

## **Witness appendix to Impacts and management of feral horses in the Australian Alps Senate Committee for the Australian Brumby Alliance**

Brumby Alliance Committee member and Director, White Alpine Equine – Nikki Alberts

Submission:

I recommend the Senate Committee add to their review material, the Final Report of the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Scientific Advisory Panel. The advice was provided in preparation for the Wild Horse Management Plan September 2020.

The full report can be found here: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/research-and-publications/publications-search/kosciuszko-wild-horse-scientific-advisory-panel-final-report>

I would like to call specific attention to recommendations made on page 9, paragraph 4; page 17, point 2, subpoint point 4; page 19, paragraph 4; and, page 21, section 2.2.8 Community Engagement Recommendations, paragraph 2.

These pages consistently refer to well-known horses in the KNP Zone 2 area – a documented ‘retention zone’ in the draft Wild Horse Management Plan.

Instead of following the recommendations to retain these horses for community engagement (key to the success of the New Zealand wild horse management plan where the community, scientists and Government bodies work closely together to manage herds), fertility control testing, and not shooting horses that are in an easy to trap zone, NPWS have instead weaponised the points.

In late 2022, seven well known brumbies, in Zone 2, were found shot dead near Dead Horse Creek, north of Kiandra, in easy view of bush walking areas. Indeed, it was a bushwalker who discovered the carcasses left to rot.

Local photographers had been sharing their stories of these horses, and interest had increased after one of the stallions had survived being shot with an arrow – the perpetrator was charged.

Due to their location and calmness, many visitors drove to the Kiandra area to see them, bringing tourist dollars into the area.

The herd had also been recommended as fertility control candidates due to easy access and their calm nature.

The Zone 2 area which they frequented could easily have been set up as a trapping area, and if removal had been the preference, homes could have been found for them several times over.

In addition, the shooting happened with no closure of the Snowy Mountains Highway which is the main thoroughfare from Tumut, to Cooma via Adaminaby, with much traffic including Snowy Hydro (SH) 2.0 trucks. It was also close to SH2.0 work huts.

Such a blatant misuse of the SAP recommendations was astounding to those believing these horses to be safe, and reckless in its proximity to public roads and SH 2.0 works.

Since my time as a rehomer in 2019 I have seen proof of many engagements, reports, recommendations, and draft plans scanning back to at least 2016.

The 'pro-brumby' side have been ready, willing and able to pull more than our weight to come to a resolution. The Government and NPWS instead ignore recommendations, from Panels that they have themselves have put together, and we are now at an impasse.

Pro-brumby advocates, sanctuaries and rehomers are yet again willing to come to the table for a resolution that doesn't involve aerial culling nor extinction of our wild horses. It remains to be seen if Government or NPWS are willing and able to do the same.

There is also a plan in motion for a Brumby Sanctuary to be established by the Ngarigo people to provide safety and management of the KNP brumbies.

In addition, as a further response to Senator Pocock's enquiry as to the Witnesses involvement and support for threats of violence, I would ask that the 'heresay' reporting of threats and damage be further investigated.

Minister Sharp herself has recently had to reverse a statement she made that the Jindabyne NPWS office had been 'firebombed' to state that a 'letter threatening a firebomb' had been received by staff. An unsigned letter by all accounts with an assumption made on who delivered it.

Senator Pocock asking the Witnesses of their involvement and support for this behaviour is akin to me asking the Senator if he supported or was involved in any Wallabies supporters misbehaving and acting like louts in the presence of All Black fans. Frankly insulting and the waste of what could have been an actual useful question to explore more factual elements in the support of the brumbies.

Senator Pocock also sought information regarding whether horses can be compared to African zebras in regard to travel. Horses, including unhandled horses, are transported regularly and easily by road, train, air and ship. Indeed, Australia's representation at international equine events would be severely limited if this had not been considered and managed by equine veterinarians and welfare advocates.

If appropriate welfare considerations are applied, as discussed on Wednesday 23 August, (panels separating horses so family groups are together, regular rest stops, food and water,)

brumbies are transported with minimal stress. Brumby transporters frequently comment on how calmly brumbies behave on trucks particularly if they are with family groups. Injuries can occur, but with competent transport, this is rare.

Yours sincerely,

Nikki Alberts  
Australian Brumby Alliance Inc. & White Alpine Equine

## **Witness appendix to Impacts and management of feral horses in the Australian Alps Senate Committee for the Australian Brumby Alliance – Jill Pickering**

### **Horse dung is easily seen/takes longer to disappear which inflates true numbers by 500%**

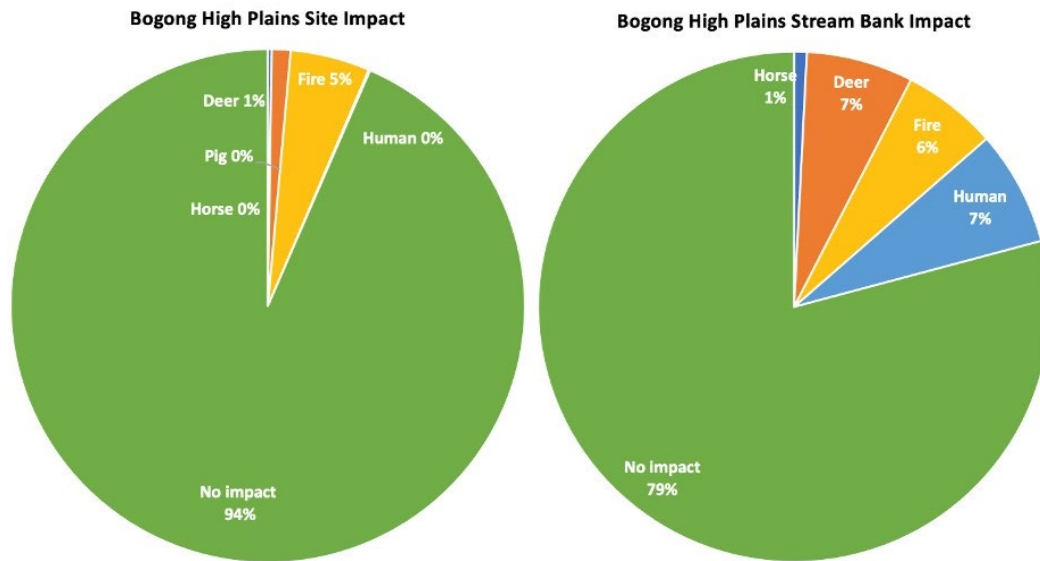
One senate witness said horse dung was more prolific than other species, inferring horses outnumber other species. **ABA response** – Horse dung is the most easily seen, while deer pellets and other species require a close-up search. To estimate horse numbers using dung the observer must apply dung/faecal decay rates. Horse dung decays over 15 months, while deer pellets decay within 3 months (5:1 ratio). Meaning deer pellets must be multiplied by 5 to gain an accurate population comparison, see Berman 2-23;

- Berman 2023 writes “The Kosciuszko National Park study that compared **deer faecal** pile and **horse faecal** pile densities to determine relative impacts, finding more horse faecal piles than deer faecal piles, whereas camera traps suggested the activity of deer was far greater than that of horses (Ward-Jones et al. 2019)..... faecal pile indices are notoriously unreliable when they have not been calibrated to densities with proper measurement of defecation rates and decay rates (Allen 2012, Le Pla 2022). Inadequate quantification of the impact or activity of other species, coupled with failure to consider differences in faecal decay/ disappearance rate or (ease of) detection mean that previous assertions about the negative environmental impacts of horses in the Australian Alps are ..... **overestimated** compared to the impact of **other animals**, such as deer”.

### **ABA rejects aggression, preferring polite/factual dialogue to refute incorrect accusations.**

ABA is unsure if Senator Pocock accepted my statement that we **never** condone aggression of any kind and reinforce on social media that such behaviour is NEVER acceptable. We use respectful, evidenced-based dialogue which is simply ignored or dismissed, for example;

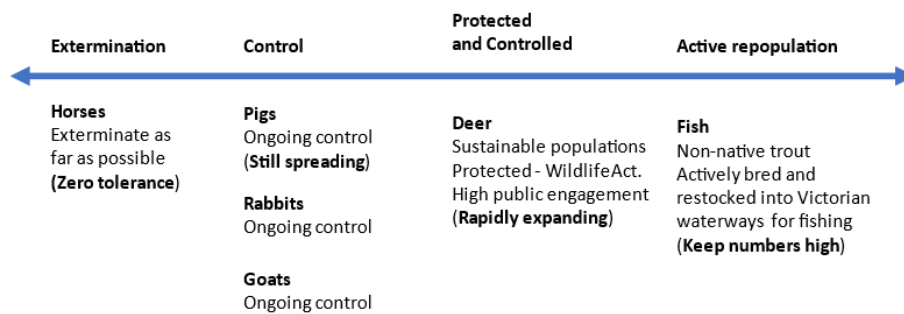
- Photos of deer damage called horse damage with several sites in Tolsma 2018 proven to be changed from **deer damage** to **horse only** damage in Court cross examination. All Bogong horses shot despite Berman 2023 showing virtually non-existent impact.



1.0 Site and Stream Impact

- Exclusion zone tall grass bio-mass vs green short biodiversity said NPWS, now denied.
- Claims that Australia did not evolve with heavy hooved animals, yet six/6 megafauna species **1,000kg**, one had hoofed feet, 1 megafauna of 2,000kg – wild horse is 450kg.
- Since horses are introduced they cause damage, yet governments retain sustainable deer numbers (which we ask for wild horses), Alps park agents **breed to re-introduce** so Alpine **trout** levels stay **high**, yet **trout** negatively **impact** Stocky **Galaxies** (*slide1.1*)

### Brumbies in perspective: Inconsistency across non-native species management



#### 1.1 Brumbies in perspective

- Decay rates ignored which inflates horse numbers by 500%, as explained above.
- Not valuing horse dung providing insects for skinks, hoof prints collect water that native frogs spawn within.

## Coexistence with native species

Positive ecological impact is rarely if ever acknowledged because of the strong value driven belief of many Australian environmentalists; that since horses are introduced, heavy hard hoofed animals they must only cause damage in Australia.



**Save energy** slashing grass for the Sun Moth - horses will do it for free

[Photo credit ABA sign 2012? and Skink 2018]



**Skinks by Brumby Dung**  
(2018 VicAlps)



**Frogs spawning in hoof prints 2020 in VicAlps**  
[Photo credit: Renee Neubauer 2020]

Dung Insects feed skinks – pug holes shelter frog spawn  
- **Investigate before** these **horses benefactors** are **killed**

### 1.2 Coexistence with native species

#### Victorian Auditor General's report 2021 found major problems with Parks Victoria (PV)

- DELWP/PV: Do **not address quality or effectiveness** of their actions (ie. Less/ more skinks & frogs) - only reporting **number** of control **activities** & treated hectares, and
- DELWP/PV **cannot** demonstrate **if**, or **how** well, it's halting further decline in Victoria's threatened species populations.
- DELWP/PV's reporting on biodiversity protection, including threatened species, **lacks accountability** and comprehensiveness. It **tells Parliament** and the public **little** about the cost, quality **or effectiveness** of the **work** DELWP delivers.
- The **lack of** scientifically and statistically rigorous long-term monitoring programs to measure and collect data about on-ground changes ... **prevents outcome** reporting.
- DELWP does **not** have a **targeted monitoring** program and **indicators** to determine **whether** its prioritised management interventions are resulting in predicted response in threatened species populations.
- DELWP & Parks, under Biodiversity 2037, monitors and reports the amount of threat management, **but** it does **not** monitor **against predicted** benefits.
- Without the support of on-ground data validation, these **limitations raise questions** about **information accuracy of supporting decisions to prioritise and fund actions**

Parks Victoria (PV) and National Parks & Wildlife Services (NPWS) are **unable** to demonstrate if their **modelled assumptions** that horses damage native species **until** a targeted on-ground monitoring program is **started** to compare data trends of native species in relation to culling.

The ABA urges this federal Senate Committee to **acknowledge** that PV and NPWS **do not know** if their **activities** (i.e. shooting horses) **can**, in reality, **help** native species, since as VAG state, "Without targeted 'on-ground' monitoring programs to validate their (predictions) can only be viewed as modelled assumptions". The auditors report highlights that Parks, **even today, fail to record on-ground** Alpine native species data to reliably inform their actions.

### Closing statements to the Senate Horse Inquiry

- The ABA does not condone aggressive action and has publicly refuted aggressive behaviour as it occurs, instead we believe in open transparent dialogue with parks.
- The ABA strongly advocates **to retain** sustainable heritage horse numbers and **kept at that level** at a minimum, 4,000 Kosciuszko NP, 1,500 East Vic Alps, 150 in Bogong High Plains (all been killed), 150 in Barmah NP - by **rehoming** and **fertility control**.
- The ABA strongly urges this Federal Senate Inquiry to question Dr. Berman 2023 on his recent, field study on-ground reporting describing how to calculate safe wild horse numbers that provides dung insects for native skinks to eat, hoof prints that collect water and native frogs spawn in and ensures mosaic cycles of short green grass to help native species survive severe fires (*slide 1.2 & 1.3*).

### Offer safety nets for native species in catastrophic fires

NPWS Scientific Advisory Panel (**SAP**): Higher plant species diversity was **maintained** by wild **horse grazing** in Australian Alps (Wild & Poll 2012; Williams 2014).

2020 fires, Nth Kosciuszko wild horse grazed areas and flora & fauna living there, were **less impacted** than many other Park regions (source **SAP**) (Ref-12))



Figure 4. Cowombat Flat, Alpine National Park, 27 February 2020 – Horses grazing near fenced enclosure.

Photo credit: Parks Victoria post-fires 2020

Cowombat Flat 2020 fires: Horse grazed area (left) survived **intact** but **surrounds** experienced catastrophic burning.

Grazing provided safe refuge of short, green grass for native species to survive.

However, Parks Victoria shot all horses to leave grass for native species despite horse presence enabled their **survival**.

#### 1.3 Brumbies positive impact on native species

Yours sincerely,

*J. Pickering*

Jill Pickering

Australian Brumby Alliance Inc.

Advocates for sustainable horse numbers managed by passive trapping & fertility control.

27<sup>th</sup> August 2023