

**Submission
No 134**

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

Name: Ms Donna Bridgeman

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SUBMISSION IN OPPOSITION TO AERIAL & GROUND SHOOTING OF BRUMBIES IN KNP.

I am vehemently opposed to the NSW government proposed alteration to the Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan to include aerial shooting as a culling method.

The Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan, adopted in 2021, was introduced to reduce Wild Horse numbers to 3000 by 2027. An unofficial count conducted by Karren Summers, Ecologist, using the 2021 NPWS Wild Horse Count Flight map, in June 2023 only counted 653 horses! Well under the wildly overinflated and biologically impossible numbers estimated using the Cairns survey methodology and certainly under the 3000 retention allowed for under the Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan to recognise the heritage value of Wild Horses in Kosciuszko National Park.

There must be an immediate halt to further removals of Wild Horses from Kosciuszko National Park until an official recount is conducted as soon as possible.

The current population counts of Wild Horse numbers in Kosciuszko National Park are flawed, proven by Equine scientist, Joanne Canning and Biostatistician, Claire Galea.

No ground or aerial shooting of Wild Horses should occur because both have been proven to be cruel and inhumane. Passive trapping is the only acceptable method of reducing numbers and re-homing given top priority. Shooting horses in traps is also cruel and unnecessary. Once the official numbers have been confirmed to be under the 3000 retention level, there will be no need for further removals at the current level.

I refer to the report "Assessment of animal welfare for helicopter shooting of feral horses" (Jordan O. Hampton, Glenn P. Edwards, Brendan D. Cowled, David M. Forsyth, Timothy H. Hyndman, Andrew L. Perry, Corissa J. Miller, Peter J. Adams, Teresa Collins)

The report raises questions about whether or not shooting horses from a helicopter is an effective tool to reduce populations. Regardless of how skilled a shooter is, there is no guarantee all horses will be humanely euthanised with a single gunshot, as required by the Standard Operating Procedures and many will be left to die agonisingly slow deaths in the upmost cruel and inhumane way.

The research was conducted in Central Australia, in a flat untreed environment which bears no resemblance to the terrain of high level treed canopies and mountainous areas, where Wild Horses live in NSW and Victoria. The flat central Australian landscape gave clear visibility to shooters. Despite the clear visibility, the shooters delivered 1 to 6 shots per horse. Instead of head or chest shots to provide a quick death to the animal, the horses were peppered with shots to legs, backs, flanks and spines.

Fly back was not prompt, to ensure all the horses were dead. In a treed environment with limited visibility, the fly back time and check for death will be even longer and will lead to extended deaths. The likelihood of locating wounded horses in canopied and mountainous areas is minimal.

This research has concluded that aerial shooting is not a humane and acceptable approach to Wild Horse management in NSW and Victoria. Aerial shooting is influenced by many factors, including

shooter skill, shooter fatigue, helicopter pilot skill and capacity on the day of shooting. The report confirms that aerial shooting cannot and does not satisfy Standard Operating Procedures.

Ground shooting also does not support Standard Operating Procedures as it is difficult to achieve a single head shot to a free roaming horse. Shooting a mob of wild horses will cause the horses to run in fear after the first shot, even if a silencer is used, as the startle of a horse falling to the ground will trigger the herd's flight response. A blood bath will ensue as the shooters attempt the impossible of achieving head shots on fast moving horses. There have been many examples documented of shot horses being found with gut, neck and back wounds, with evidence the animals have suffered long drawn out deaths.

Wild Horses in Kosciuszko National Park are unfairly attributed with the majority of the damage to the park and for the loss of native animals. Deer, wild pigs, feral cats and foxes are responsible for much of the destruction that the horses are blamed for. Removing the Wild Horses will achieve very little to limit further damage and the benefits the horses do bring to the park, such as fuel reduction and seed dispersal, to name a few will be lost.

I own two KNP Brumbies and they are an absolute joy. They are smart, quick to learn and are looking for you to be their leader; they make wonderful domestic horses. Shooting of any description is so indiscriminate and such a waste of a beautiful sentient creature who deserves to be given a second chance as a domestic horse.

I am also involved with running Brumby Clinics in Victoria and NSW to bring Brumby people together to provide training and support for people who have recently acquired a Brumby to provide the best outcome for both the owner and the newly domesticated Brumby.

Wild Horses have co-existed in Kosciuszko National Park for 180 years; please let them be.

Donna Bridgeman

12.10.2023