

**Submission  
No 151**

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

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## **Submissions** – Inquiry into proposed shooting of Brumbies in KNP

### Introduction

I am an avid horseman of more than 60yrs, from a farming background, regular horse rider in northern region of KNP (**KNP North**) and a former panel member of the *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Community Advisory Panel (CAP)*. I wish to air my most stringent opposition to shooting of Brumbies in KNP.

Not only are Brumbies forever entrenched in the Australian history, culture and folklore, they are also iconic and symbolise in part what Australia is about. Their ancestors helped to develop this land; fought a world war and now, as reward, they roam free as the spirit of our country.

Both the former and current governments clearly stated that:-

- i) A proper population count was necessary; and that
- ii) No aerial culling would be allowed.

(See Hansard transcript of speeches by former the Hon. Dep Premier JOHN BARILARO (previous government) and the then opposition spokesperson, the Hon. PENNY SHARPE.)

### Response to items listed in Terms of Reference

- a) I respectfully submit that the methodology used is very dubious and the accuracy thereof questionable.

The number of Brumbies in KNP North as per Alpine Surveys:-

- i) 2014 – 3,255
- ii) 2019 - 15,687
- iii) 2020 – 12,511
- iv) 2022 – 12,774

These surveys were done by scientists in a classroom situation. They seem to be farfetched and not realistic.

Imagine 3,255 total population in 2014. Make up say 50:50 mare/stallions and included are foals. A horse's gestation period is 11months. Foaling percentages and raising a foal would be varied depending on age, condition, predators (wild dogs) etc. It seems impossible to me for numbers to reach that 2019 level if 2014 was correct.

Between the 2019 and 2020 surveys there were the devastating bushfires (2019/2020) in the region BUT it is generally accepted (NPWS and others) that relatively few horses were lost in the fires or its aftermath. The 2020 report however would suggest that 3,167 horses were lost which is simply not true and therefore these survey numbers are inaccurate.

This issue of population numbers was acknowledged by both sides of the isle as per the comments of the relevant parliamentarians referred to herein (The Hon Barilaro and Sharpe) and to which I respectfully refer.

NPWS own annual counts across the whole KNP reflect Brumbies counted:-

- i) 28 June 2017 – 2,144
- ii) 27 September 2018 – 2,791
- iii) 25 & 26 September 2019 – 3,110

- iv) 26 & 27 June 2020 – 2,468
- v) 27 & 28 September 2021 – 3,699

The government acknowledged the issue regarding population numbers. The Hon. PENNY SHARPE said (See Hansard second reading page 16):

***“Having spoken to other brumby advocates, we accept that there remains an ongoing issue about the count of the number of horses in the park. We have committed to a scientific count of those horses with key stakeholders. We need to put this issue to bed once and for all.”***

The horse riding and Brumby stakeholders (including commercial operators) have always held the view that the number of Brumbies in the KNP North did not exceed 3,000.

During February 2020, shortly after the bushfires I arranged and personally undertook an aerial survey of this area. (**See attached report** that I compiled at the time.) I confirm that the content of the report was to the best of my ability, true and accurate.

If one accepts that in my count we missed some Brumbies and we double the figure, it is still a long way off the 15,687 suggested by the 2019 survey.

Any suggestion of alternative methods to count the Brumbies have to date been ignored or avoided. See in this regard suggestions for:-

- i) Population counts using drone as proposed by CAP Deputy Chair and government advisor Prof. Hugh Durrant-Whyte.
- ii) Dung counts; and
- iii) Actual count (persons sent to particular areas on horseback or 4X4 motorised transport to conduct an actual count – numerous volunteers available and was done recently by *Brumby Sustainability Group*).

- b) I would further respectfully submit that there is no justification for aerial shooting.

Both of the majority political parties have committed to **‘no aerial culling’**. These solemn promises made should be honoured and that in itself should be enough to take this option off the table.

But no culling of any sort should be undertaken until there can be a degree of certainty as to the accuracy of population numbers. Any degree of urgency that now exists, is self-created by the inability or unwillingness of those in power at the time to address the real issue as to numbers, notwithstanding their respective and expressed understanding of the need therefore and their undertakings to do so.

I would refer the Committee to the paper published by the government’s own scientist and expert, the former Chair of the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Scientific Advisory Panel’s) Dr Dave Berman on Brumby impact issues in the Victorian Alps - June 2023.

Dr Berman says the impact damage depends on the *density* of Brumbies. This is not rocket science and any person with a farming background knows about ‘over grazing’ I understand. Dr Berman to say that in areas with a high density of Brumbies, damage is expected but then in areas of a low density, there is no proof that damage occurs.

c) Brumby population numbers in KNP have been reduced significantly in the past months by NPWS's passive trapping and aggressive shooting. Numerous dead Brumby carcasses were left to rot all over the KNP as seen on national TV and these bodies have no doubt polluted water ways and provided feed to the ever increasing in number, feral pigs and wild dogs.

d) A stay on Brumby removals at this stage will not upset the *status quo*. It may in fact slow down the breeding of the said problem pigs and dogs.

It is clear from statements and promises previously made, that both of the major parties reject aerial shooting of Brumbies. Were these statements and promises made to appease constituents and serve as mere window dressing or were they made in furtherance of honest and truthful intentions?

If a ruling party has promised voters a particular course if elected, surely that promise should be fulfilled.

e) My view is that the practise is inhumane, cruel and brutal. In order for the practise to be humane, every shot has to be a fatal and instant death shot. But then too, the potential injuries suffered by the terrified fleeing Brumby to get away, must be considered. The terrain over which they flee is rugged and unforgiving.

It is very difficult for even the most skilled marksman to shoot out of a moving helicopter at a galloping Brumby. Many dead Brumbies found, show that the shot/s were not fatal and suggest a slow and painful death.

If the RSPCA, who approve of the practice, is to be asked whether they would approve of leaving and letting a horse die after being wounded by a non-lethal shot, I doubt if they will do so.

f) Shooting in an area where people are or might be, is always dangerous and poses many risks. I would suggest that the government will open itself up to civil claims (or maybe even criminal liability) for any injuries or deaths that occur as a result.

Furthermore, a commercial horse riding business in KNP has told me that they have had cancellations from customers who do not want to see dead horses when on a ride.

g) Any government ought to learn from mistakes made in the past. This practise should not be an option. But even more so in the present case, and in the face of the expressed promise the Hon. PENNY SHARPE made as per Hansard note (second reading page 17) when she said about aerial culling: ***"No, we would not; we ruled out aerial culling."***

h) Please refer to my submissions under a) above in relation to alternative methods to count the Brumbies.

- i) The legitimate expectations created by these statements and promises of the major parties (The Hon Barilaro and Sharpe ) as noted above, are edged out in the minds many constituents and any deviation here from will further tarnish the perception of *no credibility and broken promises* that so many voters have of politicians generally.

### Conclusion

I applaud this Committee for describing the Brumbies by their real name – **Brumbies**.

I appeal to the Committee to ensure that the promises previously made by politicians from both sides are honoured and that the right thing is done for these Brumbies.

We are the custodians of the next generation and we owe them the duty to preserve and sustainably manage the KNP and Brumbies. This can however only be done by knowing precisely what the population numbers are and then balancing, in a sustainable manner, the co-existence of all *fauna* and *flora* in the KNP.

I will gladly expand on any matter raised herein before. I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address you.

13 October 2023

**Leon Meyer**

## **Report on 2020 Post Fires Aerial Brumby Survey**

On 20 February 2020 SMBUGS in conjunction with SMBSMG undertook an aerial survey of Brumby numbers in the northern end of the KNP in the area, approximately 60km North to South and 18km West to East, consisting of the area :-

- North of the Snowy Mountain Highway where it crosses the Upper Eucumbene River;
- South of Mt Peppercorn;
- East of the Snowy Mountain Highway between the N and S points; and
- West of the Eastern boundary of the KNP.

Flying conditions were ideal; clear visibility with a very light E breeze. The survey took approximately 2.4hrs (08h20 – 10h44).

The Aircraft used was a high wing 4seater Cessna 182; the pilot and an observer in the front seats and two observers on the back seats. The front observer counted Brumbies in the immediate flight path whilst the two in the back seat counted Brumbies on either sides of the aircraft.

The transect was surveyed flown at a ground speed of 148km (80 kts) at a height of 500ft above ground level. Each Brumby sighted was recorded. Each transect consisted of a 1km wide survey strip on either side of the aircraft (2km in total per survey strip). A total of 9 survey strips were surveyed using the same methodology.

Special notice was given to foals sighted and they were counted separately.

### **General Observations**

The 2019 Alpine survey of Northern Kosciuszko covered 1549sqkm and suggests a population of 15,687 Brumbies. The recent fires have caused a huge amount of very visible damage nearly all the way around the surveyed area.

Although the current survey was done over 1080sqkm, the remainder of the area was badly burnt and it is improbable that Brumbies would be present in those areas. It was also noted that where the vegetation was lighter and fuel reduction had occurred because of Brumby presence, there was less or no fire damage.

The Tantangara Dam water level was very low and as a result there was a large green pick all way around where the water had receded which would serve to attract Brumbies. Brumbies were in good condition and were grazing or lying down, basking in the sun during the overflight. Experience has taught that the Brumbies come out of the tree lined areas in the early part of the morning and then retreat back there by midday.

### **Summary of Survey**

A total of 1128 brumbies (including 46 foals) were counted. This figure is comprised of: - 45 by front seat observer; 698 by left rear seat observer; and 385 by right rear seat observer. If the NSWP formulae of horses not seen is applied the figure is 1375. The figure is significantly lower than the 2019 Alpine survey and it is hard to imagine such huge numbers could possibly be present given the current result taken with on the ground observations by regular bush users familiar with the areas.

## **Conclusion**

The government will be urged, as was foreshadowed by the passing of the current legislation, to conduct a proper count in order to effectively make *bona fide* management decisions.