

Independent Technical Reference Group
KNP Wild Horse Plan Review
PO Box 2228
Jindabyne, NSW 2067

Subject: Submission on Impact and Control Methods for Wild Horse Populations in KNP

Thank you for the opportunity to put in a submission to the Independent Technical Reference Group (ITRG) on the management of wild horses in Kosciusko National Park (KNP). As frequent bushwalkers in KNP, the members of the Canberra Bushwalking Club (CBC) have an active interest in promoting the park's environmental values, while ensuring that this is carefully balanced with the humane treatment of the wild horses. We cannot offer the ITRG empirical research findings on the wild horses, but we thought that it would be useful to share our views on some key areas that we think need to be considered in the collection and analysis of scientific and technical information.

Firstly, several of our members have seen the damage caused to KNP's wetlands and waterways by wild horses, as well as the trampling of vegetation and creation of large horse dung mounds in this delicate alpine environment. Some attached photographs taken by CBC members at Cooleman Plain in March 2014 provide an example of this damage. At the same time, it is much more difficult to capture information about the damage to plant and animal species dependent on this environment, as it is far less visible. This seems to have led to some perceptions in media reporting (at least in the ACT) that this damage is minimal or unimportant, for example, possible threats to the habitat of the rare and endangered Northern Corroborree Frog. Presentation of data and analysis on this issue would be highly valuable.

We also hold the view, based on the research findings available to us that the assessment of the environmental impact of wild horses cannot be taken in isolation from the impact of other feral, and possibly native, animal species. For example, if the number of feral pigs in an area also has become unsustainable and/or is contributing to the damage, then consideration may need to be given to integrated animal control approaches.

From the research we have seen, it appears that the wild horse management methods currently in use in KNP – and the budget available - are not sufficient to achieve adequate control over the adverse environmental impact of the horses. This is a matter of great concern to the CBC. We would strongly encourage the ITRG to consider both shorter-term and longer-term control options, possibly even a two-step approach of measures to bring the numbers down to a level that minimises environmental damage followed by measures to hold numbers at that level.

Lastly, the CBC wanted to raise the idea of community partnerships for monitoring the environmental impact of wild horses, as a possible cost-effective way of generating data on an ongoing basis. For instance, some CBC members have been trained by ACT Parks and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS/Greening Australia) to report on exotic weed incursions in areas not easily or regularly accessible to park rangers. If such a mechanism is considered feasible by NPWS for monitoring and reporting on wild horse management issues, CBC would be happy to assist.

I hope that these inputs are helpful to the deliberations of the ITRG. The CBC looks forward to reading your recommendations to the NPWS/New South Wales Government.

Yours sincerely

Linda Groom
President
Canberra Bushwalking Club

20 March 2015

Attachments: six photographs