

Submission
No 43

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

Name: Name suppressed
Date Received: 13 September 2023

Partially
Confidential

The protection of wild horse heritage values in Kosciuszko National Park is currently based on maintaining a population of 3,000 horses. However, this number was initially derived from a 2020 survey estimate of 14,380 horses, which implies a plan to reduce the population by 11,380. Removing such a large number of horses could potentially lead to their complete extinction in the park, which would contradict the 2018 legislation.

Surveys using Distance Software have produced estimates that are scientifically questionable, suggesting population increases of 41% per year, which is double the accepted scientific maximum. Other official surveys in 2020 have produced estimates far below the published figures, indicating the unreliability of computer-generated estimates.

Actual head counts in some areas, such as North Kosciuszko, have yielded significantly lower numbers compared to the published estimates. Independent research based on the results of the Montague Drake survey from 2005 and a realistic population increase of 16% suggests a much lower estimated population of 975 horses in the North Kosciuszko region.

Given that 85% of the horses in the park are concentrated in North Kosciuszko, it appears that there are already fewer than the intended 3,000 horses in the park, as stipulated by the plan.

A call for a new head count using helicopter spotting, with involvement from local brumby advocates, has been proposed. This approach is believed to produce more realistic numbers in line with scientific findings.

Regarding the impact of wild horses on the environment, there is a dispute about whether they pose a significant threat to native fauna and flora. Independent studies and published peer-reviewed research on the effects of wild horses in Australia are lacking, as confirmed in the ITRG report.

The argument is made that wild horses can have beneficial effects on the ecosystem, including reducing bushfire fuel loads, aiding in seed dispersal, fertilizing soil, and contributing to groundwater replenishment. Research results are cited to suggest that wild horse grazing may not significantly impact plant communities.

However, the main threats to the environment in the park are attributed to human development, tourism, catastrophic fires, diseases like Chytrid and Cinnamon Fungus, climate change, predation by carnivores, and competition from other invasive species like rabbits, wild pigs, and deer. The damage caused by these factors is considered more significant than that caused by wild horses.

In terms of management, it is argued that before deciding on any management approach, an accurate population count is essential. If there are already fewer than 3,000 horses in the park, the plan to maintain that number through annual removals for rehoming and contraception control is proposed as a humane approach. Lethal management methods, such as shooting, are strongly opposed due to ethical and practical concerns. Ground shooting is deemed particularly inhumane and impractical for managing wild horses.

The legislation and recorded speeches emphasize a commitment to non-lethal management methods and the relocation of horses from sensitive areas to ensure their preservation as part of the park's heritage.

In conclusion, this submission advocates for a reevaluation of the wild horse population in Kosciuszko National Park, the involvement of local brumby advocates in future head counts, and the prioritization of non-lethal management methods while addressing other significant environmental threats in the park. It also questions the reliability of computer-generated population estimates and highlights the lack of independent research on the effects of wild horses in the Australian environment.