

Meeting Summary

Kosciuszko Wild Horse Community Advisory Panel

Monday 9 December 2019

The Kosciuszko Wild Horse Community Advisory Panel was formed under the *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018* to provide advice on the preparation of a draft wild horse heritage management plan.

The panel met at the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) office in Queanbeyan for its second meeting.

2019 Australian Alps wild horse aerial survey

At the time of the meeting, the survey results were still undergoing a review by external experts. Therefore, the results were not yet available from the Australian Alps National Parks Cooperative Management Program (AANP).

The panel discussed the use of drones in population monitoring. The technology may enable more regular monitoring and make results available to the community in real-time. If the methodology of the AANP survey was retained, results may be comparable over time.

The 2016 draft *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Management Plan*

The panel discussed improvements to the 2016 draft *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Management Plan*. The panel generally agreed that four key areas warranted revision.

1. The extent of population control should be based on impacts to the environment, not population numbers.

An outcomes statement would need to define the environmental state that was trying to be achieved as a result of wild horse management. This would then define the level of control required. The outcome statement would be specific to each management area and so the level of population control needed in each area would also differ. The level of control required may be best expressed as a level of acceptable environmental impact (that may involve a population reduction), rather than a specific number, and would be regularly revised against management outcomes. An environmental monitoring program that correlates the impact of horse numbers to that management area would be required.

2. Need to identify heritage areas where populations of horses can be retained.

The panel agreed that there are conservation and heritage reasons for reducing or eliminating horses in some areas of the park. There was general support for the management areas defined in the 2016 draft plan, with some minor modifications. The panel generally agreed that horses should be removed from areas west of the Snowy Mountains Highway in the northern end of the park; alpine areas above the tree line; the Cooleman Plain karst area and, areas of recent colonisation e.g. Nungar Plain. The panel suggested retaining horses in areas where there was a historical presence e.g. Cascades to Pilot and the southern parts of the park and Snowy Plain.

3. Methodology for reducing the population.

Most of the panel did not support lethal control measures, particularly aerial shooting. The panel discussed a proposal for the community to work with NPWS to improve the transparency of management. A 'high country muster', undertaken by traditional families, was discussed. The muster may occur two to three times per year and may remove significant horse numbers each year. Mustered horses could either receive fertility control and be released, or be transported to an off-park holding facility. The muster could be supplemented by a variety of control methods including ad-hoc mustering, passive trapping; and some brumby running and removal. A trial muster was recommended before any implementation.

As part of the discussion, the panel discussed how a combination of methodologies (mustering and trapping), with supplemental interventions such as fertility control, as well as continual population monitoring, could be combined to deliver major immediate reductions and then deliver a more measured population reduction. The panel discussed the need for a variety of management controls not limited to risk, safety and veterinary oversight.

4. Improving trust and transparency in the community.

Ongoing engagement and involvement of the community in management and control is required. This includes keeping the community up-to-date with information. The successful implementation of points 1 to 3 above will be part of demonstrating transparency, improving trust and promoting respectful and productive conversations amongst the community on wild horse management.

Questions were directed to the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Scientific Advisory Panel on the four key areas of improvement of the 2016 draft plan.

Next meeting

Monday 13 January 2020 at Queanbeyan. This includes a joint meeting with Kosciuszko Wild Horse Scientific Advisory Panel.