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Community Engagement Report Wild Horse Management Plan Review

18 March 2015

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1 Executive summary

Straight Talk was commissioned by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), a division of the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH), to develop a comprehensive communication and engagement strategy and deliver a suite of community and stakeholder engagement activities in support of its review of the Wild Horse Management Plan for Kosciuszko National Park. The purpose of this consultation was to identify community values and views on wild horse management in Kosciuszko National Park in order to inform NPWS's review. Scientific input to the review is being garnered via an Independent Technical Reference Group.

The program of community and stakeholder engagement, which was undertaken from May until mid-December 2014, identified the following themes:

- The community values and strongly supports national parks and recognises their importance in protecting native plants and animals, and unique landscapes
- Community members have a low level of knowledge about the impact wild horses are having on Kosciuszko National Park and although people think they are well informed about the management of wild horses, the evidence from the engagement demonstrated that they are not
- The majority of people regard feral (wild) horses in a different light to other feral animals, particularly in relation to appropriate population control methods, and there is a low level of awareness that horses are feral animals (non-native and introduced) in national parks
- No population control method for horses is universally supported or opposed by the community, however when given accurate information about control methods and time to reflect community members often did change their initial views
- There is a general understanding that a suite of different control methods is necessary to be able to effectively control horse population numbers in all circumstances
- The effectiveness of control methods is the most important consideration, and cost is the least important, for the community. The perceived humaneness of control methods is one of the key factors in determining how well supported different control methods are by the community
- Community members need to have confidence there is a legitimate need to manage horse population numbers in order to feel comfortable about the use of lethal control methods, and a formal management plan with well-articulated aims and objectives is also required
- Once community members understand the issue, they want NPWS to manage it proactively and effectively
- The views of environmental and horse advocates are polarised at either end of the wild horse management spectrum and do not reflect the views of the general public. Unlike community members, these stakeholders are not open to revising their views
- In relation to control methods, the views of the broader community are more closely aligned with environmental advocates than those of horse advocates
- Although environmental advocates indicated effectiveness was the most important consideration in a control method, both they and horse advocates identified humaneness as being important. However, there is not a shared view of what humaneness means.

2 Introduction

Straight Talk was engaged by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to undertake community and stakeholder engagement in support of its review of the Wild Horse Management Plan for Kosciuszko National Park. Straight Talk partnered with Bluegrass Consulting to ensure the engagement strategy and program included both online engagement and a comprehensive suite of face-to-face engagement activities.

Importantly, the outcomes of this consultation with the community and stakeholders had to assist NPWS to make robust and informed decisions about the future management of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park by providing a comprehensive understanding of the diverse range of views about wild horse management within the community and the underlying values that inform those views.

Kosciuszko National Park, which is the largest national park in NSW and one of the largest conservation reserves in Australia, is under the management and jurisdiction of NPWS, which manages, conserves and cares for more than 7 million hectares of land in NSW. Management plans guide the activities of NPWS, in relation to both specific areas and particular issues, such as pest and weed management. There is a suite of management plans that guide NPWS's management of Kosciuszko National Park, including the 2006 Plan of Management for Kosciuszko National Park and the Southern Ranges Regional Pest Management Strategy 2012 – 17. The Wild Horse Management Plan, which is currently under reviewed, is one of a range of subsidiary pest management plans that apply to this area.

The management of wild horses is a complex issue which often attracts strong opinions, particularly at either end of the management spectrum (which ranges from no population control methods to complete eradication). As is often the case in these situations, the expression of extreme views discourages community members with more moderate views from participating in open discussions, so that public discourse becomes dominated by polarised views, which do not reflect broader community opinion or the genuine complexity of issues. Seeking the involvement of the more silent middle-ground in any public debate is important to ensuring that government decisions do, in fact, genuinely reflect the values of the broader community (and not just those of vocal stakeholders) and have broad community support.

As community engagement specialists, Straight Talk's role was to develop and implement a comprehensive communication and engagement strategy to support the review by NPWS of its Wild Horse Management Plan for Kosciuszko National Park. The strategy had to provide opportunities for participation by the general public, who had not been involved with this issue previously, and stakeholders and community members who had already been engaged with it.

Consultation activities designed to specifically involve and capture the views of the general public included:

- Focus groups
- Initial online (panel) survey
- 21st century town hall meeting.

Other activities in which both the general public, and stakeholders and engaged community members could be involved were:

- Online engagement through 'Protecting the Snowies' engagement platform
- Kitchen Table Discussion Guides.

A small number of comments were also received by email during the engagement period.

Finally, a number of stakeholder meetings were also undertaken to specifically involve and capture the views of stakeholder groups and already engaged community members. Meetings were undertaken by both Straight Talk and NPWS.

This suite of activities largely occurred from May until mid-December 2014 and attracted the participation of approximately 21,000 people.

Communicating and engaging with NPWS and OEH staff was also important to the success of this project. Staff were involved and kept informed throughout the project via briefings, staff newsletters and announcements.

This report provides:

- > An overview of the issues that influenced the engagement process and details of the aims and objectives of the communication and engagement strategy
- > Overview of the engagement activities undertaken and the key outcomes of each activity
- > Key outcomes of the engagement program as a whole, including identification of differences and similarities in the views of the general public and stakeholders
- > Recommendations for the review of the Wild Horse Management Plan for Kosciuszko National Park.

Details of each engagement activity and its outcomes are contained in Section 4: Engagement activities and full reports of each activity are attached in the appendices.

3 Engagement strategy

The management of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park is a complex and contentious issue which attracts strong and emotive responses in some people. This issue has become highly politicised, particularly since 2000 when aerial shooting in Guy Fawkes National Park attracted significant media attention and a public outcry, driven by a strong social media campaign undertaken by various stakeholders. This resulted in the (then) NSW Minister for the Environment, the Hon. Bob Debus, placing a moratorium on the use of aerial shooting as a control method for wild horses in NSW national parks, although not for other feral and pest animals. This moratorium remains in place today.

So polarised and emotive is this issue for stakeholders that even the nomenclature of these horses is contentious. As introduced, domesticated animals that have been released into the natural environment and become wild, horses are by category feral animals. However, for some stakeholders this identification is problematic because they feel that 'feral' has connotations that horses do not warrant. For others, this emotional response is irrational and should not detract from the fact that horses in Australia's natural environment are introduced or feral, and more importantly, are impacting on the native environment, causing significant damage to native flora and fauna. For the purposes of this engagement the term wild horses was used.

A further complication is that while Kosciuszko National Park is within NSW and is under the management and jurisdiction of the NSW NPWS, the Australian Alps, in which these horses roam as a contiguous population, cross State borders. This impacts Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory, and other jurisdictions such as Forest Corporation NSW, as well as private property.

Finally, for some stakeholders a complex history of government land management decisions and actions, such as the removal of high country grazing access, wilderness area declarations, and fire, weed and other pest management, has influenced perceptions, motivations and relationships. A lack of acceptance of the evidence of damage by horses in the Kosciuszko National Park and the research into wild horse population numbers has also influenced some stakeholders' approach to this issue.

Consequently, the review of the Wild Horse Management Plan represented a number of significant communication and community engagement challenges that needed to be effectively addressed for the review to be successful. These included:

- The strength of the iconography surrounding wild horses and the place 'brumbies' are seen by some to have in our national story, masking the damage they do to Kosciuszko National Park
- The emotional attachment people generally have with megafauna, and the concomitant lack of attachment to other, smaller animals or plants (largely unseen or unnoticed)
- Interest groups ability to utilise and manipulate both mainstream and social media to run strategic, integrated and effective campaigns that develop strong emotive hooks to build community interest and support for their issue and attract credible media interest to create further social and political pressure
- Divergent approaches amongst the states and other jurisdictions on how best to address the debate around wild horse management, such as the announcement by the Victorian government that it would not consider lethal control methods as part of its current consultation process into its management plan (which was subsequently overturned)

- The polarisation of the debate about wild horse management between different stakeholder groups at either end of the management spectrum (no population control methods or complete eradication) which largely focussed on the kill/do not kill dichotomy at the expense of a more nuanced discussion
- The lack of understanding by the general public about both the role wild horses play in the degradation of the environment in the Kosciuszko National Park and the impact various population control methods have on wild horses
- A belief by stakeholders at both ends of the management spectrum that other stakeholders hold the political power and have an undue ability to influence the outcome of the review
- The need to provide a safe environment in which the public discussion could take place, without being subject to inappropriate or intimidatory behaviour
- Record levels of community mistrust of government and its ability to deliver efficient and effective solutions to any issue.

To manage these issues a Communication and Engagement Strategy was developed, as was a supporting Communication and Engagement Delivery Plan. The objectives of the strategy were to:

- Proactively and effectively engage with internal (NPWS) stakeholders, external stakeholders and the broader community
- Increase understanding about wild horse management in Kosciuszko National Park and why it is so important
- Allow nuanced and balanced discussions that consider the issue in all its complexity and build support for a balanced approach to wild horse management
- Ensure the broad range of views across the community are heard and captured, and limit the ability of any one stakeholder group to dominate public dialogue
- Contribute to the public discussion about wild horse management in such a way that the Wild Horse Management Plan can be effectively and successfully implemented.

One requirement of the strategy was that it provided opportunities for safe, open discussion throughout the consultation process. This was particularly important because some stakeholders involved in this issue had previously been engaged in inappropriate and intimidatory behaviour towards stakeholders with alternative views to their own. Environmental advocates in particular have felt threatened and intimidated by some of the tactics and past interactions they have had with some horse advocates, to the point that many are reluctant to speak up and express their opinions publicly.

Consequently, designing a process which protected participants from inappropriate behaviour and allowed genuine dialogue about a complex and important issue was necessary to ensure the review considers the views of the broader community.

Similarly, the welfare of NPWS staff and their families, especially those who live and work in close proximity to Kosciuszko National Park and have ongoing interactions with highly engaged horse advocates within their local communities, was an important consideration throughout the engagement.

It should be noted that, despite the care taken, inappropriate behaviour was displayed and experienced by some stakeholders, such as labelling on social media a specific NPWS officer a 'Nazi' and personal attacks on NPWS staff's character, and the sale of bumper stickers that read "Aerial cull a greenie, save a Snowy brumby".

Finally, a key corner-stone of the strategy was adequate promotion of the engagement program to ensure there was a strong level of involvement by the broader community. Without this promotion, the risk was high that only those who NPWS was already engaging with, and whose views were

already well known, would participate and the opportunity to capture the views of the broader general public would be lost. Although both documents were approved by NPWS and the incumbent NSW Minister for Environment, approval to actively promote engagement to the broader community was not provided.

4 Engagement activities

A suite of engagement activities was designed to effectively reach and involve both the general public and stakeholders who had a pre-existing interest and involvement in wild horse management issues. The purpose of the activities was to:

- Provide information and educate people about the issues associated with wild horse management in Kosciuszko National Park
- Generate considered dialogue about the management of wild horses
- Identify and capture views on wild horse management
- Gain an understanding of the underlying values that drive those views.

One of the key challenges of the engagement was that it had to involve the general public, while respecting and seeking stakeholder views. Stakeholders can be motivated by a variety of interests to be involved in engagement activities and will often wish to participate in multiple activities. Community members who do not have a pre-existing investment in an issue are significantly less motivated to be involved. Although people may be open to giving short amounts of time to an issue, for example answering a quick survey, they do not have sufficient motivation to justify giving up a lot of their time.

For this reason, it is standard market research protocol to pay people for their time as a way to motivate them to participate in activities they would not normally be motivated to become involved with. This approach applied to two activities undertaken as part of this engagement process: focus groups, where members of the general public were invited to participate in a two hour meeting in the evening and were compensated for their time with an \$80 stipend; and the 21st century town hall meeting, where participants were asked to give up almost all of their Saturday (and the last Saturday in November) and were compensated for their time with an \$150 stipend.

Finally, the engagement also required a process which gained the trust of stakeholders in order to encourage their involvement but ensured they did not dominate the conversation or be over-represented in the final outcome.

In order to meet these requirements, the following engagement activities were undertaken:

Engagement activities for the general public

Focus groups

Background

Straight Talk undertook four focus group meetings from 3 to 15 July 2014, in Parramatta, Jindabyne, Canberra and Sydney.

The objective of the focus groups was to:

- Understand community views in relation to the population control methods used to manage feral animals in national parks, and wild horses in particular
- Identify the key matters that the community think are important in relation to that management
- Understand the information people need in order to move past their initial position on wild horse management and deliberate about the complexities involved.

Participants for the focus groups were randomly selected by an independent third party market research firm to be broadly demographically representative (by age and gender). Additionally, potential participants were discounted from participating if they held strong views about the purpose of national parks generally. This ensured that the focus groups contained participants who were generally 'neutral' about national parks.

Each focus group comprised 10 to 15 participants and lasted approximately two hours. In accordance with standard practice, each participant was paid a stipend of \$80 for their attendance. Straight Talk's Director, Lucy Cole-Edelstein and Senior Consultant, Nicola Wass moderated the groups.

The outcome of the focus groups provided evidence of the breadth of views held by the general public about feral animal management in national parks and wild horses in particular, and helped to frame all future engagement activities by providing details of key matters of importance to the community.

Results – Review of the management plan

The focus groups provided a wealth of information about how people thought about feral animals and their management, including wild horses. The key results of the focus groups, as relevant to the review of the Wild Horse Management Plan for Kosciuszko National Park, were:

- Effectiveness and humaneness are critical components of an acceptable population control method. Effective can mean:
 - Cost effective (there was some discussion about the cost of not acting, and alternate uses of money that could be 'saved' by the use of cost-effective methods)
 - Achieving a specific goal or objective
 - Quick
- Different participants have different concepts of what humaneness means but in most cases it meant 'quick and clean' (one shot, one kill) so animals don't suffer
- For participants to be comfortable about the use of lethal control methods for horses they needed to understand there is a legitimate need to control population numbers. Even then, some participants were concerned by the idea of the animal being 'wasted' (wanted the carcasses to be put to a good use, such as being used for dog food)
- If lethal methods are necessary, ground shooting (which participants understood to be trapping and then shooting at close range) was initially seen as being more accurate/effective/humane than aerial shooting – but after discussion and an explanation of the effectiveness of aerial shooting, most participants accepted aerial shooting could have a place in appropriate circumstances. Precision, control and accuracy are key factors in the acceptance or otherwise of aerial shooting
- Acceptance of shooting as a control method is influenced by how controlled/professional the process/marksman is. Although some participants suggested licensed private hunters could be utilised, the majority were very uncomfortable with the idea that shooting would be done by people who enjoy hunting/shooting animals as a recreational pursuit
- For lethal control methods to be acceptable, there has to be an objective or goal that is part of a formal plan for managing population numbers – many participants were interested in understanding what the objective of management is and whether there is a sustainable number of wild horses the park could cope with

- Aerial shooting could be accepted as part of a suite of control measures to be used in appropriate circumstances.

Results – Communication insights

The focus groups also provided an insight into how people actually thought about the issue of feral animals and wild horses. Key communication insights were:

- Participants engaged with and assessed the topics differently – approximately one third had a ‘critical thinking’ approach – one based on evidence, science, definitions, cost/benefit analysis, while two thirds exhibited a more emotional/values-based approach to considering topics to varying degrees
- Many participants equated ‘feral’ with ‘destructive’ and did not conceive wild horses as being destructive since they do not kill other animals; the destruction of plants was not considered damaging
- In almost all cases, people only mentioned animals when talking about feral species, weeds and other plants were only discussed by one or two participants
- The majority of participants were not aware of the numbers of wild horses, or the extent of their impact or the damage they cause, in Kosciuszko National Park but on learning of it they understood the need to control population numbers
- When provided with information and time to think about an issue, the majority of participants reconsidered their views to some extent, if not completely.

A copy of the Focus Group Report is attached at Appendix 1.

Initial online (panel) survey

Background

An online questionnaire survey of community attitudes was undertaken from late July to early August 2014.

The objective of the survey was to collect comprehensive data on community views and knowledge of:

- The purpose of national parks
- Feral and pest animals
- Feral and pest animal control methods
- Wild horses, their impact and control methods.

The survey design was undertaken in collaboration by Straight Talk, NPWS and an independent third party market research firm, Jetty Research. Jetty Research’s project manager and research team are trained in statistical and research methodology, to ensure the survey and its results are robust.

At the commencement of the survey, respondents were informed that the subject of the survey was about national parks but were not told that it related to pest or feral animals in national parks or wild horse management. In addition, respondents were not able to alter previous answers. This ensured that respondents’ answers were not influenced by their position on the topic of wild horse management. It should also be noted that no supporting information, such as explanations of population control methods, was provided to respondents prior to them answering questions.

The survey was undertaken using CINT, a leading online survey panel provider. As CINT allows for specific geographic quotas a broad and representative spread of respondents from both metropolitan and regional NSW was obtained. In all, 819 people completed valid surveys.

It is understood that CINT's panel model represents a random sample, and results of this 819 person survey are accurate for the survey population to within +/- 3.4 per cent at the 95 per cent confidence level. (This effectively means that were the same random sample to be conducted 20 times, results should be accurate for all those in the target population – in this case the adult population of NSW - to within +/-3.5 per cent in 19 of those 20 surveys.)

Results – Review of the management plan

The online (panel) survey generated a significant and rich body of data on unmitigated community views (those uninfluenced by explanatory information) and the diversity of views held by different types of community members. The key results from the online (panel) survey, as relevant to the review of the Wild Horse Management Plan for Kosciuszko National Park, were:

- Nearly 60% of respondents do not think native plants and animals can cope with introduced plants and animals
- There is a strong understanding that the purpose of national parks is to protect and conserve native plants and animals (identified by 71% of respondents) and to protect natural and unique landscapes (by 59%). For 39% of respondents national parks protect and conserve cultural heritage and historic sites
- When asked to identify the major threats to Kosciuszko National Park, 35% of responses identified introduced flora and fauna as a major threat and 31% pollution and environmental damage. However, a significant majority of responses (63%) identified human activity, including tourism, as a major threat
- 83% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Kosciuszko National Park is home to rare or threatened native flora, fauna and unique ecosystems and 57% stated that these native plants and animals could not cope with introduced plants and animals
- Only 10% of respondents thought wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park should be protected at all costs, compared to 49% who thought native flora and fauna in Kosciuszko National Park should be protected at all costs. A total of 41% of respondents were neutral, with 27% of those selecting 5 from the 0 to 10 scale, which suggests the need to balance the interests of both wild horses and native flora and fauna
- The most acceptable forms of controlling feral and pest animals were fertility control (56% of responses) and trapping and euthanasia (52% of responses). Aerial shooting and mustering from the air were the least acceptable method (both 21%). The remaining control methods were identified as acceptable from a range of 47% (trapping and relocating) down to 26% (baiting and poisoning)
- When considering ways of controlling wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park, fertility control and trapping and relocating outside the park were identified as most effective by 38% of participants and were also considered the most humane, 44% and 53% respectively. Although it was identified as an acceptable control method for feral and pest animals generally, trapping and euthanasia was only identified by 25% of respondents as being most effective and 23% as most humane (see report for the effectiveness versus humaneness rating of all control methods, at Appendix 2).

Results – Communication insights

- There is a relatively low level of awareness that horses are a feral or pest animal. When asked to identify feral or pest animals only 35% of responses were for horses, compared to 74% for rabbits and 70% for foxes. Only 45% of responses identified horses/brumbies as a feral or pest animal in Kosciuszko National Park, which was similar to the response for cats
- There was a low level of awareness about the threat posed by horses to the park. When asked to identify the biggest threats to Kosciuszko National Park only 17% of responses were for horses, compared to cats and foxes which both recorded 24% of responses, and rabbits 21%. 40% of responses were for 'don't know'
- Generally speaking, respondents who had visited Kosciuszko National Park were more likely to identify: Kosciuszko National Park as home to rare or threatened native species and unique ecosystems that need protecting; that horses are a feral or pest species; that horses are a threat to native flora and fauna; and lethal control methods are acceptable than non-visitors. This suggests that familiarity with Kosciuszko National Park results in familiarity with the impact of wild horses within the park
- NPWS is not the main source for information about this issue for the community. Almost half of respondents heard about the management of wild horses through ABC TV news and current affairs (48%) and over a third from commercial TV news and current affairs. Only 11% heard about wild horse management from NPWS information, which suggests NPWS's view on this issue is not well known or part of the broader public discourse
- Respondents' personal characteristics – age, gender, location (metropolitan or regional), and usage of national parks – all have an impact on how they perceive this issue. For example, regional respondents are more likely to strongly disagree that native plants and animals in Kosciuszko National Park can cope with introduced species and are also more likely to support lethal control methods for feral animals than metropolitan respondents
- When thinking about what makes Kosciuszko National Park special, half of the responses were for snow and related activities. Natural beauty/size and unique landscape/wilderness only accounted for 45% and 34% of responses respectively. Again, this suggests that NPWS's view on Kosciuszko National Park is not well known or part of the broader public discourse about the park and its values.

A copy of the Initial Online (Panel) Questionnaire Survey Report is attached at Appendix 2.

21st century town hall meeting

Background

A 21st century town hall meeting is a large group process in which randomly selected and demographically representative community members deliberate on a complex issue.

This 21st century town hall meeting was conducted over seven hours at Queanbeyan on Saturday 29 November, 2014. The meeting was attended by 72 randomly selected, broadly demographically representative community members and, in accordance with standard practice, each participant was paid a stipend of \$150 for their attendance. 21 stakeholder representatives also attended the meeting and participated in the process. The seven NPWS staff who attended to observe the proceedings did not participate in any of the meeting activities.

The purpose of the 21st century town hall meeting was to:

- Engage with members of the broader community on wild horse management

- Provide the environment in which community members can deliberate on a range of complex and contested issues, and capture the considerations that were of most importance to them during their deliberations
- Transparently capture community opinions, using Keepad technology, on:
 - > The importance of national parks
 - > The priority of native flora and fauna vs. wild horses
 - > Eight population control methods being considered by the review
 - > The importance of humaneness, effectiveness and cost in wild horse management
- Allow a direct comparison between community and stakeholder views.

Meeting participants were seated in small table groups and presented with a range of information on the management of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park on which they deliberated. There were nine tables of community members and three of stakeholders, two tables of horse advocates and one of environment and conservation advocates, each with an independent facilitator.

Throughout the day, material was presented to the group by both pre-recorded video presentations and written form. The video presentations showed the issue from NPWS's perspective, then two environmental advocates and two horse advocates gave their differing perspectives on the issue and finally an RSPCA representative discussed animal welfare considerations. Written material gave details of population control methods being considered as part of the review and what they involve.

Following the presentation of material, discussion questions were posed to the groups and time allowed for each question to be discussed. Table facilitators ensured everyone participated in the discussions and also captured the factors or matters participants discussed, and the key points the discussions raised.

At the close of the table discussion, participants answered Keepad questions which required them to indicate their view via their individual Keepads. For example, after the initial period of discussion about whether national parks were important and why they are needed, participants were asked to indicate where they sat on a sliding scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being National Parks are not at all important to them and 10 being National Parks are extremely important to them. Stakeholder representatives did not use Keepads to record their preferences but indicated their views via sticky dots on an answer sheet. Once voting closed the results were broadcast to the room.

By the end of the day participants had deliberated on nine discussion questions and indicated their views on a total of 19 Keepad questions, including five demographic questions.

Results – Review of the management plan

- The majority of community participants supported or strongly supported the protection of flora and fauna, and agreed that wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park should be controlled in order to do so. Consequently, the majority supported the removal of horses from the park, one-third of whom supported their complete removal
- Community participants were ambiguous about the current population control method being used by NPWS, and had considerable concern about the stress endured by horses from transportation
- Trapping and euthanasia onsite was supported by the majority of community members, suggesting that this is seen as a better alternative for horses than transportation to abattoir for euthanasia

- Community participants' views on aerial and ground mustering, fertility control and ground shooting varied widely with all three methods attracting both strong support and opposition
- The majority of community members found brumby running and roping to be unacceptable or completely unacceptable, and fencing also attracted strong opposition as a control method
- Whilst the majority of community participants (almost two-thirds) supported aerial shooting as a control method, approximately one-third did not support it
- The vast majority of community participants felt strongly that the effectiveness of the control method to control population numbers should be the most important consideration and the cost of undertaking the control method should be the least important consideration
- While both horse advocates and environment advocates viewed national parks as very important, their views on control methods were highly polarised (no control method was either supported or opposed by both groups). Generally speaking, community participants' views about control methods were more closely aligned to those of environmental advocates
- As with community participants, environmental advocates thought effectiveness was the most important consideration for a control method, while for horse advocates humaneness was the most important consideration.

Results – Communication insights

- Most community participants identified as knowing 'nothing' or 'a little' about the issue of managing the wild horse population in Kosciuszko National Park
- Slightly more than one-third of community members changed their views as a result of the event and being better informed, and of those who did not change their views many felt better informed about the issue
- Stakeholder representatives did not change their views over the course of the day which indicated that they have a strong investment in this issue and a pre-existing position about wild horse management which is unlikely to change.

A copy of the 21st Century Town Hall Meeting Report is attached at Appendix 3.

Engagement activities for the general public and stakeholders

Kitchen table discussion guide

Background

Kitchen table discussion guides were available for completion from 17 November until 12 December 2014 in soft copy from the 'Protecting the Snowies' engagement platform. 1000 hard copies were also printed and distributed through NPWS visitor centres, local schools, community groups and to participants at the 21st century town hall meeting. No active promotion of this engagement activity was undertaken.

The purpose of the guide was to capture the views of the broader community, in particular, those who may not ordinarily participate in public engagement activities, such as attending public meetings or participating in online discussion forums. The guide introduced the current problem facing NPWS by providing very concise, basic and balanced background information on why the 'Snowies' and Kosciuszko National Park are a unique natural and cultural asset. It also explained how NPWS currently manages the problem and described the various control methods being considered in the review to manage the wild horse population. It also shared various opinions expressed across

stakeholder groups to demonstrate the complexity of the issue and the challenge for NPWS in getting the balance right.

Groups who held kitchen table discussions were asked to discuss and provide their feedback on the management of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park and the different control methods being considered by the review. 39 completed guides were submitted, capturing the feedback from a total of 178 community members and stakeholders.

Results – Review of the management plan

- Respondents had polarised views on the management of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park
- No control method was universally supported, or opposed, although individual results did indicate an overall preference one way or the other
- The control method that attracted almost equal numbers of supporters and non-supporters was the only method NPWS currently uses – trapping and removal and then rehoming or transport to abattoir
- Non-lethal methods were supported by more respondent groups than lethal methods, although lethal methods were still supported by approximately one third of participant groups
- Humane treatment was a recurrent theme in responses, and appeared to be the consideration underpinning respondents' ratings of management methods
- The need for a balanced and effective management strategy was recognised by the majority of respondents.

Results – Communication insights

- For respondents who discredited the scientific evidence about this issue, the main areas of contention were estimated population numbers and the positive value of horses in the Kosciuszko National Park ecosystem
- Approximately one-fifth of respondents saw the cultural and heritage significance of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park as important.

A copy of the Kitchen Table Discussion Guide Report is attached at Appendix 4.

Online engagement

Background

The 'Protecting the Snowies' online engagement platform was active from 21 July until 14 December 2014.

The purpose of the online engagement was to:

- Provide an accessible engagement platform that allowed the broadest reach of community involvement
- Educate the community about wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park and provide information and research material about the issue
- Invite participation in an ongoing discussion that allowed the examination of the complexities associated with wild horse management and an understanding of nuances to develop
- Collect evidence of community views and values to inform the review of the Wild Horse Management Plan for Kosciuszko National Park.

The Protecting the Snowies engagement platform included 32 online forums, and provided a range of resources, such as information sheets, NPWS videos, and links to credible media outlets, and participant generated stories and pictures. The second online survey was also built on the engagement platform and accessed via the site.

Promotion of the platform was limited. Initially, 50 stakeholders with a registered interest in the Wild Horse Management Plan were invited via email to join the online conversation. Participation subsequently grew organically, as stakeholders promoted the site amongst their networks, relevant media reports attracted interest and engagement activities raised awareness of the site and the resources it contained. The only pro-active promotion of the site was via a Premier's Newsletter, dated 7 November 2014, which listed the platform in its "Featured Consultation" section.

In total, there were just under 20,000 unique visitors to the platform and more than 1400 actions (a comment or vote of agreement/disagreement of a comment). More than 18,000 visited the discussion forums to 'listen in' to the conversation and 6552 visitors downloaded documents, watched videos and read the questions and answers and other material.

Results – Review of the management plan

- Most participants value the Snowy Mountains as a national park, but for different reasons, with many valuing wild horses as part of the heritage or iconic attraction of the Snowy Mountains
- The majority of participants acknowledge that there is a challenge or problem in managing wild horses and there is recognition that the current management techniques are not effective or the best outcome for the majority of wild horses
- Participants want more effective solutions but in a balanced way that manages environmental impact and humane treatment of wild horses, and they want more evidence of the effectiveness of the solutions, particularly of environmental regeneration
- Some participants want to be involved in the management of wild horses or the monitoring of the impacts of wild horses in the national park.

Results – Communication insights

- Despite a high level of visitation, only a small number of people (589) actively participated in the online discussion by contributing to a forum with a comment or vote, completing the survey or submitting a story and there were only 307 registered users to the site, or 1.3% of total visitors (including repeat visitors)
- These low levels of active participation suggest that, while community members are interested in the issue, they do not hold strong enough views to warrant their involvement in online discussions. Consequently, those who did participate were those with stronger views than the general community. Of the 32 online forums, 14 were dominated by horse advocates and 11 by environmental advocates. Only seven forums attracted a balance of comments.

A copy of the Online Engagement Report is attached at Appendix 5.

Second online survey

Background

As part of the online engagement, an online survey was run through the 'Protecting the Snowies' engagement platform from 14 October to 14 December, 2014. 405 online surveys were completed.

The objective of the survey was to collect further data on views and knowledge of:

- The purpose of national parks
- Feral and pest animals
- Feral and pest animal control methods
- Wild horses, their impact and control methods.

Survey questions closely followed those used in the online panel survey undertaken in July and August 2014. However, due to technical constraints of the EngagementHQ survey platform, there were some inconsistencies in the functionality of the surveys, particularly in relation to the flow of questions within the survey. These inconsistencies may have some impact on the results of this online survey.

Further, unlike the initial survey, in which participants were only aware the survey was related to national parks before they commenced, and could not change their earlier answers once they were aware the later survey questions were capturing views on wild horse management, participants of this survey self-selected to complete a survey and were well aware it was gathering information about wild horse management, for the review of the Wild Horse Management Plan for Kosciuszko National Park. Consequently, the second survey was more likely to be completed by those with stronger views and a pre-existing 'investment' in the issue since they were firstly motivated enough about the issue of wild horse management to be on the 'Protecting the Snowies' engagement platform and then to self-select to complete the survey.

Results – Review of the management plan

- Respondents believed the role of national parks is primarily to protect natural landscapes and native species, and promote the appreciation of nature
- 86.7% of respondents believed Kosciuszko National Park is home to threatened species and half the respondents (50.7%) did not believe that Kosciuszko National Park can cope with introduced species, although a significant minority (30%) disagree
- 91.3% of respondents believed that feral animals pose at least some threat to the environment of national parks, and 79.1% of respondents are concerned about the impact of feral animals
- No means of controlling feral animals was universally acceptable to respondents and all control methods were unacceptable to around half of respondents or more. The most supported control method for respondents is trapping and relocating (acceptable to 52.1% of respondents), followed by fertility control (49.6%) and trapping and euthanasia (45.4%). These three control methods were also rated as the most humane (in the same order)
- The least supported method is aerial shooting (but still acceptable to 34.1% of respondents), although ground shooting was more acceptable than both baiting and poisoning, and fencing. However, aerial shooting was identified as the most effective control method
- Although respondents were generally polarised on the issue of the trade-off between horses and the environment, with over half of respondents rating themselves at one of the extreme ends of the scale (horses vs. environment), the majority of respondents prioritised protecting flora and fauna.

Results – Communication insights

- Participants did not necessarily categorise horses as feral, with just 49.9% of respondents identifying them as such (they are one of the least likely non-native species to be identified as feral)

- Pigs were nominated by respondents as a bigger threat to Kosciuszko National Park (50.1%) than horses (36.8%). Horses were the second most common identified threat to the park
- NPWS is not the main source of information about wild horse management - respondents had received their information from a variety of sources, including word of mouth (56.8%). ABC news and current affairs (at 50.1%) stood out as an influential formal source of information while 47.7% of respondents identified NPWS information as the source of their information about the management of wild horses
- Knowledge levels about control methods used for horses in Kosciuszko National Park is not high - although 84.5% of respondents identified they were aware of the control methods NPWS uses for horses in Kosciuszko National Park, almost half of responses incorrectly identified shooting, both aerial and ground, as a control method that is currently being used by NPWS. Mustering, fencing, fertility control and poisoning were also incorrectly identified by respondents as control methods currently used by NPWS for horses
- Those who used NPWS for their information source were better informed about current control method for wild horses than those who used other sources.

A copy of the Second Online Questionnaire Survey Report is attached at Appendix 6.

Engagement activities for stakeholders

Stakeholder meetings

Background

NPWS staff having been consulting with many stakeholder groups and representatives about the management of wild horses for well over a decade.

As part of the engagement activities undertaken in support of the review of the Wild Horse Management Plan, Straight Talk and NPWS undertook a suite of meetings with stakeholders from December 2013 until December 2014. A total of six meetings were conducted with horse advocates, as well as three field inspection trips in Kosciuszko National Park, and two meetings were conducted with environmental and conservation stakeholders. In many cases individual stakeholders attended multiple meetings. NPWS staff also attended public meetings that had been organised by horse advocates about this issue.

The purpose of the meetings was to provide stakeholder groups with an opportunity to:

- Discuss issues associated with wild horse management in Kosciuszko National Park in an uncontested environment
- Have their views heard as part of the review
- Allow for more focussed discussions about the issues of most interest to them.

Results – Review of the management plan

Not surprisingly, the issues and concerns that were raised by horse advocates and environmental advocates were substantially different from each other.

However, it would be a mistake to suggest that horse advocates speak with a unified voice and have shared concerns and values, as there are significant areas of difference between various horse advocate groups. In particular, there are a variety of views about what constitutes humane treatment of horses.

For some, brumby running or roping is considered an appropriate method of control, although the underlying value for those who support this method appears to be a cultural one, around family history and local heritage. For others, this activity is neither considered a legitimate control method nor a humane way to treat horses and it should not be included in any horse management plan.

Similarly, views about euthanasia are also varied. For some horse advocates, euthanising horses onsite might be supported if there was sufficient evidence of the need to reduce horses numbers in Kosciuszko National Park and they were unable to be rehomed. Support in this circumstance is predicated on the basis that this was considered to be more humane than putting horses through the stress of transportation only for them to end up at an abattoir to be euthanised. For others, euthanising horses could never be supported.

For horse advocates, the key outcomes of formal consultation meetings that relate to the review and had general support were:

- Can agree that horses need to be managed in Kosciuszko National Park but need to establish and then get their agreement on a sustainable number of horses otherwise they would consider any horse management plan an 'eradication plan'
- Want to have legislation and policy that recognise the value of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park and protects their future in the park
- Current management plan has not been evaluated and its effectiveness has not been assessed. A new plan cannot be developed until the effectiveness of the current plan has been properly reviewed
- Do not accept that scientific evidence is credible, as it has been gathered by scientists who are funded by the government, and believe all the information NPWS publishes is only its opinions, rather than facts
- The revised plan needs to acknowledge the value of horses in Kosciuszko National Park, such as their heritage and tourism value, and the benefit these bring to the park.

Issues which do not attract general agreement amongst horse advocates relate to what constitutes the humane treatment of horses and which control methods are acceptable for horse populations.

For environmental advocates, the key outcomes of the meeting were:

- Numbers of horses in Kosciuszko National Park are significantly increasing, as is their impact and the damage they are causing to the park. Horses are now being seen in parts of the park they have not historically been seen
- Scientific evidence is necessary and a scientific approach should be taken – horses are feral animals and should be identified as such – and evidence should be in the media
- Current method of control (passive trapping and removal) is very expensive and highly inefficient, and they are concerned that horses are learning to avoid traps
- Would like horses to be completely eradicated from Kosciuszko National Park but recognise that this outcome may not be achievable
- Any control method used needs to be quick, and both cost effective and humane. The impact of control methods on the park must also be considered (for example, vehicle tracks can last up to 40 years)
- The elevation of horses, their mythology, is only recent – they were previously seen as a pest

- New Zealand's approach to the management of wild deer in its national parks was very successful.

5 Key outcomes summary

The key outcomes of the community engagement, as relevant to the review of the Wild Horse Management Plan, were:

- There is a strong understanding within the community that the purpose of national parks is to protect native plants and animals, and to a lesser extent natural and unique landscapes
- The community strongly believes that Kosciuszko National Park is home to rare and threatened plants and animals, and unique landscapes, and also believes that these cannot cope with introduced plants and animals
- The majority of the community believe that the native plants and animals in Kosciuszko National Park must be protected at all costs and consequently they support the control of wild horse numbers in the park, although a significant proportion of the community support a balanced approach
- The effectiveness of control methods to control population numbers is the most important consideration for community members
- While each control method has some level of support, there is no control method which enjoys the uniform support of the community. It should be noted though that support levels for different control methods change when people are given credible information about what the method actually involves and time to reflect on it (as indicated by the differences in support for control methods demonstrated by the online (panel) survey outcomes and those of the 21st century town hall meeting)
- There is a general understanding that a number of different control methods are necessary to be able to effectively control horse population numbers in all circumstances
- The current method of population control being used by NPWS does not have strong community support, and concerns about the stress endured by horses through transportation to abattoir seems to drive the lack of support for this method
- The majority of people regard feral (wild) horses in a different light to other feral animals, particularly in relation to appropriate population control methods
- There is a low level of community awareness that wild horses are feral animals and many people do not recognise the categorisation of horses as feral even when known
- Humaneness was a key consideration when determining how acceptable or otherwise a control method was for wild horses. However, participants had considerably different views on what humaneness means and which control methods were humane and which were not
- For community members to feel comfortable about the use of lethal control methods for horses they have to know there is a legitimate need to manage population numbers. Having a formal management plan, with well-articulated aims and objectives, and evidence of the need to manage the population, will be a key component of that
- For lethal control methods, such as shooting, to be acceptable they must be controlled and the marksmen involved must be professional and highly trained. The use of NPWS staff is more strongly supported for this purpose than private operators. The use of volunteer or recreational hunters and those who enjoy hunting and shooting animals is not at all supported

- There is a low level of community knowledge about the number of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park and the extent of their impact on the park, and NPWS is not the main source of information about this issue for the majority of the community
- Both horse advocates and environmental advocates valued national parks but did not agree on their purpose – environmental advocates believe their purpose is to protect native plants and animals and the environment, and horse advocates to protect cultural values and provide recreational opportunities
- In relation to control methods, stakeholders' views, which are polarised at either end of the wild horse management spectrum, do not reflect the views of the general public, although there is a closer alignment between the views of community members and environmental advocates, than horse advocates
- While community members are open to hearing NPWS's views and being influenced by scientific evidence, stakeholders hold very strong views, which are unlikely to change.

6 Review recommendations

On the basis of the outcomes of the community engagement undertaken in support of the review of the Wild Horse Management Plan, and in particular, the views expressed by the community, the following recommendations are made for the review:

- Given that the effectiveness of population control methods is the most important consideration for the community, the Independent Technical Reference Group should review the evidence and undertake a systematic analysis of the effectiveness of each control methods being considered by the review
- Given the importance humaneness plays in the level of support the community has for population control methods, the Independent Technical Reference Group should review the evidence and undertake a systematic analysis of the relative humaneness of each control methods being considered by the review
- The Wild Horse Management Plan should contain:
 - Very clear aims and objectives for the management of the wild horse population
 - The evidence that supports the need to manage the wild horse population
 - Analysis of the relative effectiveness and humaneness of each control method that was considered
 - The basis on which decisions to include or not to include control methods in the plan were taken
 - How the effectiveness of the plan will be assessed
- The public exhibition of the revised plan should be supported by a communication and engagement strategy. The strategy should include the provision of relevant information about the need to manage wild horse numbers and what is at stake if numbers are not successfully managed, as well as tools to manage any negative media or social media campaigns undertaken by stakeholders. The extension of the online engagement platform, appropriately renamed to reflect the next stage of the project and with its resources archived for access by new visitors, is recommended as part of the communication and engagement strategy
- An ongoing education campaign to highlight that horses are feral animals and the damage they are causing to Kosciuszko National Park and its native flora and fauna, to help build community understanding of the need to have an effective management plan is also recommended.

7 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Focus Group Report

Appendix 2 – Initial Online Survey Report

Appendix 3 – 21st Century Town Hall Meeting Report

Appendix 4 – Kitchen Table Discussion Guide Report

Appendix 5 – Online Engagement Report

Appendix 6 – Second Online Survey Report