INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED AERIAL SHOOTING OF BRUMBIES IN KOSCIUSZKO NATIONAL PARK

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SNOWY MOUNTAINS HORSE RIDERS ASSOCIATION

Keeping Our Heritage Alive...

The Animal Welfare Committee NSW Legislative Council <u>animal.welfare@parliament.nsw.gov.au</u>

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The SMHRA was established in 1985 and is a cohort of long-term local residents & horsemen who surround or adjoin the KNP including descendants of the first settlers and occupiers of the mountain region who have a wealth of generational as well as personal history, knowledge and experience in controlling the brumbies.

It was SMHRA that KNP first called on in 2000 to assist with the original Alpine Horse Management Plan. It was SMHRA who in good faith now regrettably, showed how to and demonstrated passive trapping to KNP staff in 2000-2003.

The following points are the reason for this mountain community's total rejection of the introduction of aerial shooting. We vehemently oppose ANY shooting for control!

- 1. In 2000 NSW Attorney General and Minister for the Environment, Bob Debus stated on 16 November 2000;
 - a. "I have listened to the community on this issue and I have **permanently** banned all aerial culling of all feral horses in all national parks in this state **permanently**"
 - b. **PERMANENT** = *Existing or intending to exist forever!* Collins Australian Dictionary
- 2. In 2000 the RSPCA stated that it had evidence of cruelty against NPWS for helicopter shooting brumbies "We believe it was a cruel operation and that's why we took it before the courts" RSPCA CEO Steve Coleman. Clearly there was enough grounds for a prosecution against NPWS in 2000 regardless of the plea bargain later and it is most unlikely that the operating procedures of cruelty could be any better today.
- 3. The Australian Veterinarian Association (AVA), immediately after the 2000 aerial shooting stated that their policy on helicopter horse culling applies;

- *i. "specifically to open arid and semi-arid country, where helicopters can easily pursue any injured animals to ensure they can be put down without undue suffering", and*
- *ii. "the very rugged forest terrain in the GFRNP is not suitable for this because of the obvious difficulty in conducting the operation in the most humane manner possible."*
- b. Consequently, the Kosciusko National Park is also absolutely not suitable for humane kills on any species.
- 4. The 2021 Plan of Management was developed by several experts over a lengthy time and consultation. The 2021 plan has only been implemented for a short time and has not been given opportunity to do its work. Other methods and measures included in the plan have not even been attempted yet!
- 5. Over the past few decades there have been several population surveys completed by a few different academics. Curiously all surveys were not only using different methodologies each time but surveyed different areas and different area size. Therefore, no comparisons can or should ever be made but always are by the antihorse people. The local community with generational knowledge and intimate landscape experience of the park and its horses, strongly dispute these ridiculous numbers. The numbers are a joke! Even more revealing to us is studying the survey reports that indicate there are many horses in certain areas that we frequent and know very well and know that there are not horses there. We believe that National Parks are deliberately engineering the numbers to justify their eradication plan. This is not only unethical but is possibly criminal to continue using known or at least scientifically challenged data.
- 6. The hundreds of shootings of brumbies over the past 12 months have been an abomination and nothing less. The pregnant mares, orphaned foals and brumbies killed inhumanely is atrocious. This is not including the disastrous carcasses left in public view, in water catchments etc.

Our families were once custodians of the mountains and now we are disgusted with how the government has destroyed this beloved area. The mountains were in much better and pristine condition when our families had cattle there. The shootings in particular have caused major distress and depression in many local people.

7. For over a century, local communities effectively managed brumbies until they were prohibited a few decades ago. The environment of the park has greatly deteriorated since KNP gazettal in 1967. In the 1983 Plan of Management, it was acknowledged that brumbies were having negligible impacts (thanks to control by the mountain horsemen before)

After they kicked us out, NPWS later sought assistance from us in 2000 to develop the first-ever plan for managing horses in high-altitude areas. Passive trapping and other humane methods were demonstrated, but once NPWS acquired the skills from us, they refused further offers of assistance, instead opting to pay private contractors for removal.

Local communities remained committed to assisting with search and rescue operations, fire management, and controlling feral animals and noxious weeds when they cross park boundaries, despite NPWS's disregard for their expertise. The attitude of NPWS, as expressed by Atticus Fleming, now dismisses the intimate knowledge of the local community, undermining the contributions and heritage of generations of mountain people and we are now treated with contempt.

- 8. NPWS have engaged two separate panels of expert & independent scientists in the last 8 years. Both groups recommendations were of removal of horses only based on adverse impacts instead of numbers. However, NPWS continue to arrogantly ignore their own expert advice.
- 9. Independent surveys using other methodologies combined was promised by Mick Pettitt but has never been implemented.
- 10. NPWS breaching the (HOR001) SOP Standard Operating Procedures:
 - *a.* (HOR001) SOP states that "Culling programs should be timed to minimise the risk of orphaning dependent foals or causing abortion when females are in late pregnancy"
 - **b.** The aerial (HOR002) SOP further states *"To minimise the animal welfare implications of leaving dependent foals to die a slow death from starvation, it is preferable not to run aerial shooting programs when mares have dependent young at foot. Foaling is concentrated over spring and summer"*

There is a mountain of evidence that pregnant mares in late pregnancy have been shot. More recently it has been open slather and foals are also being shot.

NPWS can never be trusted again!

Any shooting taking place in areas that will not be closed to the public is outrageously dangerous! Will someone need to be killed for NPWS 'law unto themselves' attitude is held to account?

All the above is nothing less than an arrogant act of bastardry by NPWS. They have arrogantly defied all of their own experts advice and continue to refuse to engage with the local community.

A major recommendation from the Community and Advisory Panels in the Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan was to include the local community for their knowledge and wild horse expertise which would help to gain social licence.

Again all advice has been ignored.

The Minister for the Environment AND the current National Park staff involved in this abomination will forever be remembered as the people who slaughtered our iconic Snowy Brumbies.

Sincerely

Stephen O'Ryan For SMHRA

SMHRA working with KNP staff and vet during trapping trials in 2002

