

Meeting Summary

Kosciuszko Wild Horse Scientific Advisory Panel

Tuesday 17 December 2019

The Kosciuszko Wild Horse Scientific Advisory Panel was formed by the Minister for Energy and Environment to provide independent scientific and technical advice to the National Parks and Wildlife Service to prepare a draft wild horse heritage management plan.

The panel met at the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) office in Jindabyne for its second meeting.

Membership

Dr Diana Day resigned from the panel on 21 November 2019. The panel decided that the experience and expertise of the remaining members were adequate to address any potential gap in knowledge left by Dr Day's resignation. Members agreed not to seek a replacement for Dr Day. The panel acknowledged that members could consult externally with other experts to address any knowledge gaps within the panel.

Site visit

The panel conducted a site visit to Kosciuszko National Park on 16 December. The visit was conducted via helicopter and included on-ground tours of sites negatively impacted and non-impacted by horses, as well as areas where horses are present and those that are currently horse-free. The panel found the site visit informative and provided an appreciation of the density of horses, grazing impacts, access and nature of the topography, which may affect the feasibility of some control methods.

Questions from the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Community Advisory Panel

At its 9 December 2019 meeting, the Community Advisory Panel directed questions to the Scientific Advisory Panel. Questions included:

- methods of measuring environmental impact
- exclusion fencing
- use of drones in monitoring and mustering
- cultural value of horses to Aboriginal people

The panel will review the Community Advisory Panel's questions for its next meeting.

2019 Australian Alps wild horse aerial survey

The panel was provided with the population estimates from the survey. The panel discussed the benefits of management and population estimates at a finer scale to avoid conjecture over large-scale population estimates.

The 2016 draft *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Management Plan*

The panel commenced discussions on improvements to the 2016 draft *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Management Plan*. Preliminary comments included:

- All statements need to be supported by science (empirical evidence).
- Lack of demographic information, including how distinct populations are and movement between populations. This may affect how control impacts populations. There is a potential to include the community in demographic studies.
- Lack of information regarding Aboriginal heritage. There is a need to address the potential impact of management to Aboriginal heritage.
- Improve transparency about where the knowledge gaps lie. These could become recommendations for future research.

The panel will review the plan in detail prior to its next meeting.

Reproductive control

The panel advised that reproductive control methods are not presently an effective strategy for reducing the number of horses but can be a useful management tool for once populations have reached an acceptable density through other means of control (i.e. removal or culls). Furthermore, effective and feasible reproductive control methods are not currently available for use in Australia, and may be some time away. A thorough up-to-date review of the literature was performed together with consultation with a range of equine reproduction control experts in Australia and overseas. The panel was keen for further research in this area to be pursued, both with immunocontraceptives and exploration of the use of intra uterine devices in mares.

Welfare of control methods

The panel will review the former Kosciuszko Wild Horse Independent Technical Reference Group's welfare assessment of control methods. While the ranking of control methods was unlikely to change, there may be additional information now available to improve the assessment. The panel supported in-field trials to quantitatively measure welfare outcomes of different control methods, and then reviewing management in light of the results.

There was a preference to use the term 'welfare outcome' rather than 'humaneness', which is more subjective. The panel also preferred to avoid classing control methods as 'lethal' and 'non-lethal', since some methods referred to as 'non-lethal', such as passive trapping and removal, can result in the death of horses if sent to the knackery. The panel acknowledged that sending horses to the knackery had the lowest welfare outcome of all methods.

Member biographies

The panel will produce biographies for each of its members to be made publicly available on the NPWS website and to the Community Advisory Panel.

Next meetings

Monday 13 January 2020 in Queanbeyan – joint meeting with the Community Advisory Panel.

Tuesday 14 January 2020 in Queanbeyan – panel meeting.