

Byron Hikers Club Incorporated

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Impacts and management of feral horses in the Australian Alps: Senate Inquiry

In December 1969 I hiked from Buchan in East Gippsland to Mt Kosciusko along what is now mostly the route of the Australian Alpine Walking Trail. Around that time I spent several years exploring what is now known as the Cobberas Wilderness area. Back then, it was quite a novelty to sometimes catch a glimpse of a small herd of brumbies shyly exiting one of the grassy plains such as Cowombat Flat, Native Dog Flat or The Playgrounds. There seemed to be little environmental damage that was noticeable to us.

Now 50 years later, the feral horse numbers are out of control. Cowombat Flat is mown to within a centimeter of the soil, the streams are muddy bogs and the horses are there in their hundreds. The threats to around 30 native species are well documented by scientists. Now the horses merely step back 20 or 30 metres when you walk through them. In places along the tracks, we have been attacked by stallions defending their turf.

The first point that I make is that even if the horses were subjected to extensive ariel shooting, it would be difficult to eliminate all of them in rugged mountain terrain. So those who want to retain some "heritage" connection to these feral horses would always be able to lead tours to discover them if they were real 'bushmen', whereas leading a group of tourists to see a 'brumby' at present is so simple because of their vast numbers. It's like taking people to a zoo: no adventure at all.

My second point is that all horses are a domesticated breed, selectively derived over a period of 5000 years from the original progenitor in Kazakhstan. This progenitor no longer exists. There are absolutely no native herds from this lineage existing naturally anywhere on the planet, so they have no legitimate legacy to be allowed to create havoc in our national parks.

Best regards, Stephen Millard

President, Byron Hikers Club