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Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

NSW Government response to Animal Welfare Committee Inquiry

Proposed aerial shooting of brumbies in
Kosciuszko National Park

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Acknowledgement of Country

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and future.

We recognise Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

Artist and designer Nikita Ridgeway from Aboriginal design agency Boss Lady Creative Designs created the People and Community symbol.

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1 Introduction

On 28 August 2023, the Animal Welfare Committee of the Legislative Council of the NSW Parliament commenced an inquiry into the proposed aerial shooting of brumbies (wild horses) in Kosciuszko National Park and surrounding areas, and in particular:

- a. the methodology used to survey and estimate the brumby population in Kosciuszko National Park
- b. the justification for proposed aerial shooting, giving consideration to urgency and the accuracy of the estimated brumby population in Kosciuszko National Park
- c. the status of, and threats to, endangered species in Kosciuszko National Park
- d. the history and adequacy of New South Wales laws, policies and programs for the control of wild horse populations, including but not limited to the adequacy of the *Aerial shooting of feral horses (HOR002) Standard Operating Procedure*
- e. the animal welfare concerns associated with aerial shooting
- f. the human safety concerns if Kosciuszko National Park is to remain open during operations
- g. the impact of previous aerial shooting operations (such as Guy Fawkes National Park) in New South Wales
- h. the availability of alternatives to aerial shooting
- i. any other related matters.

The Animal Welfare Committee's report was tabled on 13 November 2024, making 6 recommendations for action to be taken by the NSW Government. Under Legislative Council Standing Order 240, a NSW Government response is required within 3 months of a report being tabled, specifically by 13 February 2025.

The *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018* and the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* are the responsibility of the Minister for the Environment. The NSW Government response was prepared by the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW).

2 Response to Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That the New South Wales Government should continue to undertake an annual count of the horses in Kosciuszko National Park, using best practice methodology, and release all results and data publicly. The National Parks and Wildlife Service should consider what new technology or techniques can be used to improve the current method and implement that.

NSW Government response

Supported

The NSW Government will continue to undertake regular surveys of the wild horse population in Kosciuszko National Park using recognised, best-practice scientific methods. Survey outcomes will be published. Additional methods and techniques, including the use of emerging technology, will be considered and trialled where appropriate and demonstrated to be scientifically robust.

Recommendation 2

That aerial control of horses, as well as other invasive animals, should continue in New South Wales as a way of protecting the natural environment. Robust settings and frameworks should support this to achieve best practice and safety.

NSW Government response

Supported

Aerial control of invasive animals, including wild horses, will continue to be used by the NSW Government as one of a suite of available control options. All invasive animal control activities, whether aerial or ground-based, will be undertaken in accordance with legislative requirements and consistent with best practice animal welfare standards.

Recommendation 3

That the training required of aerial shooters, as well as the type of firearms and ammunition (including both the calibre and the cartridge size of the ammunition) being used to aerially cull brumbies should be reviewed to ensure best practice.

NSW Government response

Supported

The National Parks and Wildlife Service will continue to monitor, review and update, as required, training requirements relevant to, and the types of firearms and ammunition used in, aerial shooting of horses including through the Feral Animal Aerial Shooting Team (FAAST) framework. In

particular, NPWS will seek additional independent advice on the type of firearms and ammunition (including both the calibre and the cartridge size of the ammunition) used in relation to horses, taking into account the results of aerial shooting operations to date in Kosciuszko National Park.

Recommendation 4

That the New South Wales Government should have an appropriate, independent third party review the Standard Operating Procedure regularly to ensure it continues to reflect best practice and is as robust and humane as possible.

NSW Government response

Supported

The Standard Operating Procedure for the aerial shooting of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park was developed with independent, external review by a veterinary practitioner. RSPCA NSW was also consulted. The Standard Operating Procedure will continue to be reviewed annually, with each annual review informed by advice from an independent animal welfare expert. Input to each review will also be invited from the RSPCA NSW.

Recommendation 5

The National Parks and Wildlife Service further investigate the effectiveness of fertility control as a control method.

NSW Government response

Supported

The Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan recognises that reproductive control is a potentially viable option when the horse density is low, and the objective is to gradually reduce or maintain the population at a low density.

NPWS will undertake additional work to identify the fertility control options that are being implemented or trialled around the world; the circumstances in which they are being used or are intended to be used; and the conditions, if any, under which they could be successfully implemented to control the horse population in Kosciuszko National Park. The objective of this additional work will be to identify a fertility control option that can be trialled in Kosciuszko National Park, for example, in a retention area or part of a retention area.

Recommendation 6

The National Parks and Wildlife Service should implement the recommendations from the investigation report into the Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horses Rehoming Program, and restart rehoming as soon as possible.

NSW Government response

Supported

The NSW Government accepted all recommendations from the independent investigation report into the Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horses Rehoming Program. The rehoming program for Kosciuszko National Park has been updated to address those recommendations, and the program has recommenced.