
Investigation into Administration of Wild Horses Re-Homing Program

Background

1. On 18 April 2024, Minister Penny Sharpe MLC (**Minister Sharpe**) received information from 2GB broadcaster Ray Hadley alleging that NPWS had failed to comply with its *Domestication (rehoming) guidelines* (**Guidelines**) when re-homing over 250 wild horses to a person with links to an alleged illegal knackery in the Wagga Wagga area (**POI**).
2. On 18 April 2024, Minister Sharpe requested that the Secretary of the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (**DCCEEW**) investigate the administration of the NPWS wild horse re-homing program (**Program**) as a whole.

The proposed investigation will focus on both general questions, and questions specific to the Wagga Wagga case and person of interest (POI).

Terms of reference:

General questions:

- a. How are wild horses allocated by NPWS to applicants under the Program?
- b. What are the current requirements in order to be approved as a re-homer under the program, and are these appropriate?
- c. Does information sharing protocols or data sharing exist across government agencies involved in re-homing and animal welfare regulation, for example Racing NSW and local government?
- d. Under current requirements, is NPWS required to make regular checks or enquiries regarding whether an approved re-homer is still appropriate to be receiving horses?
- e. In what circumstances, if any, should NPWS make further enquiries or checks with re-homers after a delivery of horses?
- f. What restrictions on wild horses and their use exist once received by re-homers? For example, in what circumstances are recipients permitted to euthanise wild horses received under the Program?
- g. Identify any gaps that exist in the policies and procedures relating to the supply of wild horses generally.

With reference to the specific case:

- h. What are the factual circumstances around the supply of wild horses to the POI accused of running an illegal knackery?
- i. How were wild horses allocated to the POI during the period of time in question, and were all protocols followed?
- j. Was there any follow up or monitoring – formal or informal – regarding the POI?

Terms of Reference



- k. Should NPWS have made enquiries regarding the fitness of the applicant to re-home wild horses given the large number of wild horses requested by that applicant? Were any additional checks made or was additional information sought?
- l. Was any information received by NPWS regarding the POI during the time that they were receiving re-homed horses?
- m. Review NPWS internal policies and procedures relating to the Program and identify matters and circumstances relating to the supply of wild horses to the POI that may fall outside those policies and procedures.
- n. Are there any immediate lessons that can be learnt from this situation and can improvements be made to the settings for the future?

(the Investigation Issues).

Conduct of the investigation

An external professional services firm is being engaged to conduct the investigation and will commence in the week of 29 April 2024.

A final Investigation Report is to be provided to DCCEEW by close of business on **14 June 2024**.