

Submission
No 52

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

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

Thank you for the opportunity to put in a submission to the Inquiry into the proposed shooting of brumbies in Kosciuszko National Park.

SUMMARY

I am concerned that some extremely narrow minded people think that the only solution to maintain the wilderness environment of Kosciuszko National Park (KNP) is to murder heritage brumbies.

There are many issues with KNP and the proper scientific evidence suggests that few, if any, of those are made worse by the brumbies.

The heritage brumby numbers in the park are now quite small and do not create problems in KNP.

Addressing the Terms of Reference

- (a) The methodology used to survey and estimate the brumby population in 2019 and 2022 has now been shown to be flawed. Claire Galea (an Independent biostatistician) has produced an independent report dated 20 May 2023 which proves that Dr Cairns estimates of the number of brumbies is incorrect.

A recount must be done. NPWS do estimates for themselves and they show less than 1000 brumbies in the NSW areas of the park (obtained under FOI)

Another independent recount was done in 2023 and it again showed less than 1000 left.

Dr Cairns flawed estimates have also been used to justify the murder of our kangaroos and raise serious questions about this entire methodology.

These false estimates must be ignored and a proper recount done with Claire Galea and Joanne Canning- a qualified Equine Scientist, in charge.

- (b) **There is no justification for proposed aerial shooting** as the estimated of brumbies in the park has been shown to be false and exaggerated. No brumby can have 7 foals in a year. After a proper recount is done it will show that the number of brumbies are not in numbers that will create any problems. In fact cattle are now kept in the Long Plain area over summer to keep the grass down so obviously there are not large numbers of brumbies in the area. Both the Scientific Advisory Panel and the Independent Technical Reference Group (ITRG) recommend that the removal of horses should be based on adverse environmental impacts at specific site localities rather than based on total population numbers. NPWS continue to ignore their own expert advice, and it would be useful to discover the reasons for this.

- (c) The status and threats to endangered species in the park.

There are many and varied threats to the endangered species in the park. Snowy 2.0 is a major threat to endangered stocky galaxias who live in a creek upstream of Tantangara.

An invasive native fish the climbing galaxias live in the Talbingo reservoir (they were introduced from the coastal streams when the original Snowy was built). Water pumped from Talbingo will transfer this invasive fish to Tantangara. This fish can climb and will compete for food and will prey on the stocky galaxias to their detriment. Snowy 2.0 has also applied for an exemption under the NSW biosecurity legislation to permit this transfer and also two other non native fish, the redfin perch and the eastern gambusia, both will wipe out the stocky galaxias. These fish will also create problems for other headwaters e.g

Murrumbidgee, Snowy and Murray rivers. Introduced trout are also a huge threat as well as the fisherman who love to walk up and down the creeks as they fish for trout.

Snowy 2.0 will also dump rock excavated into the two reservoirs and this will pollute water storage and rivers downstream. We are now told that this rock could contain asbestos.

The E.I.S is incomplete and Snowy 2.0 appears to have no intention of producing an accurate assessment of all the problems and possible solutions to environmental damage.

Snowy 2.0 is now wanting to put the transmission lines above ground and clear one kilometre of bushland around the lines. This will cause far more damage than any brumbies.

Unfortunately a lot of species that can be found in the park have endangered status.

Pygmy Possum – horses are not in the same habitat.

Corroboree Frog – unfortunately a fungus (*Batrachochytrium Dendrobatidis*) and climate change are the main problems – the frog is found at attitudes above 1300 metres. Work is being done to save the frogs. Again the horses are not the problem and are not in these areas. The removal of cattle stopped some of the Corroboree frogs from breeding in the cow pads and this has decreased their numbers and increased the bushfires in the park.

Broad toothed rat- live in wide areas, they face problems with cats, foxes, ski resorts roads, are often mistaken for ordinary rats as has happened with Snowy 2.0 where poison was used to kill the rats in the living quarters of the staff. No studies indicate horses are a problem.

Alpine treefrog – limited information available, chytrid fungus and climate change appear to be the problems- widely distributed in Alpine areas – share only a small area with the horses.

Guthega Skink and Alpine Sheoak Skink. Not in horse areas.

The same for most of the endangered plants the horses are not a problem. Deer will eat endangered plants, horses eat native grasses.

Kosciuszko National Park faces many problems and the brumbies are not the major problem.

Snowy 2.0 is a disaster, the Ski lodges do not comply with the conditions put on them, the sewage is a major issue. The skiers have no regard for the high country and bike riders are also not interested in the welfare of the park.

Lately I have noticed that the staff are now many contractors who also have no respect for, or knowledge of the high country.

- (d) The heritage value of wild horses in KNP and the importance of the horses to the local and wider community are recognised by the final report of the Scientific Advisory Panel (SAP 2021).

Aerial shooting of horses is extremely barbaric and cruel and should never be used. Recently ground shooting has occurred in the park and the results show that only one horse was shot in the head, most were left to die horrible deaths and two bushwalkers were almost killed in the horrible murders.

- (e) The animal welfare concerns associated with aerial shooting.

With aerial shooting even the RSPCA recognise that the very best kill rate is 63% and that is on flat and open terrain with no trees and only small mobs . In an area like KNP an expert shooter would be lucky to get one clean head shot. FFAST and the Military state that 'shooting from a moving platform to a moving target is highly inaccurate with a narrow margin for a kill shot'. With a helicopter in the air the horses would panic and the damage to them would be horrible, the scene would look like a war zone, injured animals and the

bush would suffer. NPWS have stated that any dead horses will not be removed and any in waterways will also stay. This will increase foxes and pigs in larger numbers and pigs can have 8-10 babies at a time.

There can be no justification for aerial shooting or any shooting or taking to knackeries, which is what is happening at present. There are not the numbers of brumbies in the park to warrant such barbaric cruelty to our heritage brumbies.

(f) Human safety concerns. People like myself love to bushwalk in the park, others like to camp, some even to fish. If the park remains open during 'operations' there will be a human injuries or death. A lot of people (like myself) are very familiar with the park and love to walk in out of the way places and some love to try to find horses because they are so beautiful to see and to watch. These people will be at high risk of injury or death from bullets or the panicking horses. The idea of closing the park to commit murder is not what the park is meant to be for, it is meant to be for the people to enjoy and the murder of our brumbies is not what people want.

(g) Impact of previous aerial shooting.

The previous aerial shooting operations such as Guy Fawkes National Park was a horrible part of NSW's total disregard for animal welfare. It was a disgrace. Charges were laid against National Park Staff by RSPCA and those staff pleaded guilty to stop the court case which would have shown how cruel and barbaric this was. The guilty plea was to stop the damning evidence becoming public.

The Australian Veterinary Association released their own statement 'Firstly we would like to express our outrage at the apparent lack of concern by NPWS or the welfare of the many horses which suffered terribly in this incident'.

Michael Keenan in his book 'In Search of a Wild Brumby' says that he and others did an analysis of 52 Skeletons that they found. Only 1 was a clean kill- that is shot to the head. Most shots were to the pelvis, back and legs, some chest. All of which would have produced extreme suffering to the animal. The bodies were left where they eventually fell creating an environment where pigs and foxes could thrive. Waterways were also polluted in these murders.

Singleton Air Base murdered approximately 200 brumbies in aerial shooting in a cruel way. Local brumby rehorners would have taken the lot, they could have been rehomed. I am told some personnel on the base were sickened and very distressed over something that should never have happened.

(h) The availability of alternatives to aerial shooting.

Non lethal fertility control could be considered if the horse numbers expanded in the future. Financial help for rehorners should be considered as well as financial support for a horse sanctuary for the brumbies.

At present proper scientific research estimates that there are less than the 3000 heritage brumbies left and they help to reduce the need for the cattle that are up in the high country over summer (despite the cattle and cattlemen being removed from the park quite a while ago). The bushfire threat is very real in the high country and National Parks do not have a

good record in controlling fires in National Parks as in 2019/2020 where the farmers in the areas surrounding the park paid the heaviest price because the National Parks let the fire go.

- (i) As someone who has spent some time in Kosciuszko National Park I unfortunately do not see a pristine wilderness. I see horrible ski lodges and the sewage smells around them. I see skiers who have no respect for the high country and in places the park looks like a dump. I talk to rangers who are contractors and it's just a job to them.

There needs to be a lot more proper scientific work to be done on how everything relates to everything else and that must include the heritage horses and people as well as all the infrastructure that is currently in the park.

Climate change will be a key component in any study.

The brumbies are being used as a scape goat for all the problems in the park and they are not the main problem. They do more good than harm particularly in what could be a bad bush fire season.

NPWS talk about damage caused by hard hoof horses. As Craig C Downer (wildlife ecologist and environmentalist) explains they need to look at the horse's hoof and they will see that the underside of the hoof is naturally designed to protect the soil where they tread, the shape is round and the surface area is relatively large. The hoof is concave on the underside and that tends to trap water and air under the hoof and allows it to 'float' on the soil. As well brumbies are nomadic and enrich their local environment and promote biodiversity with their unique digestive systems which allows for regeneration of seeds and grasses, as well as their selective grazing patterns which creates habitats for bugs and small birds.

Another aspect is that I have been receiving (uninvited) posts on facebook from Invasive Species Council and Reclaim Kosci telling me that the brumbies are the cause of all the problems in the park. They lie about the damage that is caused by brumbies. The photos are not brumby damage but actually pig and deer damage and they then say the brumbies are pushing unique Aussie animals to the edge e.g. the corroboree frogs, pygmy possum, broad toothed rat and 34 threatened species directly harmed by brumbies. This is a lie and Invasive Species Council are given State and Federal money to peddle lies and mistruths. Government money should be spent on proper research and not an ill informed lobby group who lie to get more Government funding. They are a bit like PwC.

The final report of the Scientific Advisory panel (SAP2021) recognised the heritage value and importance of the wild horses in KNP and the importance of the horses to the local and wider community.

I would like to see the heritage brumbies recognised as an essential part of KNP, similar to the huts and the old mines.

The horses must stay.

Thank you.

Lynette Desmond