine welfare assessment.

The evidence for the necessity of reducing feral horse impacts in KNP is strong and widely supported by the scientific community, NPWS and many visitors to the park. While there are some in the general community as well as brumby supporter and rehoming groups who dispute the evidence about horse damage or the numbers within KNP, there are now several decades of studies and systematic observation of feral horse damage within a wide range of sensitive and unique alpine environments.

It is clear that the current approach to reducing horse impacts by reducing their numbers in some areas of the park is insufficient to substantially reduce their negative impacts, leading to the ludicrous outcome that fences have to be erected to protect rare species such as Corrobboree frogs and the Stocky Galaxia from the horses. There are negative welfare risks for all methods that are used to remove feral horses from KNP, and the assessment of these risks has already be undertaken by x. When considering the welfare risks of various control or removal methods, consideration of the intensity, duration and frequency of the welfare insult can assist to determine the most humane control methods. Welfare insults that are of stronger intensity, longer duration or occur more frequently generate a higher risk of very poor welfare outcomes.

While passive trapping and transport may on the surface appear to be lower intensity it carries significant risks from injury during trapping and transport due to the fact that the horses are wild, have no prior experience of being confined and respond to confinement and stimulus that frighten them with flight responses and/or aggression towards other horses. The duration of time horses are exposed to these risks can be several days depending on how long they spend in traps and the duration of journeys. In addition, these journeys expose horses to psychological stress due to the confinement and novelty of the experience.

Ground shooting, is the culling method with the least welfare risk because it doesn't involve exposing the horses to extreme fear from being chased prior to shooting. However it carries a risk that wounded horses will also not be followed up.

Aerial shooting does carry welfare risks, though these can be mitigated by using excellent marks people and ensuring that all animals are shot a sufficient number of times to ensure they are killed. Animals that are shot and remain upright should be followed up in a short period of time.

Aerial culling does expose horses to a high intensity welfare risk during the pursuit and it is likely during the pursuit their welfare will be poor due to extreme fear and strenuous physical responses to escape/avoid the helicopter. However, provided appropriate protocols are put in place to ensure all animals are quickly dispatched and long chases are

avoided, the duration of this welfare insult can be kept to a minimum. Culling should not be undertaken where there is a likelihood that wounded animals won't be followed -up.

The current methods being employed carry these risks, howeDespiute claims to the contrary, passive trapping and road transport, either to a rehomer or to slaighter carry significant physical and psychological welfare risks from injury, separation of family bonds, exposure to poor handling. Ground shooting by experienced markspeople where follow-up shots can be delivered where required