



# ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA

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Dear Premier Berejiklian,

I was relieved today to learn that claims that your Government were nearing a decision on horse management made in an article in the Daily Telegraph were not true. The article suggested that you might not proceed with shooting-control of horses in Kosciuszko National Park, and that the rate of reduction of horse numbers would be slower, and to a much higher final number, than in the draft management plan.

These steps would be in a direction that would strip Kosciuszko of many of its natural values, and I can say that the Ecological Society of Australia is pleased that the claims in that article are not Government policy.

New South Wales has only 10% of its land set aside in reserves, so nature has already been massively compromised in NSW. With such a small proportion of the land protected, all nature reserves should be exclusively for protecting native Australian species, and places where Australians can enjoy our natural heritage. Horses and other introduced species can occupy the 90% of the state that is not part of the reserve system.

Horse numbers continue to grow, and by now are likely 20%<sup>i</sup> higher than the most recent surveys suggest; the problem gets worse the longer a decision to rapidly reduce horse numbers is delayed.

It is well established that feral horses degrade the alpine environment and are likely to drive already threatened species closer to extinction. The review of the 2008 Kosciuszko Horse Management plan reported that 76% of stream-banks were degraded in areas with feral horses, but only 11% were degraded in areas without horses. That report also listed threatened species at risk from the impacts of horses, including the critically endangered corroboree frog, alpine tree frog, alpine water skink, broad-toothed rat and Kiandra greenhood. The damage caused by horses to the environment led to horse impacts being listed as a potentially threatening process in Victoria. A report for the Ecological Society of Australia (copy attached) found that feral horses presented a substantial weed risk, damaged waterways and were a threat to native species.

As emphasised by the scientific statement released last year (copy attached), culling horses to rapidly reduce numbers is essential, and aerial culling is the most humane and effective method of doing so. The NSW technical reference group report demonstrates that aerial culling is the most humane way to manage feral horses; horses suffer very little stress before being put down by marksmen. This is in contrast to the

main alternative used since 2008 of trapping horses and shipping them out. It is an expensive approach (over \$1000 per horse), and it hasn't worked. Horse numbers have continued to increase, despite efforts to remove them. Rounding up horses is also one of the cruellest management approaches. Horses suffer extreme stress on long road journeys, and 82%<sup>ii</sup> of horses rounded up are sent to the abattoir.

There are solutions to celebrating the Man-From-Snowy-River culture that don't involve having horses in sensitive alpine ecosystems. Cultural appreciation of horses already occurs on lands outside of the national park in the form of horse-themed bush festivals and races. We don't need horses in our national parks as well. Feral horses need to be taken out of Kosciuszko National Park as quickly as possible to protect Australia's natural heritage.

The Ecological Society of Australia urges you to consider use of aerial culling, and at the very least to implement substantial ground-shooting methods to rapidly reduce horse numbers within a few years, and not the 20 year time frame suggested in the draft plan. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the ecological evidence in support of these actions with you, please do not hesitate to contact me using the contact details above.

Regards,



Professor Don Driscoll  
President  
Ecological Society of Australia

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<sup>i</sup> Dawson 2009 Aerial survey of feral horses in the Australian Alps  
<https://theaustralionalps.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/2009feralhorsealpssurvey.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> NPWS, 2016, *draft Horse Management Plan for the Alpine Area of Kosciuszko National Park*, Office of Environment and Heritage, p.4.