

**Submission
No 141**

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

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The Chair
Animal Welfare Committee

Inquiry into Proposed Aerial Shooting of Brumbies in Kosciuszko National Park

Thank you for launching this inquiry into the welfare of brumbies and other matters in relation to the brumby population in Kosciuszko NP.

It is time to have the fight over our heritage horses put to an end once and for all. I believe this can be achieved in the scope of this inquiry and I for one hope to get some relief from the mental anguish and grief this issue causes so many animal advocates.

The bias in mainstream media reporting has led to a public perception that the brumby population has exploded out of control and that aerial culling has become a necessary evil. This is simply not true. The Government should be focussing on the true sources of concern rather than using the highly visible brumby as a scapegoat for its failings.

Removing brumbies will likely change nothing, but so much more will be lost forever.

The snowy brumby has a rich heritage dating back to the famous Waler horses of WW1 some of which were developed in the high country. They were revered around the world as the best cavalry horses ever known. Rare and now extinct breeds live on only in the DNA of our Australian brumbies. They are indeed unique and irreplaceable.

As a species, the horse has been beside us in war, peace, prosperous times and depression. They have given all of themselves, as our ancestors have, to build this great nation. I believe our wild horses deserve respect, not betrayal.

For the State Government of the day to cull the iconic Australian snowy brumbies, based on lies and deceit, is an abomination that is bringing worldwide shame on all of us as Australians.

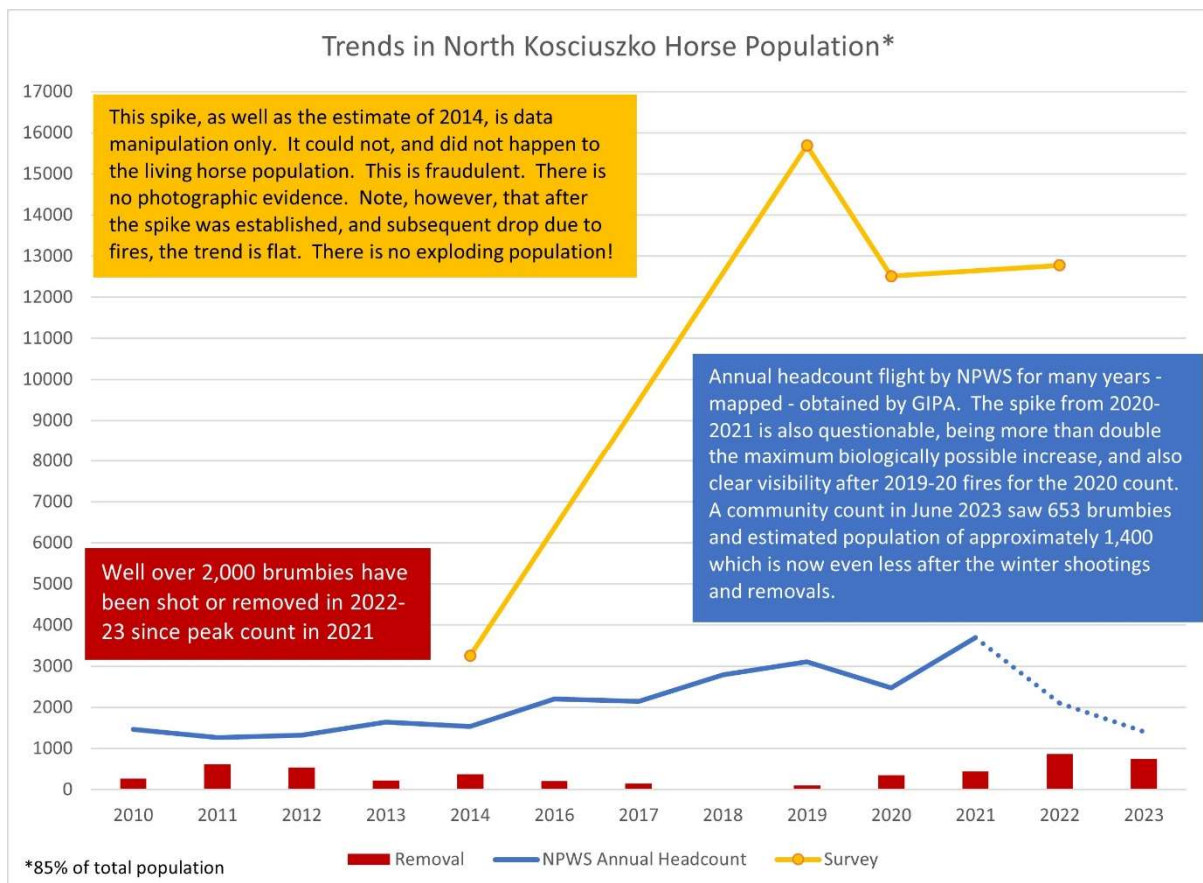
I hope this inquiry can put an end to the madness.

Submission follows

Population Estimates

The graph below outlines the trend in the brumby population of Northern KNP where it is accepted that 85% of the total horse population resides. There are notes on the graph explaining the two trendlines - one of Cairns Distance Sampling and the other NPWS headcount flights. When one compares the two trendlines, it becomes abundantly clear that there is an extreme discrepancy that simply cannot be ignored. Whilst neither report can be relied upon for exact numbers, it is the trend that is case in point here.

The graph also shows a lack of trapping effort between 2016-2019 which allowed the population to increase. However, prior to this point regular removals kept the trendline relatively flat and was at a sustainable level to allow rehorners to keep up with the rate of removal.



In my view, to blatantly ignore these red flags and continue to use these extreme population figures to shoot, trap, and slaughter horses, is not only a breach of legislation and ministerial oath but a criminal act. This action indeed brings the whole of Parliament into disrepute.

To refuse a moratorium on killing until correct data can be ascertained is simply an act of defiance and indeed vengeance.

Rehoming

Rehomers do an amazing job of preparing these horses for a life of domestication. When they are allowed some breathing space between trapping seasons, the system has worked very well. The past 3 years, however, have been non-stop, with many rehomingers at capacity for the whole period with no relief, just the thought that if they don't keep going then horses are subject to shooting or slaughter - I don't know which is worse.

The human welfare of these wonderful people has been disregarded - many are almost going under both mentally and financially, then add a little drought or flood, skyrocketing hay prices and a constant stream of Government lies and deceit and you have a situation that is literally breaking the best of the country's good-natured and generous people. For what? Killing horses achieves nothing for the environment when they are not a big problem.

I personally have adopted 4 Kosciuszko brumbies - soon to be 5 with my adopted mare about to foal. They are the most incredible, bold, cheeky, intelligent characters – just oozing with old Australian spirit. Like many others who own brumbies say, “I'd never own any other horse now”.

Ground Shooting

Time and again, the model Code of Practice and the Standard Operating Procedure for humane shooting of horses has been seemingly disregarded by NPWS and their contractors. Very few horses have been afforded a shot to the brain as is required for instant unconsciousness and therefore, humaneness. I believe the reason for this - as mentioned by RSPCA in their federal submission - the COP and SOP are apparently not mandatory for wild as they are for domestic stock. NPWS and their contractors seem to believe that they are untouchable by law. Are they?

RSPCA also recommended URGENT review of current control methods be undertaken, particularly with regard to ground shooting and the use of shoulder/lung shots to immobilise, rather than rendering the animal instantaneously unconscious, as well as the use of thermal imaging and shooting at night. Horses have been subjected to barbaric "near enough" shooting for long enough. Lethal management must stop now.

How can human safety ever be assured when there seems to be such disregard for SOP?

The Environment

Findings over the past few years have shown many horses decaying in waterways and drainage lines, and close to camping areas - both of which are in breach of the SOP and are an environmental disaster.

The Government is telling the public that this needs to be done to over 20,000 more horses before they're finished. Try and picture 20,000 horses. If this were indeed true, what an abomination! Luckily it is not true - sadly there are very few brumbies left.

NPWS use of 5 times their normal rate of the lethal and barbaric 1080 poison (which is banned in most countries) to combat any rise in dingo and other undesirable scavenger populations as a result of culling operations should be noted for its cruelty as well – to both target species and non-target. The knock-on effect just goes on down the chain.

Horses must also be studied for their positive benefit to the environment before mass removal of a species that has co-existed in harmony with native flora and fauna for over 150 years. Their manure alone is a micro-habitat that feeds insects, pollinators, lizards, birds, and fungi, sequesters carbon and rebuilds soils - particularly after events like fire. Their ability to manage grassland helps to lower fire intensity - a report commissioned by the Invasive Species Council found that the fires of 2019-20 did not burn hot, or at all, in areas with higher horse density - a haven for surviving flora and fauna.

Horses contribute but a fraction of the collective damage of deer, pigs and rabbits, but contribute positively to biodiversity – this cannot be ignored. Countries worldwide are recognising the amazing ability of horses as a species with their unique digestive systems to rebuild ecosystems and reintroducing wild herds to repair them. Ecosystems need large herbivores.

It has also been reported by regular visitors to the park that an increase in pig damage, where it has never been seen before, has occurred after removal of horses from the area. It seems that horses may “hold space” and therefore protect vulnerable species from this impact.

More research must be completed before mass removal of this species.

Aerial Culling

Aerial culling is not humane - realistically or statistically. The idea is to pepper the animal with multiple bullets and hope for hydrostatic shock - they are not trying to achieve a precise brain shot as is considered essential by the RSPCA - because it's simply not possible from a helicopter. The results are horrific - neck, jaw, shoulder, back, gut and leg shots.

In the flat open desert terrain of central Australia with the highest trained personnel and weapons technology, over 37% of horses were determined as NOT killed humanely. The study also warned that these were best-case scenario figures and in variable terrain would not achieve the same result. In a place like Kosciuszko where the terrain is so much more variable, the indiscriminate carnage and suffering would be immense.

Aerial culling in real terms (not on paper, not from an office chair) is off the charts for intensity and pain on the humaneness scale - it is a barbaric practice that should never be allowed to occur. The much-used statement "if done well" is simply NOT achievable in the field.

Imagine if horses vocalised their pain - maybe then we would be able to realise what cruelty we have inflicted upon them.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Immediately remove brumbies from the control of NPWS, instead using an approved contractor with the highest animal welfare standards (independently audited) to manage the appropriate seasonal trapping and rehoming of wild horses. This contractor and their procedures must also be approved by a body such as the Australian Brumby Alliance or similar, as well as independent equine welfare experts. No lethal management is necessary.

Recommendation 2: Undertake a population survey that produces indisputable evidence of the brumby population (including photographic evidence of the raw data as a minimum) which satisfies all stakeholders.

Recommendation 3: An immediate moratorium on all lethal management, including trapping and slaughter at knackeries or abattoirs.

Recommendation 4: Ban the slaughter of brumbies at knackeries or abattoirs, and before it's even suggested, they should never be live-exported.

Recommendation 5: Study the positive impact of brumbies on the environment, one man's 30cm compacted trail is another man's fire break etc. Mass removal could be detrimental to the overall health of the park and all its inhabitants.

Recommendation 6: Tell the public the truth.