



14 March 2023

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and  
Communications  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

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

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our feedback to consultation on the impacts and management of feral horses in the Australian Alps, especially the ACT and Upper Murrumbidgee River sections.

Icon Water has been proudly serving our community for over 100 years by supplying quality drinking water and wastewater services to the ACT and region, including drinking water for Queanbeyan and Googong. We own and operate assets and manage land across the ACT, comprising the dams, water treatment plants, sewage treatment plants, reservoirs, water and sewage pumping stations, mains and other related infrastructure. We consistently deliver safe drinking water and reliable sewerage services to a community of over 450,000 people. Icon Water sources water from four major dams and the Upper Murrumbidgee River to ensure secure drinking water for the communities of Canberra, Queanbeyan and Googong.

Icon Water is committed to working with all levels of Government in managing our water catchment areas whilst continuing to service our growing community in a way that is sustainable, adaptive to the challenges of climate change, and collaborative with Ngunnawal and First Nations people of the broader region.

Climate change is impacting now, with data showing less water is entering our dams for the same amount of rainfall, and the future management of our catchments will require increased focus on appropriate, timely and integrated land management activities. The hydrological functions of protected National Park areas contribute to the overall high quality and quantity of water in this broader region of NSW and the ACT, and their ongoing protection is of critical importance. The protection of sensitive ecological communities supports the sustainable production of water, essential for human health and the environment, whilst preserving critical habitat essential for the survival of many native species, such as the Macquarie perch and Two-spined blackfish within the Cotter River system.

Icon Water supports the ACT and NSW Governments efforts to improve the environmental stewardship and management of the Australian Alps unique ecological community by focussing on the management of invasive species such as feral horses along with directly managing all vertebrate pests, invasive plants, fire ecology and inappropriate access and impact by people. Icon Water commends the ACT Government for work undertaken to date on feral horse, deer and pig management within Namadgi National Park and

their use of new and emerging technologies such as thermal imagery and aerial pest animal management practices.

The changing climate and associated impacts of major events such as the Orroral Valley fire in 2019-20 all create cascading conditions and step changes in our catchments which lead to landscape modifications and potential long-term water quality impacts. The eradication of invasive species from protected areas for improving catchment health is only one of a suite of tools required for landscape recovery efforts and future catchment resilience. An integrated invasive species management model must be flexible and adaptive to ecological thresholds and approaches to identify and differentiate between areas practical to support and maintain with existing approaches versus areas to prioritise to focus on immediate and innovative methods.

Icon Water proposes that community drinking water supply protection considerations be highlighted as an example of the need to protect the Australian Alps from the impacts of feral horses and the associated ecosystem services be further highlighted for their role in protecting human health and the environment long-term. Clarifying the importance of the Australian Alps as an ecological community in supplying quality raw water to the catchment will also increase community appreciation regarding the sensitive nature of these ecological areas, their susceptibility to change in function due to invasive species along with the broader catalyst for a deterioration in condition caused by long-term climate change impacts such as reduced snow cover (increased Alpine and subalpine ecosystems stress).

We look forward to continuing our work with all Governments in protecting and enhancing the overall value of high country ecological communities associated with the Australian Alps and a zero-tolerance policy to all vertebrate pests within this critically important ecological community.

For further information please contact me at

or on

Yours sincerely

Tim Chaseling  
Team Leader Catchment Protection and Land Management