

**Submission  
No 72**

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

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## Submission Inquiry

Dear Members of this Inquiry

**This submission inquiry will deal with the issues surrounding brumbies, including the questionable counting methods, flawed methodologies, brutal killings, and heartbreaking trapping they have endured for far too long.**

I am vehemently opposed to the cruelty of aerial shooting, a heartless approach that should never be considered. The Minns government showed a complete lack of compassion and made an amendment to the Wild Horse Management Plan to include the aerial shooting of brumbies in Kosciuszko National Park ('KNP'). They reintroduced aerial killing. The images I saw were deeply shocking and distressing, and we must take action to end aerial shooting. I am absolutely disgusted that this government took this action. They obviously did not consider the public's opposition to aerial shooting in the recent public submission process. The Labor state government chose aerial shooting of brumbies because it is the cheapest and expedient way to deal with a problem that they feel is all because of the presence of brumbies in the **Kosciuszko National Park**. The reason given was to protect native wildlife and the biodiversity of the Snowy Mountains and blame all the problems on the brumby. It is a pity that this same determination to protect our biodiversity is not applied when assessing fossil fuel projects (controversial Narrabri coal seam gas project with 850 wells already approved by Independent Planning Commission NSW) or logging forests that causes habitat destruction (eg Tallaganda State Forest and the destruction of the Southern greater glider's habitat and extensive logging of koala habitat in the proposed Great Koala National Park).

This LETHAL MANAGEMENT program was used because the brumby was singled out as the only cause of the biodiversity loss in the KNP. This is wrong for two reasons – 1. The incredible cruelty attached to aerial shooting and 2. The actual numbers of brumbies counted are also incorrect and did not warrant this extreme measure taken a few days ago in the first place. We therefore MUST protect brumbies and have a moratorium on this inhumane killing method and end it completely. **Aerial shooting is ruthless and inhumane – a heartless approach that should never be an option.** The government is strongly urged to 1. study the actual numbers of brumbies first and obtain reliable and correct data to ascertain whether any action is even required, 2. If any action is required the use of ONLY non-lethal methods MUST be employed because of animal sentience and changed community expectations that reflect humane animal welfare outcomes, 3. Look fairly and without biases towards brumbies that there are other reasons why our native flora and fauna in these alpine regions are negatively impacted. The brumby for far too long has been demonised as being the cause of this biodiversity loss. Following is further information on these issues raised.

### **1. Concerns regarding the inaccurate population estimates.**

- To date the Minns Labor Government have relied on a survey undertaken by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in November 2022, which estimated 18,814 brumbies remained in KNP. This boasts a 95 per cent level of confidence that the population is between 14,501 and 23,535 horses – an obviously huge variance and gap by anyone's standards. Then, this NPWS survey found brumby numbers had increased by 31 per cent in the past two years, up from 14,000 horses in 2020. The survey doesn't appear to have taken into consideration the death of KNP brumbies during the NSW bushfires or the actual breeding cycles and capacity which dictates wild horse reproduction. The gestation period for horses is 11 to 12 months and foals are weaned at around 9 months old. Claire Galea has said that "If we look at North Kosciuszko for the wild horses and go with the population estimates the government says, a mare would have to produce seven foals a year."
- **Implausible population estimates** show that in a peer review of the 2019 population survey, by St Andrews University Scotland, population increases were well beyond the usual published population increases for these animals. Equine science expert Joanne Canning noted up to 41% annual increases in brumby populations in some parts of the park were described as 'biologically impossible' for this species that in favourable conditions will only increase to a maximum 20% per annum. 17% is the average increase in normal conditions and less when natural disasters occur that results in a decrease.
- **Flawed Survey Methodology**- In 2021 **biostatistician Claire Galea** who was involved in the 'Kangaroo Inquiry into the Health and Well-being of Kangaroos and other Macropods' in NSW, along with Penny Sharpe, our current environment minister **both** expressed concerns about the counting methodologies for kangaroos

then. Why hasn't our environment minister reflected these same concerns for consistency now in the brumby count as it uses the same methodology?

- The government numbers of wild horses in these alpine regions are grossly over estimated because it is based on the Cairns methodology which has been proved to be flawed. 'Distance Software' was applied to elevate these numbers even higher to justify a massive cull of brumbies! Using this software to estimate these numbers is clearly not working. **The results are not biologically possible for this species and therefore these surveys are not working as they are not scientifically sound.** *All surveys conducted with helicopter would involve double counting because, for the most part, horses will most certainly run from one transect to another.* Joanne Canning studied the numbers and found that in 2014 NPWS actual headcount was 1637, and they used a total aerial estimate of 3255 which was an increase by the computer software of 970%. Then in 2020 again NPWS actual headcount of 2468, made an estimate of 12511 which was an increase by the computer software of 1630%. This is not valid or reliable and represent illogical numbers.
- Calculations were also made by Montague Drake starting with the results of the 2005 survey and then using a realistic scientific wild horse population increase per year of 17% to 2023. Their figures included the continued culling of populations each year to reach a park estimate of 1285 brumbies in 2023 that does not include the 2023 culling figures. This is well under the 3000-threshold set by the government. So, the number of brumbies in these alpine regions is much lower than the numbers the government cites are there.
- I am, therefore, deeply concerned with the flawed methodology and statistical modelling used to estimate the population numbers of wild horses in KNP. Concerns by others like Peter Cochran who has lived there for decades says his estimates sat around 3000-4000 wild horses in KNP, "if that". A recent volunteer headcount, conducted in the park by brumby supporters over two days, saw only 853 wild horses. These concerns have not been adequately addressed by the government, who ignores any comments that do not support their agenda. It is critical that any government decisions be supported by facts and independent scientific evidence which has been clearly missing in the brumby cull.

**2. Concerns for the inhumane treatment of brumbies. The government banned aerial culling in 2000 and RSPCA is opposed to shooting from a helicopter because it can be inaccurate, causing great suffering and a longer death. Use of 1080 baiting is inhumane.**

I firmly believe that the NSW Government should not have backflipped on the aerial shooting of brumbies ban that was introduced in 2000. Following the infamous October 2000 Guy Fawkes River National Park aerial shooting over 3 days 606 brumbies were shot, that left many to suffer for days afterwards, the then NSW Minister of the Environment issued a ban on the practice. Even though a review of the shooting found it was carried out appropriately, it shocked and outraged the Australian public, myself included. One horse was found alive days after being shot twice. This event caused significant public distress and anger and resulted in the complete NSW prohibition of using aerial shooting as a lethal control method for brumbies. How quickly our current environment minister dismisses the claim that aerial shooting is inhumane.

The aerial shooting of brumbies was revisited and refused in 2016, as it should have been today. The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service also initially refused to consider resuming aerial shooting in 2023. The RSPCA also does not recommend aerial shooting, due to a lack of research in its 'humaneness' and due to the significant and adverse animal welfare implications and immense suffering it causes. This is not acceptable practice, and the government must start listening to the community's concerns. Ground shooting has continued as in May this year 67 brumbies in KNP were shot in the neck and left to bleed out. Pregnant mares and foals also perished. The true extent of these killings and fate of these horses is unknown. The government brumby shooting and trapping is not humane.

It is therefore totally unacceptable that Minister Sharpe strongly supported the aerial shooting method in the first place and then followed through on this action extremely quickly. This indicates that there would not have even been sufficient time to listen to the communities' viewpoints on this issue. The public were given a voice through the submission process on the 'Aerial Shooting of Brumbies in Kosciuszko National Park' which closed to the public on the 11/9/23. The brumby cull has already occurred in less than a month. This clearly shows me that this government did not listen to the issues raised by the community. My submission was ignored because I was opposed to aerial shooting.

I firmly believe that aerial shooting is a controversial method and cannot be considered a “humane” death. Helicopters are affected by light winds, updrafts, and turbulence and do not provide a stable enough platform to be able to shoot a moving target accurately or humanely. It is incredibly difficult for a shooter to achieve a headshot and even if it is executed, it still does not guarantee an instant kill. Accounts from shooters themselves admit their own inaccuracy and the inhumane nature of shooting from helicopters. They recalled “often they [the shooters] ended up missing the horse’s brain, taking out its jaw or something else instead. The consequences of which was often seriously maimed horses escaping into tree cover where they would later die a slow and painful death.” Unweaned foals can also be left to fend for themselves and potentially starve to death or face attack from predators.

I am concerned that the killing of brumbies will increase the lethal control of other animals, particularly the native and ecologically important dingo. The current plan stated that “there is a significant risk that the implementation of an aerial shooting program will result in a loss of the social licence to remove wild horses from the national park”, and this is what we are now seeing with the many carcasses rotting on the landscape. Horrible images! Former MP Peter Cochran has called for a Royal Commission into the NPWS activities. This has created another issue of attracting feral pigs and dogs. To counteract this problem often the NPWS increase wild dog baiting by six times the usual volume. So, we now have another issue of poisonous baiting which can affect our native wildlife that may consume this poison or poison leakage into rivers or streams where platypus reside in the KNP. Interestingly the platypus is likely now to meet the criteria of a threatened listing. The government’s actions are directly impacting wildlife like the Corroboree Frog which is also listed as critically endangered under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 NSW. Back in June this year NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service’s silence on brumby carcasses left in Kosciuszko National Park caused more community outcry. The 2021 Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan says the disposal of carcasses presents logistical challenges. The government creates the problem with no solution offered to solve it. Despite repeated requests for specifics, none were provided by NPWS or Environment Minister Penny Sharpe. The minister wouldn’t confirm if the department had consulted with the DPI on methods of carcass disposal to prevent contamination of water (ground and waterways) and to ensure the safety of the community, other stock, the environment, native wildlife, and disease spread. This will be an ongoing problem for the government as community resentment increases on this issue. It is time that the government look at more humane methods of population control rather than create another problem of carcass removal or leaving carcasses to spread disease, increase feral animals or degrade the land and waterways.

The NSW Government proposal states that some horse carcasses will not be removed and that they will undertake “enhanced and targeted” control of dingoes. Policy spin to condone the use of this poison. 1080-baiting programs are used to target dingoes in Kosciuszko National Park. 1080 poison is known to cause severe and prolonged suffering, so *the proposal to increase the killing of brumbies will also increase the suffering in other species, too*. This is not how I want my public money used – to cause extensive and extended animal suffering of many species. This is outrageous that the government condones this cruelty.

1080 poison does not always work on dingoes. Despite continuously being targeted, studies from the 1980s on show that 1080 baiting simply isn’t working on dingoes (but works on other animals- rodents that are consumed by birds). Two studies in KNP confirmed that non-target animals were taking the bait instead. One study found that out of nine dingoes, only one was killed in a 1080-baiting program. In another, only one out of eight dingoes were killed. Overall, baiting only reduced the number of dingoes by 22%. It is time for the government to implement other, non-lethal methods, and invest in research and development FIRST to humanely manage animal populations. The government tries to control one problem and then creates another problem. ***If they had of invested in non -lethal methods in the first place like contraceptive measures to control brumby populations, we would not have the issue of 1080 baiting having to be used to control feral animals and poisoning native wildlife and waterways instead.***

### **3. Concerns for threatened species and the issues of human activity on their survival in the KNP**

With littered dead and decaying brumbies across the landscape, biosecurity concerns are not even recognised by this government, particularly the negative impacts on groundwater and waterways. Ground shooting of brumbies has continued over the years, even though there was a pause on aerial shooting.

Footage of decomposing remains downriver from Lake Jindabyne was captured in September 2022 by Ian and Michelle Brown of Snowy Brumby Photography Adventures. Their comment follows- “You can see that whole area is a water catchment area, you can see all the little streams and creeks in pristine condition feed the Eucumbene River,

but NPWS have left 12 horses there to rot. Last week they stated it's against their management practices and policy to leave dead horses near water, yet this whole area is catchment," Mr Brown said. He contacted the NSW Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) twice to report potentially polluted waters in Kosciuszko National Park. "They said they were interested so I sent them what I had but I never heard back from them." NSW EPA said Mr Brown's reports were not a matter for them and had referred them to the NPWS in October 2022. This is a perfect example of 'passing the buck' between government departments and no one recognising there is a problem or attempting to solve it.

The amendment to employ aerial shooting of brumbies was proposed due to concerns for threatened species in KNP. I want our threatened species protected also. However, I am outraged that horses are being blamed while other adverse impacts caused by human activity are ignored. Human activities, such as the creation of dams and the Snowy Hydro Scheme-Snowy 2, the use of 1080 poison, horse riding tours, 4-wheel driving, increased tourism and the building of more infrastructure, snow sports, bike riding tracks, more roads, agricultural run-off, and illegal hunting all impact native species survival. Let us not just demonise the brumby, man's footprint, and the government's insatiable desire to develop in these alpine regions is also affecting our native wildlife. Environmental scientist, Frankie Seymour, described the Government's plan as *"short-sighted, environmentally counterproductive, and extremely cruel. The government appears to have decided to ignore the humane alternative options while also declining to address any of the other human-based activities that are damaging the biodiversity of the Snowy Mountains like land clearing, roads, weeds, ski resorts, the long legacy of grazing sheep and cattle, and natural disasters such as fires, droughts, and the many recreational users and rising snowlines driven by anthropogenic climate change."*

There are many factors that are attributed to declining environmental values in the KNP. Government building approvals for more accommodation must be viewed cautiously as this leads to more roads, more land disturbance and of course more people causing further biodiversity loss.

Visitors, agriculture, construction, climate change and natural disasters are all affecting the biodiversity in KNP.

While the NSW State Government claims to be focussed on protecting native species, the factual record is a disgrace, with 1,043 species listed as endangered/threatened in NSW. The lack of meaningful actions by the NSW Labor Government only further diminishes its 'environmental' credibility. Proactive recovery plans with appropriate funding are needed for our threatened wildlife in the KNP and throughout NSW. When we see unsustainable logging, fossil fuel expansion, extensive urban sprawl, this is affecting our wildlife and their ability to survive. The government's standard to restore and protect native wildlife and their habitat is failing and this is also reflected in the KNP. But instead of taking responsibility for over-development and animal agriculture, the brumbies are blamed. This strategy deflects responsibility away from the government for their own actions that has also caused a decline in environmental values.

The government are not listening to scientists on the issues of fauna and flora risks in the area anyway. One example is the Corroboree Frog whose threats are chytrid fungus, climate change, droughts, floods, wildfires, and predation by carnivores. Egg, tadpole, and adult frog survival rates is severely impacted by natural disasters. Climate change exacerbates natural disasters and is caused by man. Horses are herbivores not carnivores, so they do not affect the Corroboree Frog. But their littered carcasses in the area caused by man, can increase carnivore predation which does affect this species. The final threat is the fungus, spread by a species living alongside the Corroboree Frog, the Common Eastern froglet. This species appears to sustain high infection levels but does not develop the disease itself but allows transmission to the Corroboree Frog. **The government MUST start to look at holistically all the threats to our endangered wildlife in this region, and not singularly cast the blame to the brumby to eradicate as the solution. Specific solutions for each species with a proactive recovery plan and appropriate funding attached is recommended. This is how you will solve the fauna and flora crisis in the KNP. But government commitment and financial funding is lacking.**

#### **4. I support alternative, non-lethal methods, such as fertility control.**

The people of NSW do not support aerial killing, shooting, and trapping and killing of brumbies. There are other strategies that can and must be used like-

- removals for rehoming,

-relocating to less sensitive areas,

-contraceptive population control. This **MUST** be introduced quickly to ensure that this callous way to deal with 'supposed exploding' numbers of brumbies (although this is questionable anyway) is **NEVER** dealt with by inhumane aerial shooting. **Contraceptive population control is more humane and will reduce foal births as well as solve the problem of removing dead horses from the KNP which is a biosecurity risk also.**

I support the use of alternative, non-lethal control methods, such as fertility control using vaccines, which have proven effective in other countries. The vaccines affect their hormones or important proteins, stopping animals from releasing eggs, producing sperm, and having offspring. People against the use of fertility control often focus on how much work it takes, especially in large areas. Yet, the same kind of criticism can be said about lethal control, including shooting. In Australia, the standards for shooting horses both on the ground and from the air agree with this concern. They specifically say that shooting from the air requires even more work than shooting on the ground because it involves a helicopter, pilots, and shooters. Other complaints about the use of fertility control argue that people need to get close to horses to give them the vaccine. Yet, people who shoot animals also need to get close, and just like giving vaccines, their success depends on their skill and the range of their guns. The public support effective and humane options, not cruel lethal methods.

In Europe, they used a special vaccine called PZP to control the population of wild horses in a place called the Romanian Danube Delta. In one study, they gave the PZP shot to some female horses and after one year, half of them received a second shot. In the following year, only 14.6% of the female horses who received the vaccine became pregnant. This was very different from the 81.5% pregnancy rate in the group of horses that didn't get the vaccine. Also, it's important to note that 44% of the horses didn't get the second vaccine. This study showed that using the PZP vaccine to stop horses from producing offspring is effective. I understand that these vaccines are not approved for use in Australia, however, I believe the government should consider this option through robust research and development and approve this vaccine. This is the way of the future, and this method of population control would be supported by the public. The government is encouraged to stop using past outdated cruel inhumane methods of control and be more progressive in their thinking. You will satisfy and solve two arguments at the same time by controlling brumby numbers that protects the biodiversity of this region which is your argument and ensure humane fertility control that supports the other side of the argument. The government must base their decisions on 'science'.

**5. Community expectations: Australians are concerned about the welfare of animals and expect animals to be treated humanely. Aerial shooting does not align with these values.**

I, like all Australians, expect all animals to be treated humanely. It was evident in 2000, that the Australian public perceived aerial shooting to be cruel and incompatible with good animal welfare and community expectations. Since then, public expectations regarding animal welfare have only increased. If it was wrong then, it is wrong now. *Community resentment will only increase towards the government if they do not cease inhumane aerial shooting.*

As a voting member of the public, I expect elected government members and political parties to declare openly and honestly their policies, positions, and intentions ahead of elections, not after results have been concluded. It is very distressing and disturbing to me that the Chris Minns minority Labor Government has only now, post the March 2023 state election, introduced a proposal to recommence aerial shooting to manage the wild horse populations in KNP. I am totally opposed to this cruel method which has not even been substantiated with correct data on the actual numbers of brumbies to even warrant this action! This is a betrayal to the electorate who thought they were voting for a more compassionate government that cared about protecting native wildlife in the KNP and preventing inhumane animal cruelty towards the brumby. On both counts the Minns government have failed miserably the electorate.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this Inquiry. I hope this leads to change and a government who is willing to listen to the community and solve problems in a better way.

Your sincerely

Janice Haviland