



## **Impacts and management of feral horses in the Australian Alps**

This submission is on behalf of the Animal Protectors Alliance (APA) and our several hundred supporting members.

Whether it is brumbies, kangaroos or any other native or naturalised animal, government methodologies for estimating wild animal populations in Australia are demonstrably flawed and notoriously inaccurate. The statistical modelling of brumbies numbers is based on incorrect data and false assumptions. The notion that there could possibly be 23,000 brumbies in Kosciusko National Park (KNP) is utterly preposterous.

Aside from the absurdity of the “estimated” numbers, there is a fundamental problem with the science behind the principle of killing brumbies. Several programs aimed at eradicating naturalised animals have shown both the devastating ecological impacts and/or the long-term futility of these attempts (cats on Macquarie Island, rabbits on mainland Australia).

Like many non-native animals brought to Australia and abandoned to fend for themselves in the wild, brumbies are now fully naturalised into ecosystems that have been vastly altered by land clearing, agriculture, development, loss of freshwater sources, and the deliberate eradication or exploitation of native animals (among other pressures).

Most of Australia’s native ecosystems have been displaced to make way for agriculture that exploits hard-hooved, heavy animals, like the cattle, sheep and horses. APA does not dispute that, like everything else Europeans introduced to this continent, horses have contributed to the devastation of native ecosystems. But any damage done by the tiny numbers of horses that have been abandoned and formed naturalised populations is utterly trivial compared to the damage done by sheep and cattle, because there are so few wild horses and so many sheep and cattle.

Furthermore, any damage the descendants of the abandoned horses may have occurred in the early years after settlement is done, and cannot be undone. Killing brumbies will not undo it, and it will certainly not, now, save the life of a single native animal. In fact, it will likely kill many native animals because naturalised animals have picked up the slack from native animals that are no longer present in large enough numbers to contribute the ecological services they evolved here to provide.

Like all other wild animals, naturalised animal populations fluctuate with the condition of the environment. If brumby numbers have increased recently, it is because the land to which they have access has increased. In the KNP, the snowline is rising with climate change, and every plant and animal that lives along that snowline must adapt or die. A rising snowline is good for horses, but most of the native plants and animals will die, not because of the horses but because of the climate change.



Clearly, blaming the horses is nothing but another government scapegoating exercise. Undoubtedly, this is the reason Australian governments rarely fund research into the evolving ecological role of naturalised animals in vastly altered ecosystems, especially those under immediate threat from climate change. They fear, or perhaps they already know that the findings of such studies would challenge their established narrative, and rob them of a convenient scapegoat.

In terms of animal welfare, it does not take much imagination to realise that shooting a moving target from a moving platform ensures a high wounding rate and is therefore inhumane. Similarly, orphaning dependent baby animals inevitable in any mass shooting exercise, and cannot be justified.

We urge you to consider that you are being advised by people who are the victims of a cultural mindset that is obsessed with killing sentient beings. They may claim that the aim is protecting biodiversity but it is not. The aim is killing for killing's sake. This mindset is both ethically and ecologically unconscionable. It has no place and can do only harm in world on the brink of a mass extinction even not seen on this planet for around 65 million years.

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