

**Submission
No 73**

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

Organisation: Wagga Wilderness Walkers

Date Received: 5 October 2023

**SUBMISSION TO: Inquiry into proposed aerial shooting of brumbies
in Kosciuszko National Park**

To the NSW Animal Welfare Committee of the Parliament of NSW

From Wagga Wilderness Walkers

5th October 2023

Wagga Wilderness Walkers recognises the importance of Kosciusko National Park to our environment, to our history and to the nation. It is a unique and fragile eco system that once lost will be gone forever. As well as walking through the park, our membership demonstrates its commitment through our involvement in hut protection, maintenance and restoration. Members give of their own time and resources to ensure the historic huts remain a part of this beautiful area.

Wagga Wilderness Walkers (WWW) is concerned that feral horse numbers have exploded from an estimated 14,380 to an estimated 18,814 within two years. WWW believes that this significant rise in numbers demonstrates the efforts of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, (NWPS) since the adoption of the "Wild Horse Management Plan" in 2021, have been inadequate.

WWW shares the concerns of the Invasive Species Council spokesman Jack Gough: *'Our sensitive alpine regions have not evolved to cope with thousands of heavy, hard-hoofed feral horses damaging streams and wetlands and degrading vegetation.'*

The membership of Wagga Wilderness Walkers values the Kosciusko National Park as one of our key wilderness destinations. Our membership comprises serious and experienced bushwalkers, some of whom have been walking the Park for more than two decades. When we do, we are on foot, on made and unmade trails and we can see and experience the terrible damage up close, and yes, it is personal. We walk into remote sites, we camp on the ground, we take drinking water from natural springs and we value the beauty and safety of the national park.

We believe this unique environment is being irreparably damaged and its future is being seriously undermined by invasive plant species and feral animals including wild dogs, feral cats, foxes and of course, feral horses. The increasing numbers of horses demonstrates that they are virtually uncontrolled.

The unique and fragile fauna is being trampled and destroyed everywhere. The pristine mountain streams that in the past have provided our drinking water are being trampled, the mossy stream beds are being churned and destroyed by hard hooves and turned to mud, erosion is evident everywhere and is worsening, and those precious streams, whose waters eventually make their way into our great river systems, are no longer pristine.

One of the worst polluting features, one that is very closely encountered by bush walkers, are the piles and piles of horse manure. The feral horses "mark" territory by evacuating their faeces on top of each-others' to create mountains of shit that are clearly visible to other horses and to everything and everyone else. To encounter these piles of excrement up close is quite frankly, disgusting. The impact on the water that runs off into mountain streams is horrible and dangerous.

WWW membership is alarmed by other damage we see in the Park: foxes; feral cats; wild dogs; bush fire damage; widespread weed infestations. These are enough to put our beautiful park, our national treasure, under extreme pressure. The feral horses act as agents of some of these other environmental factors: spreading the seeds of weeds throughout the park in their faeces and fur;

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damaging native wildlife habitat so that other feral animals have greater opportunity to thrive; damaging and changing the landscape so that fires can take greater hold.

We all agree that horses have played a major role in the history of civilisation and the history of Australia. They are beautiful and powerful animals. Some people love them unconditionally. Others want to make money from the situation by taking visitors to see the “beautiful wild horses”. Unfortunately, in this context, they are not beautiful “wild” animals because they are feral and they are doing irreparable and overwhelming damage to Kosciusko National Park. Furthermore, the horses in this untamed and wild state are also vulnerable to drought, parasites and fires.

While aerial culling is a strategy that might seem cruel, unfortunately, adequate controls were neglected for so long that the national park is now so urgently threatened that aerial culling is necessary. The real cruelty was inflicted by careless people who released horses into Kosciusko in the first place.

Wagga Wilderness Walkers has written to members of the NSW Government calling on them to fully implement the Wild Horse Management Plan adopted in 2021. While WWW considers the NSW Government target of leaving 3000 feral horses as probably too many for a national park, it believes that implementing and maintaining the plan is an important start.

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