

Submission on behalf of the Heritage Horse and Environment Protection Alliance

In this submission we respectfully ask that consideration be given to the strong connection between Australia's wild horses, the brumbies, and our heritage Australian breed, the Waler. Given this, brumbies need to be categorised and treated very differently to other species regarded as feral, such as cane toads and wild pigs.

Horses arrived in Australia with the First Fleet and 'over the following years a large number of horses were imported ... [and] ... from this widely diverse pool of horses, a distinctive type started to emerge, ... shaped by the unique Australian environment ... only the strongest and toughest survived the trip ... [and] the developing Australian horse breed was based on the very toughest genes' (Pickerel 2011 p.105).

The breed became known as Walers, a term being used in 1840s, meaning a horse bred in the colony of NSW, and was used in reference to horses sent overseas as remounts for the British armies in China and India, and for Indian regiments. Advertisements for Australian Waler horses can be found in newspapers of this time from British India, *The Pioneer 1877* and *The Civil and Military Gazette 1886*, for example (Allen, 1977). Walers were highly regarded throughout the world as a 'superior saddle horse ... [with a] great reputation as a cavalry remount' (Ballantine 1976 p. 27). Thousands of horses were exported during this time with 169,000 used in World War 1 alone. The 4th Light Horse Brigade's charge at Beersheba, one of the last cavalry charges in warfare, is well known (Ballantine 1976). The export trade flourished from the 1840s to the 1930s with thousands of horses leaving Australia each year. Many properties were devoted to horse breeding, with owners choosing to run their horses in the wild as brumbies, through this process developing the toughness and intelligence for which the breed was renowned.

Throughout Australia, Walers were the all-purpose horse. The saying was that a Waler would work the stock, pull a plough, carry the children to school and take the family to church on Sunday. They played an essential role in the development, history and cultural identity of Australia and 'the horse is owed a debt' (Ballantine, 1976 p. 7).

When horses were no longer needed, they were released into the wild and have become the brumbies with which this inquiry is concerned. The Australian Waler is now classified as rare and endangered but we are fortunate in that the breed has survived in the brumby population. Since the 1980s efforts have been underway to re-establish and protect the breed with particular focus on preservation of the foundation bloodlines. Extensive and ongoing DNA testing through the University of Texas as part of the Global Equine Genome Project is being used to confirm the status of the breed as 'the old bloodlines of the Waler cannot be reproduced once these have been lost' (Khanshour, Juras & Cothran, 2013 p. 357).

Brumbies remain key to the re-establishment and preservation of the Australian Waler because 'we cannot recreate the Water with modern blood' (Crispin 2011 p.6). **All horses recognised as Foundation Walers have been wild caught.** That is, they were running as part of a mob of brumbies and, to quote Janet Lane, a leading authority on the breed, 'sourcing old bloodlines from wild populations would greatly assist in securing a future for the types we once had' (<https://walerdatabase.online/>).

We have the opportunity to re-establish an iconic breed. Walers have the potential to be a valuable economic resource. Current prices range between \$4000 and \$10,000 and, as the breed becomes more well known, prices will continue to rise. Both Walers and brumbies have the potential to be a valuable tourist attraction - think of the Icelandic pony, the horses of the Camargue and the New Forest Ponies. These horses are an essential part of Australian history and can be a part of our future. Given this we ask that consideration be given to the preservation of a sustainable number of brumbies managed through a carefully considered combination of environment protection, relocation, fertility control and rehoming.

Bibliography:

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