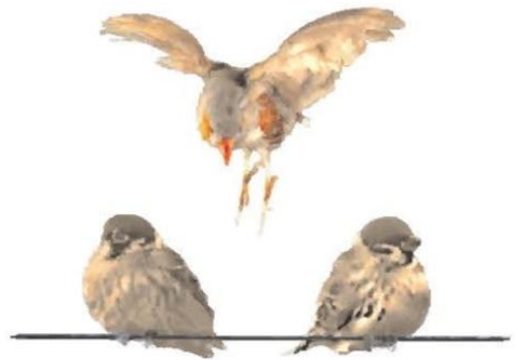


straight Talk

hear every voice, know where you stand



Kitchen Table Discussion Guide Wild Horse Management Plan Review

16 March 2015

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1 Introduction

This report details the outcomes and key findings from Kitchen Table Discussion Guides which were completed as part of the community and stakeholder engagement activities associated with the review of the Wild Horse Management Plan for Kosciuszko National Park.

Straight Talk was engaged by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to undertake community consultation to capture community and stakeholder views about the management of wild horses to inform its review. A multi-stream approach was used to gain the community's participation and capture its views on this issue including focus groups, an online survey and 21st century town hall meeting, as well as Kitchen Table Discussion Guides.

Kitchen Table Discussion Guides are an engagement tool that provides the information and guidance needed to allow individuals and small groups to participate in discussions at a time and place that suits them, and with people they are comfortable exchanging opinions with.

The guides were made available from 17 November until 12 December 2014 online via the 'Protecting the Snowies' engagement platform from where copies could be downloaded and printed, and in hard copy at NPWS information centres. Hard copies were provided to stakeholders who were already engaged with the review, to be distributed through their networks, and were also sent to individuals on request. 1000 hard copies were distributed through these means.

A total of 39 guides were completed and returned, capturing the feedback from a total of 178 community members and stakeholders.

2 Methodology

The Kitchen Table Discussion Guide on the Wild Horse Management Plan review was developed by Straight Talk in collaboration with NPWS. The tool was produced to encourage a deeper engagement across the community and stakeholders by reaching people who ordinarily may not participate in other forms of engagement, such as online discussion forums and face-to-face meetings.

Given the location of Kosciuszko National Park and the level of interest in both feral animal and wild horse management in rural and regional areas, the Kitchen Table Discussion Guide also provided another avenue for broader public engagement across the whole State. Multiple hard copies were provided to stakeholder groups to distribute to their membership and networks to further broaden the reach of the engagement.

The purpose of the guide was to inform and educate the broader community on wild horse management in Kosciuszko National Park, to engender an understanding about the issue and to capture their views about the management of wild horses in the park.

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 to manage the wild horse population being considered in the review. Most importantly it shared the various opinions expressed across stakeholder groups to demonstrate the complexity of the issue and the challenge for NPWS in getting the balance right.

The guide invited family, friends, colleagues and classmates to get together and talk about this issue. It was designed to help facilitate those discussions at home, work or in the classroom by providing guidelines and a step-by-step approach to preparing for and hosting a discussion. It provided the questions to be answered by the group and the means by which to capture those views and submit them for input into the review.

Participants were asked to discuss and provide feedback on the following questions:

Question one – On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is 'Leave the wild horses in KNP alone' and 10 is 'Remove all the wild horses and protect the sensitive environmental values in KNP', where do you rank and why?

Question two – Now consider each management or control method outlined in this guide (see section 4). What types of control are acceptable to you and why? (rank each method using a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is 'Not acceptable' and 10 is 'Acceptable').

- > Trapping and removal then rehoming or transport to abattoir
- > Aerial or ground mustering
- > Fertility control
- > Ground shooting
- > Brumby running or roping
- > Fencing
- > Aerial shooting
- > Do nothing option

Are there any other control methods or management approaches that we should consider?

Question three – What does the ‘humane’ treatment of wild horses during population control and animal management mean to you?

Question four – Are there other concerns relating to the issue of wild horse management within KNP that your kitchen table discussion group would like to provide feedback on?

To ensure the broadest distribution, two versions of the KTD were created. An online version was used on the project website on the ‘Protecting the Snowies’ engagement platform (www.environment.nsw.gov.au/protectsnowies), which could be downloaded and printed, and a hard copy version was also available. 1000 printed copies of the guide were distributed through the NPWS visitor centres, local schools, community groups and additional local visitor information centres. A copy was also given to all participants of the 21st century town hall meeting to encourage participants to continue the conversation amongst family and friends. Finally, hard copies were provided to identified stakeholder groups, including environmental and conservation and wild horse advocacy groups. See Appendix A for a copy of the guide.

However, no formal promotion of the guide was undertaken. Only visitors to the ‘Protecting the Snowies’ engagement platform, stakeholders, and their networks, and those who received hard copies of the guide were aware of this engagement activity. Consequently, as participants were self-selected and chose to ‘opt in’ to being involved, this process was more likely to capture the views of those with stronger positions and a pre-existing ‘investment’ in the issue than those processes where participants are randomly selected or are motivated to participate by the advertising and promotional activities that normally accompany public community engagement activities.

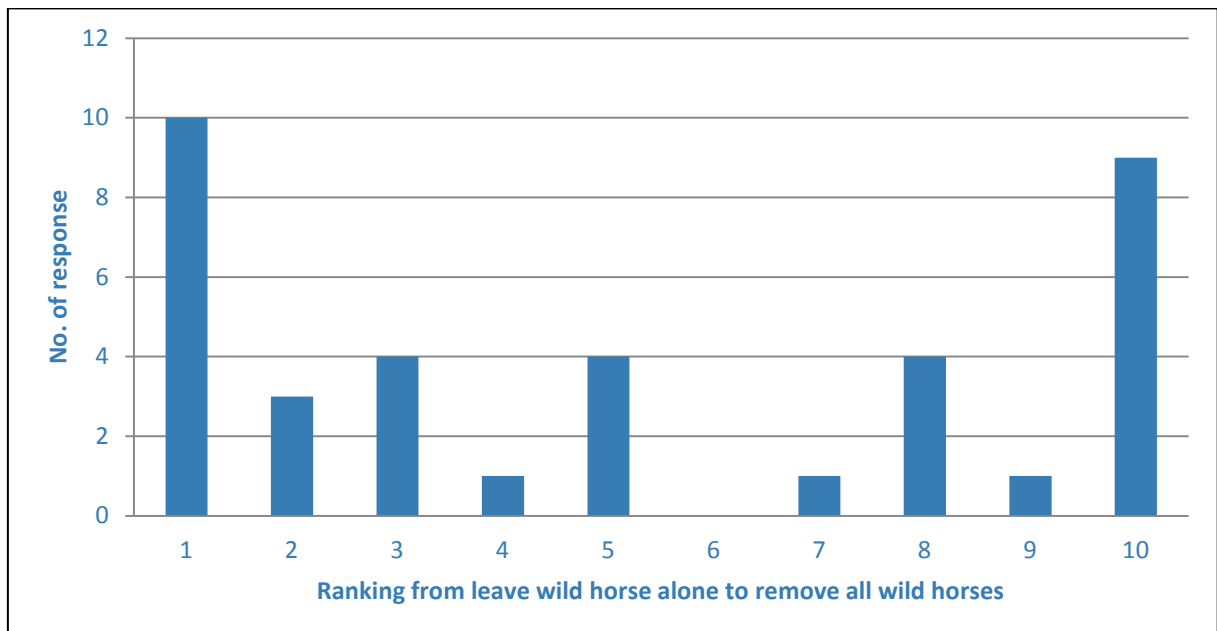
3 Discussion outcomes

Participants in the kitchen table discussions were invited to provide feedback on a range of matters associated with the management of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park.

A total of 39 Kitchen Table Discussion Guides were completed and returned for analysis, providing feedback from discussions which involved at least 178 individual participants. However, not all respondents provided information about the number of participants in their discussion so that the actual number of people involved in discussions would be higher.

Question one - priority in Kosciuszko National Park

On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is 'Leave the wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park alone' and 10 is 'Remove all the wild horses and protect the sensitive environmental values of Kosciuszko National Park', where do you rank?



A total of 37 responses were provided to this question.

Approximately half of all responses fell at either end of the scale, being 1 – 'Leave the wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park alone' or 10 – 'Remove all the wild horses and protect the sensitive environmental values of Kosciuszko National Park' and almost all of the remaining responses indicated a preference. There were only four responses that indicated a neutral view (by selecting 5 on the scale).

This indicates there are strong and polarised views on the presence of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park amongst participants.

For those who supported leaving wild horses alone, the most common reasons stated were:

- Wild horses have a substantial cultural and heritage significance
- Wild horses are an integral part of the National Park's ecosystem
- Wild horse management is required, however they should not be eradicated from Kosciuszko National Park.

The need to manage the population humanely and effectively as well as protect the environment was also expressed by supporters of leaving wild horses alone.

For the community members who indicated that they would like to remove all wild horses from Kosciuszko National Park, the most common reasons stated were:

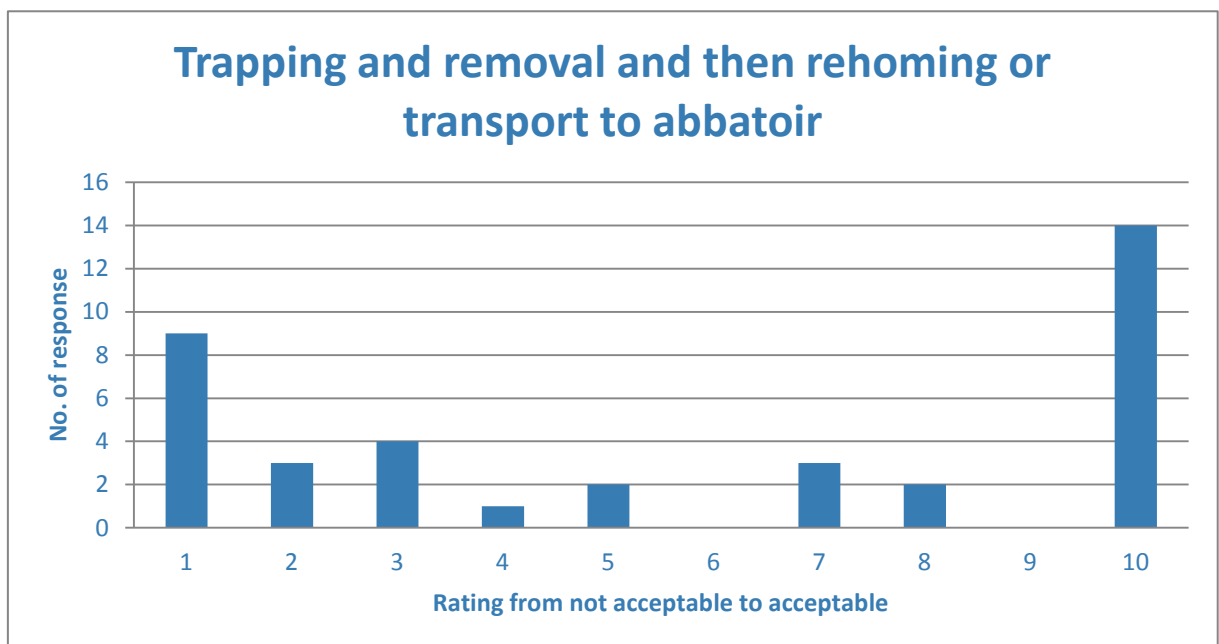
- Wild horses are a feral species
- Kosciuszko National Park is a sensitive environment in need of protection
- Wild horse population needs to be controlled.

Amongst the supporters of removing wild horses there was an acknowledgement of the cultural and heritage significance of wild horses.

Question two – population control methods

Participants were asked to consider different management or control methods and rank the acceptability of each method on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is 'Not acceptable' and 10 is 'Acceptable'. For the purpose of the analysis of results to these questions, respondents who rated a method from 1 to 4 were classed as not supporting the method, those rating 5 and 6 neutral, and the remaining ratings were seen as supporting the method.

Trapping and removal then rehoming or transport to abattoir



A total of 37 responses were provided on the acceptability of trapping and removal and then rehoming or transport to abattoir as a management method. It should be noted that this is the only method NPWS is currently utilising to control the wild horse population in Kosciuszko National Park.

The responses were divided with peaks at the two extremes of the scale and only two neutral responses. The largest number of responses was for 10 'Acceptable', indicating that for these participants trapping and removal and then rehoming or transport to abattoir is an acceptable management strategy. However, overall the number of respondents that supported this method was almost equal to the number not supporting it.

Those who did not support the trapping and removal and then rehome or transport to abattoir, stated that this was due to:

- Being too stressful to horses and not humane
- Not being an effective management strategy
- Being too expensive.

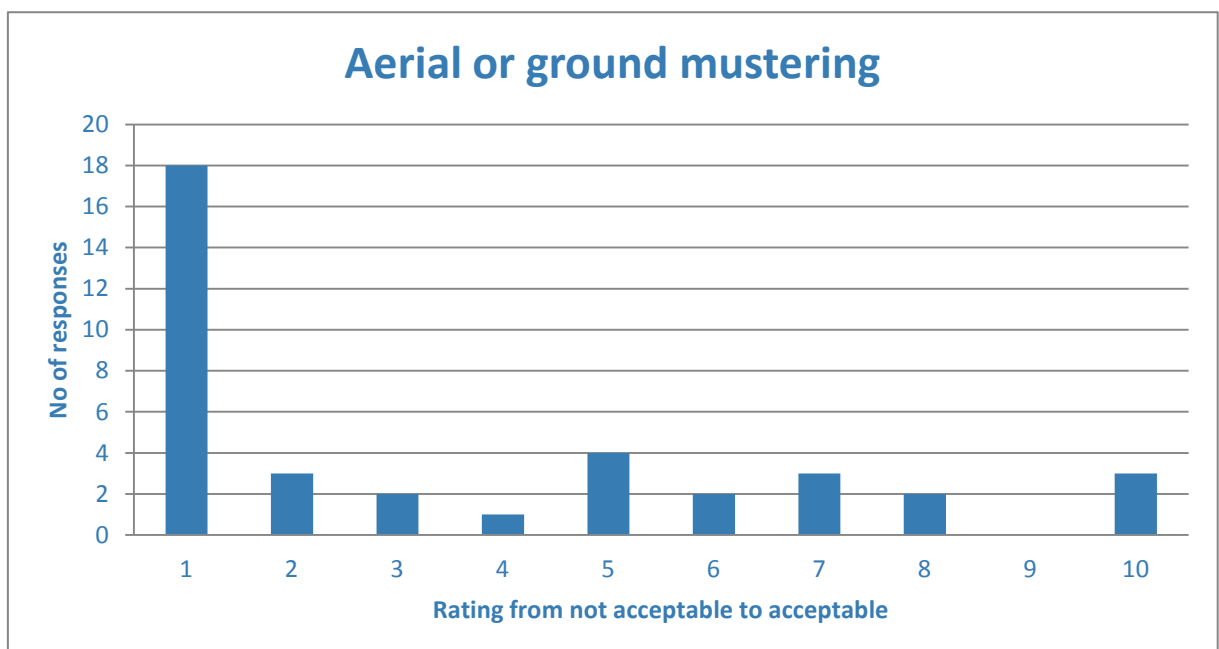
It was commented that if this method was to be utilised it should be carried out by experienced operators.

Supporters of this method most commonly stated that this was because:

- It is a humane method for managing the wild horse population
- It provides wild horses the opportunity to be re-homed
- It is the best method available.

Concerns were expressed amongst supporters of this method regarding stress being caused to wild horses and some respondents indicated they held a preference to euthanise wild horses on site if they were not able to be re-homed. Other supporters of this method indicated that they did not support transport to an abattoir.

Aerial or ground mustering



38 groups responded to whether aerial or ground mustering was an acceptable management method.

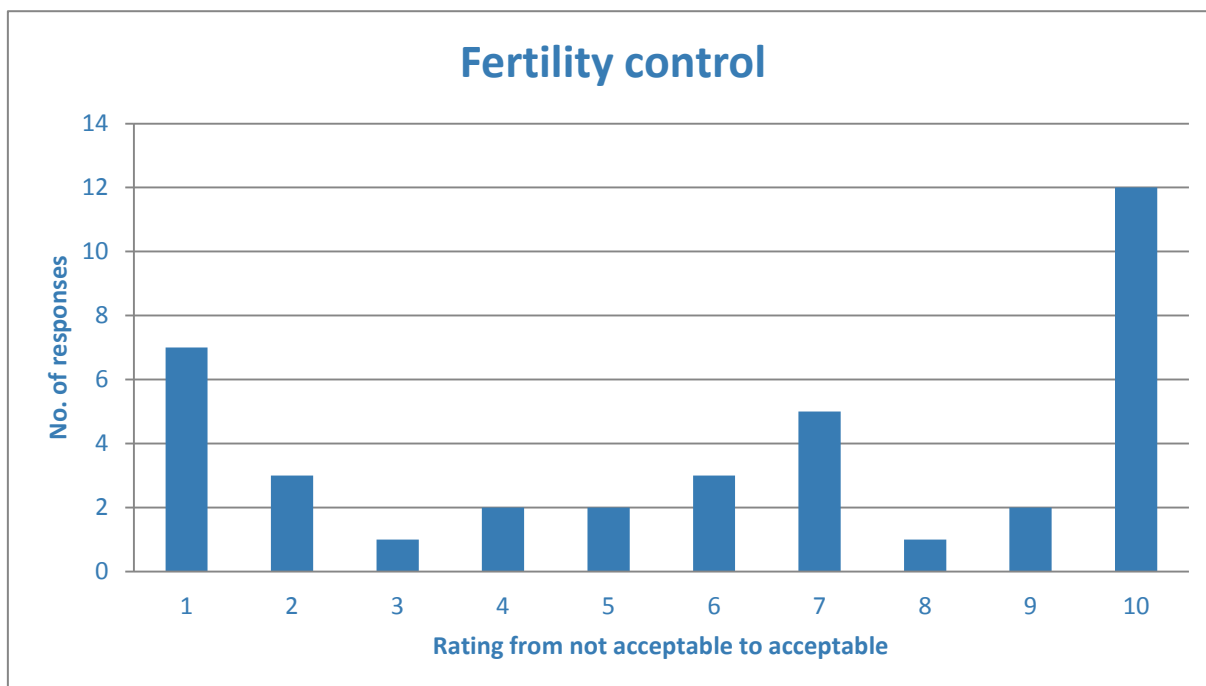
There was a clear indication in the results that aerial and ground mustering was not considered an acceptable management strategy with 18 groups scoring this question 1 'Not acceptable'. A clear majority of responses did not support this control method.

The main reasons expressed for this method not being acceptable were:

- Stress and risk of injury to wild horses and riders
- It is not feasible to undertake given Kosciuszko National Park's terrain
- It is not a cost effective management strategy.

Amongst both detractors and supporters of mustering it was indicated that ground mustering was preferable to aerial mustering.

Fertility control



There were 38 responses about fertility control.

A significant proportion of responses considered fertility control an acceptable management strategy by scoring the question at 10 'Acceptable'. Responses were spread across the whole spectrum with peaks at the extremes of the scale but overall more than half the respondents did support this method.

The main reasoning for those who support fertility control was:

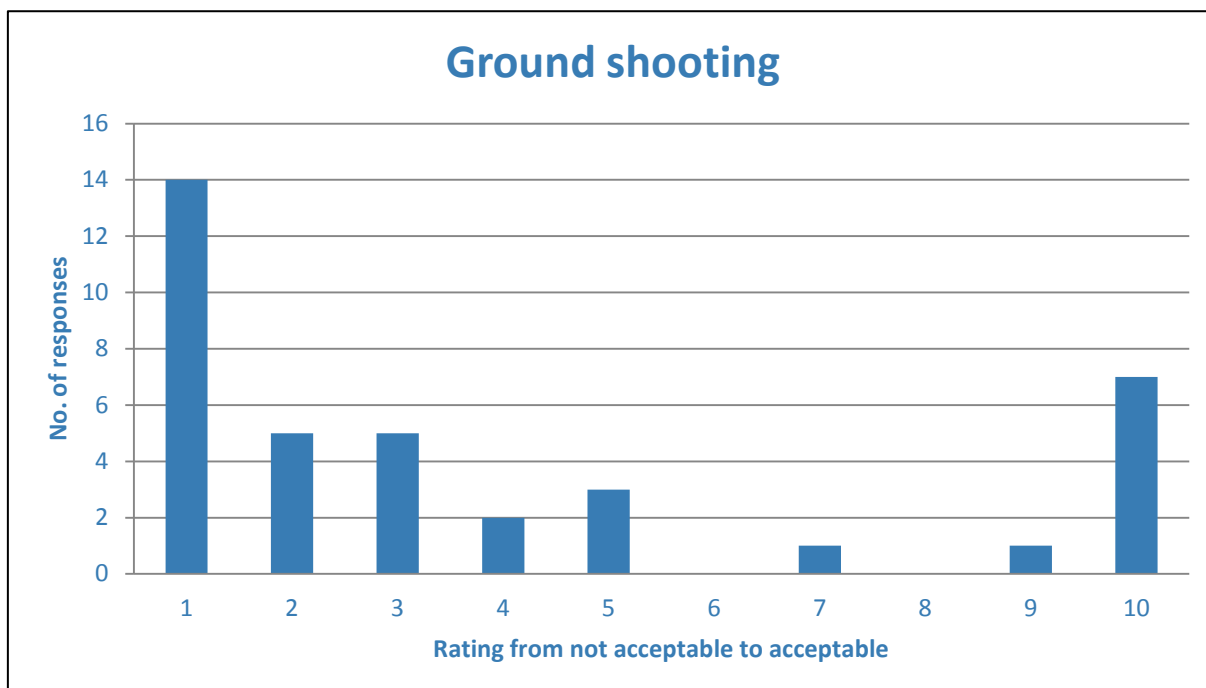
- It is the most humane option
- It would compliment other proposed methods well
- It was a preferred method.

Amongst the supporters of fertility control there were expressed concerns about its cost effectiveness and feasibility.

The main reasons provided by community members that did not support fertility control were:

- It is not a cost effective management strategy
- A more immediate response is required
- A belief that this method does not work.

Ground shooting



A total of 38 responses were provided regarding ground shooting as a management method.

The clear majority of responses (approximately two-thirds) indicated that ground shooting is not considered an acceptable management method with 21 responses scoring between 1 and 4.

However, similar to other management method responses, there was a spike at the other end of the scale with 7 responses scoring the question at 10 'Acceptable'.

The main reasons why ground shooting was not acceptable were:

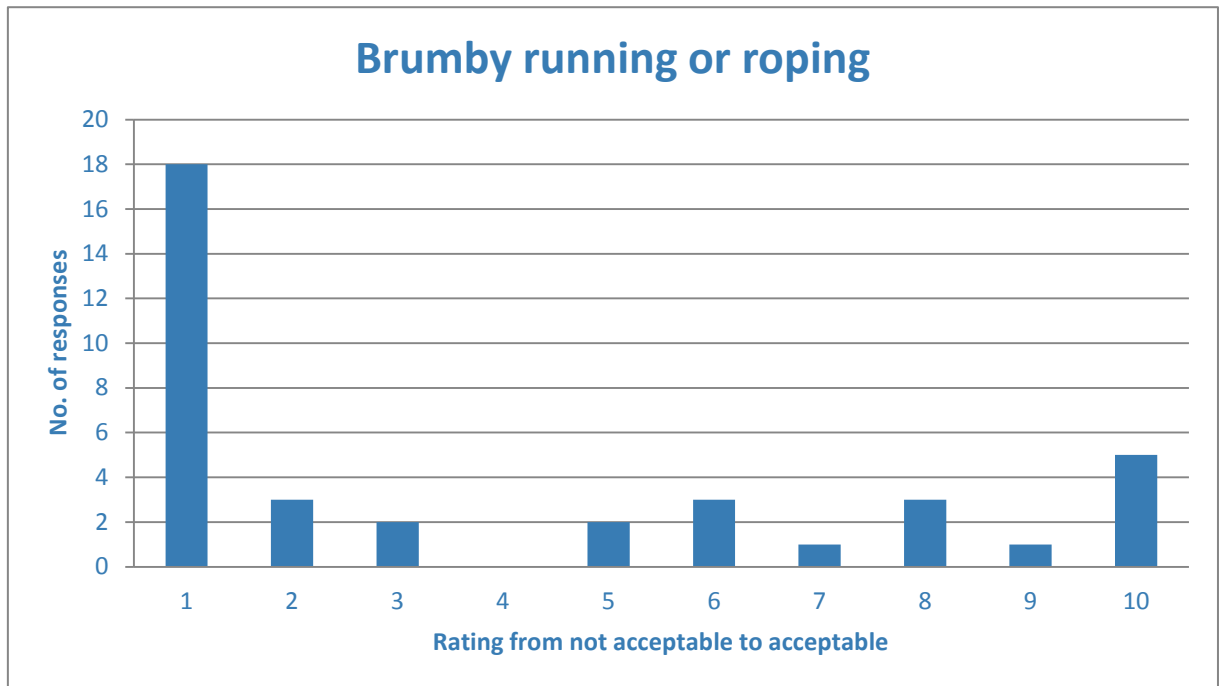
- The method was inhumane given the risk of injuring horses and not having a 'clean kill'
- It is not an efficient management method
- Conflict with park users, sections of the park being restricted due to ground shooting.

For those who found ground shooting acceptable the main reasons were:

- It is a cost effective management strategy
- It is a humane method.

A proportion of those who considered ground shooting acceptable qualified that it needed to be undertaken by experienced and competent marksmen.

Brumby running or roping



38 responses were given in relation to the acceptability of brumby running or roping.

A clear majority of responses indicated that brumby running or roping is not an acceptable management method with two-thirds of responses scoring between 1 and 3.

The main reasons reported for brumby running and roping not being an acceptable strategy were:

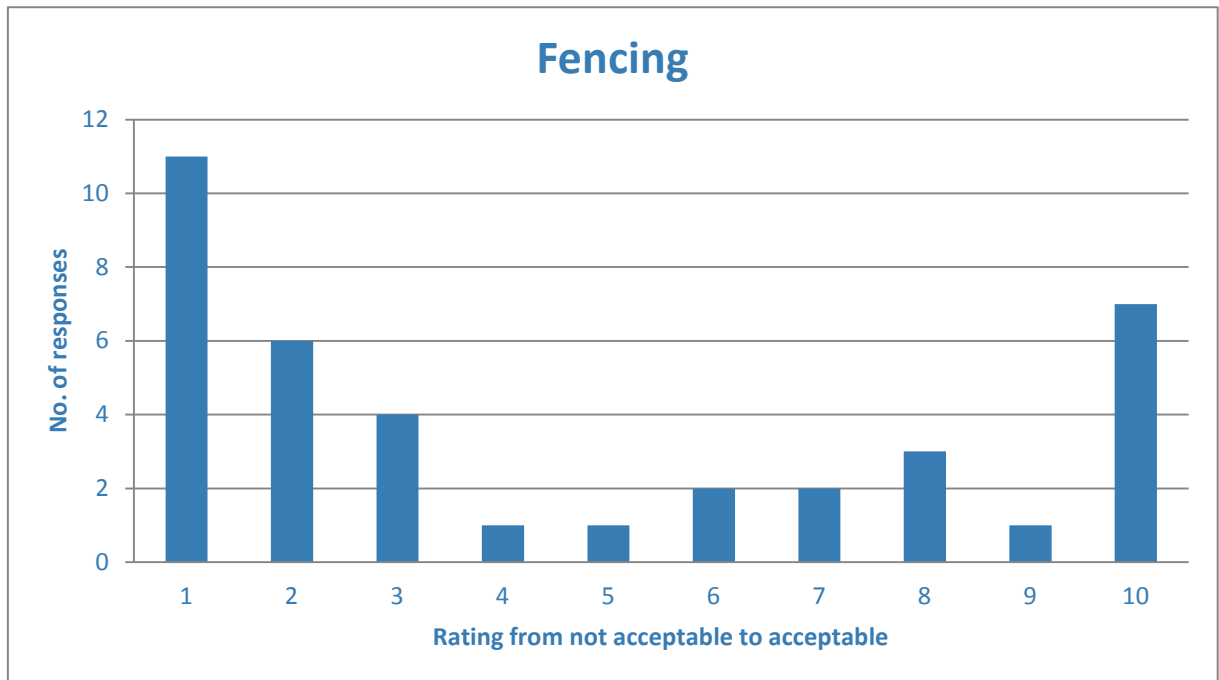
- It is inhumane
- It poses great risks to riders
- It is not an efficient or effective strategy.

The main reasons why brumby running or roping was supported was:

- It is a traditional method
- It is cost effective.

However, there were concerns expressed amongst supporters regarding the stress caused to wild horses using this method and its impracticality.

Fencing



There were 38 responses regarding fencing as a management method.

Responses indicated that participants were split between the ends of the range with 11 responses scoring 1 'Not acceptable' and 7 responses scoring 10 'Acceptable', however more than half of the responses were in the negative range indicating a decided lack of support for this control method.

Those who considered fencing unacceptable stated that it:

- Was not effective
- Would have a substantial visual impact in the park
- Would have a greater environmental impact.

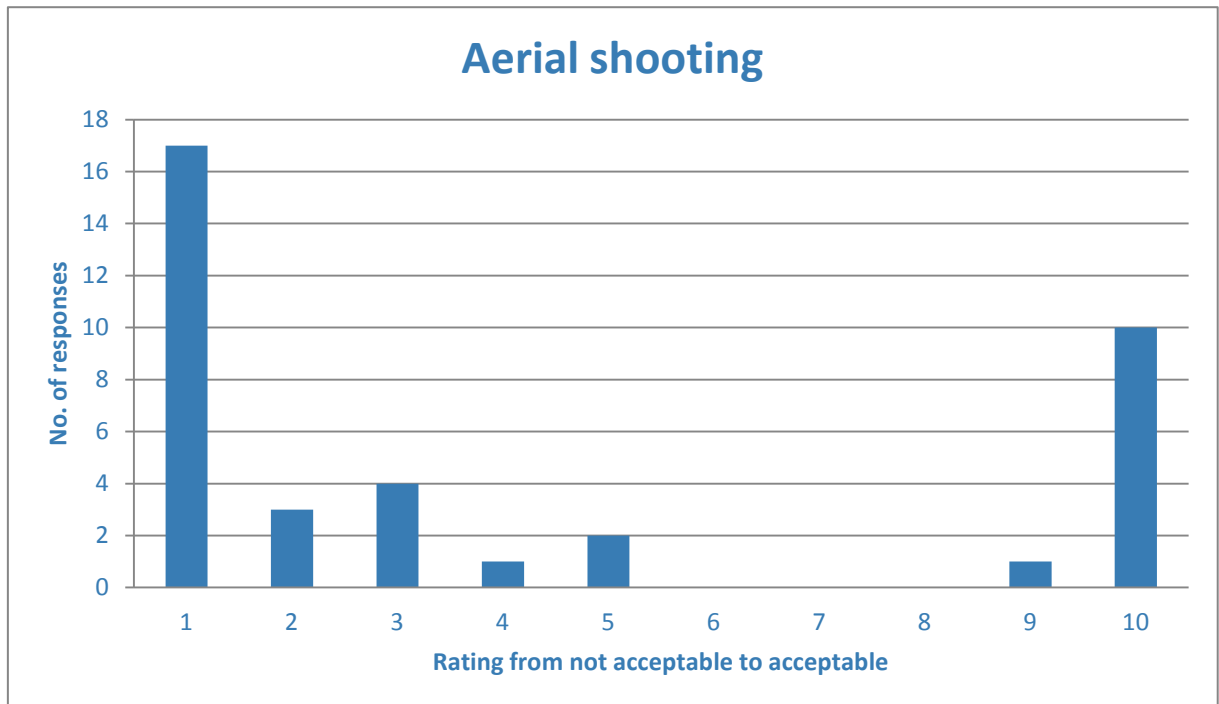
Amongst these responses there was consideration that fencing sensitive environmental areas may have benefit.

Respondents for whom fencing was acceptable gave their main reasons as:

- It would maintain the integrity of sensitive environmental areas
- It would allow wild horses to be contained and enable them to 'self-regulate'.

Concerns were expressed by supporters that fencing may not be cost-effective or practical in managing this issue.

Aerial shooting



A total of 38 responses were provided regarding the acceptability of aerial shooting as a management method.

Although scores fell to the extreme ends of the scale, with 17 responses scoring this method 1 'Not acceptable' and 10 scoring this method 10 'Acceptable', around two-thirds were within the negative range. This is a very similar result to ground shooting, indicating a very clear preference by the participants in this process for non-lethal methods of population control.

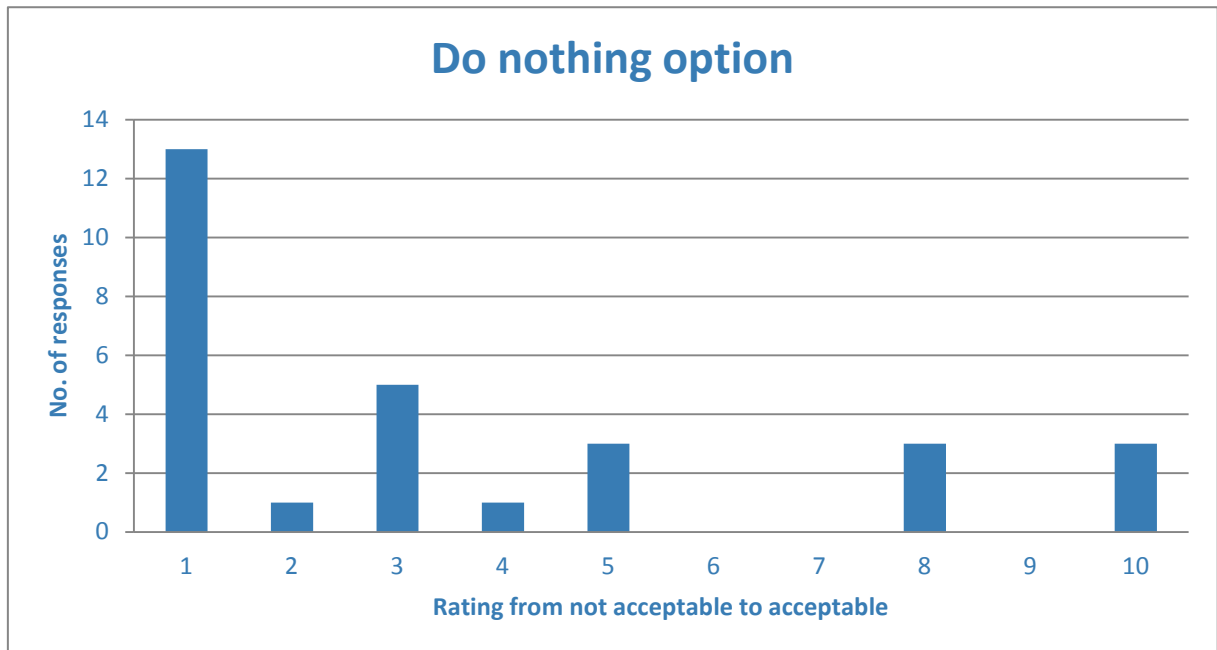
For those who considered this method not acceptable, the main reasons were:

- It is inhumane
- Marksman could not be accurate, increasing the risk of injury over a 'clean kill'
- It is not efficient due to the terrain of the park.

Those who considered the method as acceptable stated that it is:

- Cost effective
- Already used for other feral species
- An effective method of management.

Do nothing option



29 responses were provided regarding the acceptability of doing nothing to manage the wild horse population.

Although there was a reduced response rate to this method, there was a clear indication that this is not considered acceptable, shown by 13 responses scoring the method as 1 'Unacceptable'.

The main reasoning for this method not being acceptable was:

- Because an active approach is needed to manage this issue
- It would not address damage occurring in Kosciuszko National Park.

In addition to the above a significant proportion of respondents directly stated that this was not an acceptable option.

Those that felt this was an acceptable strategy reasoned that:

- Wild horses positively contribute to the eco-system
- Science regarding wild horses and damage is incorrect and management should not occur until this has been further examined.

Other comments

A minority of the responses received in the control methods section posed questions regarding the science behind the Wild Horse Management Plan review and highlighted their feelings that the information base informing this review was incorrect. One response stated, "It is important to find the facts of the positive contributions and account for those in looking at the entirety of objective science and peer reviewed studies and research." Other participants discussed concerns about what they felt was an over focus on wild horses to the exclusion of other fauna in need of management. "Why is the focus on BRUMBIES when there is a huge problem with ever increasing populations of pigs, deer, goats, rabbits, foxes, cats etc".

Question three – alternative control methods

Participants were asked if there are any alternative control methods or management approaches that should be considered as a part of this review.

There was diversity in responses amongst participants which included:

- Selective removal of stallions via aerial tranquilising
- Genetic based fertility programs
- Kosciuszko National Park to be re-designated as an eco-tourism sanctuary, and engage horse advocacy groups to assist in management
- Better management of land to control re-growth so that horses are not confined to smaller areas of Kosciuszko National Park
- Relocation of the wild horse population to less sensitive land within Kosciuszko National Park
- Rotating wild horses around Kosciuszko National Park to maintain perennial pastures
- Trap and euthanise wild horses on site
- Methodological observations to assess herd/band structure to be combined with fertility control program
- Selective breeding program to improve wild horse temperament to assist in re-homing/selling horses.

Further to the above suggested control methods, some participants further expressed their opinion about what is required in a wild horse management plan. One participant remarked that a “balanced and sensible approach is very much needed with regard to control of ALL introduced species.”

Other participants responded to this question by expressing their belief that there are errors in the “data” and that management strategies cannot be considered or acted upon until this information was verified and accepted.

Finally, other participants provided further reasoning for their responses to question two, for example, “The central lands council in the Northern Territory has recently used the aerial culling method of control. I understand it was closely monitored by vets and animal protection groups. It was deemed to be the most humane method of control available to them. This was effective in controlling thousands of horses.”

Question four – humane treatment

Participants were asked what humane treatment of wild horses during population control and animal management means to them.

Responses to this question were more consistent than others, primarily indicating that humane treatment means that horses do not suffer undue stress or injury. Just fewer than 50% of responses expressed this view. Below are some direct comments from groups:

- “They shouldn’t be overly stressed or injured.”
- “No stress to the animal.”
- “Minimising distress to the animal.”
- “Minimise stress to the horse.”

For some participants there was a correlation between what humane treatment meant to them and the rating they gave to control methods. For example, a participant that indicated that both ground shooting and aerial shooting were acceptable control methods stated, “Quick and as painless as

possible. Not terrifying these animals – they are “wild” horses so mustering [and] floating them is totally wrong.” Another participant remarked “Kill as quick and clean as possible”.

Some participants answered this question by discussing their belief in the importance of humaneness when managing wild horses, without explicitly citing what it meant to them. One participant wrote, “To me inhumane treatment is never an option specially when there are so many other options.”

Finally, for other participants the most humane management strategy would be not to implement any control methods, “leave them alone”, “they should be left to be wild Brumbies as much as possible.”

Question five – other concerns

Finally, participants were asked if there were any other concerns relating to the issue of wild horse management within Kosciuszko National Park that their kitchen table discussion group would like to provide feedback on. A wide variety of responses were provided to this question, which participants used to highlight factors of the review of the wild horse management plan that were of importance to them.

Broadly speaking, responses to this question supported the views on management strategies that had been expressed through previous questions and their priority - the conservation of the environment in Kosciuszko National Park or the conservation of the wild horse population.

For example participants that indicated they supported leaving wild horse in Kosciuszko National Park alone in question one stated:

- “A non-human species can never speak up for itself and have justice or leverage in its fate. We are obligated by our humanity to speak up on their behalf to understand them, their needs and figure out ways we can include them compassionately and wholly in decision making and in sharing resources”
- “We feel that brumbies are now a part of the Australian landscape. People expect to see brumbies whilst in the park and many visit with the hope of seeing some of these beautiful wild horses”.

Participants whose response to question one signified they believed in removing all wild horses from Kosciuszko National Park and protecting the sensitive environmental values of the park, stated:

- “Stop spending money on research and control their numbers. Everyone knows what works”
- “People would rather have horses in the park than clean water, weed-free river banks, corroboree frogs, small native animals – give the local fauna a chance!”

Generally speaking, participants that did not score themselves on the extremes for question one did not provide a response to this question. Of the few that did, issues relating to information were raised:

- “An explanation of the life cycle of a brumby might be helpful in informing stakeholders, media, interest groups about why wild horses need to be managed”
- “How is the management linking with measures being implemented in other states?”

4 Key findings

Key findings from the kitchen table discussion feedback are:

- Respondents had polarised views on the management of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park
- No control method was universally supported, or opposed, although with the exception of the management method currently being used by NPWS (see below), 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 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
- For respondents who discredited the scientific evidence about this issue, population numbers and the positive value of horses in the Kosciuszko National Park ecosystem were the main areas of contention
- A significant proportion of respondents saw the cultural and heritage significance of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park as important.

5 Conclusions

Although the Kitchen Table Discussion Guides provided an opportunity for community members who may not normally participate in public engagement activities to provide input into the review of the Wild Horse Management Plan for Kosciuszko National Park, the uptake was disappointing.

Despite being easily accessible, only 39 completed Kitchen Table Discussion Guides were received. This number, and the fact that in many cases the results were quite polarised, suggests that only those with a pre-existing interest in wild horse management in Kosciuszko National Park participated in this process.

However, given the lack of active promotion of the guide, the fact that it was primarily available on the 'Protecting the Snowies' engagement platform and that hard copies were sent to stakeholder groups who were already involved in the review for distribution, this outcome is not surprising.

Had active promotion of the Kitchen Table Discussion Guides been approved and greater awareness of the availability of the guides within the broader community, less polarised outcomes may have resulted.

The results of this engagement indicated a range of views amongst participants but given they self-selected to complete the process and potentially already had a pre-existing investment in the issue, indicated by being registered stakeholders or users of the 'Protecting the Snowies' engagement platform, results cannot be seen as being representative of those of the broader community.

6 Appendix A - Kitchen Table Discussion Guide



Kitchen Table Discussion Guide.

Wild Horse Plan Review

Have your say on the
Kosciuszko National Park
Wild Horse Management Plan

Close Date
12 December 2014





Introduction

Thank you for your interest in the Wild Horse Management Plan for Kosciuszko National Park (KNP) and agreeing to be part of the consultation process by hosting a Kitchen Table Discussion.

Kitchen Table Discussions form a part of our broader community engagement process and are made up of a small group of people who get together to talk in an informal setting. The information that comes out of your discussion will be used to help review and shape a new five-year wild horse management plan for Kosciuszko.

When you're inviting people to your discussion, it's important to note that while National Parks and Wildlife Service have been engaging stakeholders and addressing the issue of wild horse management within KNP for over 16 years, no decisions on future management practices have been made. Instead these decisions will be made once the community and other interest groups have provided their input and the NPWS receives independent scientific and technical advice. A draft revised plan will then be placed on exhibition for formal comment (submissions) before a new plan is adopted in the latter half of 2015.

Wild horse management is one of the most challenging issues for NPWS to address. There is a wide range of very strong but different views and opinions within the community as to the impact of wild horses on the environment, whether or not horses should be managed and how they might be managed.

Kitchen Table Discussions are not votes to be tallied. It's not about the number of people supporting or opposing a certain side of this issue, it is about capturing informed and considered ideas, views and opinions to assist with a solutions.

It is important to understand the issues surrounding wild horse management, which is why we have provided background information on the issues and ask you to read it so you can help guide an informed Kitchen Table Discussion. For further information please read the information sheets on the website www.environment.nsw.gov.au/protectsnowies.

Process Timeline



Let's get started

This guide has been designed to make it easy for you to run a Kitchen Table Discussion.

A Kitchen Table Discussion is a small group of people who get together and talk. The setting can be informal: a kitchen table, lounge room, classroom or coffee shop. Participants don't need to be an expert on the subject. What people need is a willingness to listen and to share ideas that are aimed at developing solutions that could work for everybody.

Anyone can host a discussion. All you need to do is bring together a group of people who are willing to share and discuss ideas.

Tips for hosting a Kitchen Table Discussion:

- Choose a time and comfortable location. Ideally use a space that can fit 4–6 people and where you can comfortably hold a discussion with minimum interruptions.
- Develop an invitation list. We encourage you to talk to your family and friends. The group of people can reflect a wide diversity of ages and experiences.
- When you invite people, direct them to the consultation webpage so they can read the background information and also this guide beforehand if they like. www.environment.nsw.gov.au/protectsnowies/
- Expect the discussion to take around 2 hours.

Preparing for the discussion

As the host, you have a very important role. It's your job to read and understand this guide in full so that you can answer questions and help the others. You have the responsibility of creating and participating in a constructive discussion without dominating it or allowing it to get out of control.

Using a talking object

The talking object indicates who the current speaker is. It can be any object (such as a salt shaker or paintbrush) that can be held while speaking. This designated speaker system solves the problem of people talking over one another or not listening.

Although we recommend using a talking object, it's your choice. Other options include you calling on people before they speak, or people knocking on the table to indicate they have finished speaking. What's important is that people can speak without interruption when it is their turn, so that everyone gets to have their say and be really listened to.

If you like, you can get everyone to decide how to make sure people can speak without interruption. You can always bring in a talking object later if it becomes necessary.

Questions

As the host, it's also your job to guide people through the agenda. Have a good read of 'What we know' and make sure you understand it and could answer questions about it. You'll be responsible for moving the group on to each discussion topic and question, determining speaking order, and making sure everyone follows the guidelines, particularly avoiding people interrupting or speaking for too long.

Recording and submitting your feedback

Your final job as host is to make sure that all the opinions and different views of the group are recorded and sent to Straight Talk, an independent community engagement consultancy, on the reply paid feedback form provided. Use extra paper if required or lodge your Kitchen Table Discussion notes online at <https://engage.environment.nsw.gov.au/protectsnowies>. You can delegate the recording task to a willing participant. At the end of discussion about each question, fill out the relevant part of the form.

The Guidelines

A Kitchen Table Discussion works best when people feel free to respectfully say what's on their minds without being judged. They need to know that there are no right or wrong things to say and that everyone's ideas are valuable.

These guidelines are designed to support respectfulness while still talking about the big issues. This means a very different and perhaps unfamiliar set of guidelines for when and how to speak on what can be a controversial, emotional and “political” issue.

These guidelines have been explicitly designed to shift the goal of discussion from “winning” to “understanding”.

1. Duration

Agree as a group how long the meeting will last and try to stick to that timeframe.

2. Open-mindedness

A discussion is a two-way street and requires you to respectfully listen as well as talk without speaking over the top of someone else. By focusing on listening, you may also benefit from the variety of ideas around the table.

3. Acceptance

Accept others will have a different point of view from you and by encouraging an atmosphere of acceptance people will be more likely to share their views.

4. Curiosity

Seek to understand rather than persuade. We're not here to convince others that we are right and they are wrong. If someone expresses a point of view that seems different from yours, see if you can ask some questions to gain clarity or understanding.

5. Discovery

Question your own assumptions and look for new insights. Kitchen Table Discussions aren't just polite conversation—they are designed to expose us to new ideas or possibly even to help us see old ideas in a new way.

6. Sincerity

Speak from your heart and personal experience. We want to hear what's important to you. Relate your ideas to your personal experiences.

7. Be brief

Go for honesty and depth but don't “go on and on” because it's important that everyone has the chance to speak.

8. The talking object

If you are using a talking object, people will only speak when they are holding it and everyone will listen.

9. Time keeping

Nominate one time keeper. We recommend 2–3 minutes per response.

Kitchen Table Discussion – Step by Step

Step 1.

Decide who to invite and agree on a place and time.

Step 2.

Bring copies of this guide plus pens and paper.

Step 3.

Begin by reading out the guidelines on page 4 and ensure everyone agrees and understands their responsibility. Get agreement on how the group will operate and who will record discussions and keep time. Read out the What We Know section and supporting information, including the stakeholder perspectives in this guide.

Step 4.

Round 1 – Introductions. The host hands the talking object to the participant on their left. The participant introduces themselves and explains briefly “why protecting the Snowies is important to me”. Ensure everyone has a turn at speaking and limit this to 2 minutes each. The talking object comes back to the host, who also answers the question.

Step 5.

Rounds 2 — The host reads question 1 and passes the talking object around the group allowing each participant to answer. The host or designated participant records discussions for this and subsequent questions, on feedback form. Repeat for questions 2 & 3.

Step 6.

Round 3 – The talking object is placed in the middle of the table – anyone can speak. The group seeks agreement where possible and if necessary clearly defines the different positions.

Step 7.

Recording – The relevant part of the form is read aloud by the host and filled out. See feedback form.

What we know.

The Snowies and Kosciuszko National Park (KNP) are a unique natural and cultural asset

1

Threatened native species

The Snowies' unique alpine, sub alpine, montane forests, woodlands and grassland areas are the only habitat in the world for a number of rare plants and animals like the Mountain Pygmy Possum, the Southern Corroboree Frog and 13 other species declared threatened or vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Rare Landscape

The Snowy Mountains and KNP contain the highest lands on the ancient and relatively flat, dry Australian continent and are one of the few places in the world with subalpine treeless flats and valleys. They contain over 204 species of flowering plants, 33 of which are rare and 21 are found nowhere else on Earth. The landscape is dominated by 'mountains of soils' that are of outstanding scientific value as examples of some of the great soil groups, both individually (the alpine humus soils) and in association with each other, and the ecological services provided by the soils. The park contains geological treasures such as the 'Karst' or limestone landscapes of the Yarrangobilly and Cooleman Caves as well as the only examples of glacial features and landscapes on the Australian mainland.

National Heritage List

In recognition of the international significance of the Snowies, Kosciuszko National Park has been declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and is included on the National Heritage List.

Water Catchment Area

The Snowies form one of the most important water catchments in south-eastern Australia and contain unique extensive peatland soils, alpine and subalpine bogs, and wetland catchments. These help supply clean water to homes and also water used in agriculture, hydro-electric power, industry and recreational activities. The headwaters of many rivers are found in KNP, including the Murray, Murrumbidgee and Snowy Rivers.

Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Recreation

KNP has a strong and diverse cultural heritage including Aboriginal significance, exploration, pastoral use, the Kosciuszko huts, mining, timber and water harvesting, conservation, and recreation. It provides one of the few places in Australia where you can experience the unique climate, scenery, history and challenges of an alpine destination.

Kosciuszko National Park and the Victorian Alps are the only two snowfield tourism destinations in mainland Australia.

Wild horses, also known as feral horses or brumbies, have lived in the Snowy Mountains since they were released by Europeans around the 1830s. The horses are a drawcard to visitors and people living in the area. Many appreciate their beauty and the way they represent settler history and a bygone lifestyle in the High Country. The poem and subsequent movie of *The Man from Snowy River* and the children's books, *The Silver Brumby* series, have helped many Australians and people overseas feel a connection to these horses.

Threats to the Snowies and KNP

The Independent Scientific Committee, formed in 2006 to guide the drafting of the Kosciuszko National Park Plan of Management, found that while much of the park was in a good and stable condition there were pressures needing to be addressed, particularly in sensitive environments. These pressures included the expansion of development, inappropriate fire regimes, increased summer visitation, climate change, and, important for this discussion, introduced plants and animals. The park's plan of management outlines strategies to address these threats.

What we know.

Pest animals are a problem

2

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is required by law to protect and conserve the native plants, animals and ecosystems of Kosciuszko National Park for current and future generations. The NPWS collaborates with other land management agencies, neighbouring landholders, the scientific community, interest groups and park visitors to try to achieve this.

The ecosystems of the Snowy Mountains are under pressure from introduced animals such as cats, dogs, pigs, foxes, rabbits, deer, goats, and horses. Australia's native plants, animals and ecosystems did not evolve with these introduced animals, which damage and disrupt them. They cause ground disturbance and vegetation damage as well as a range of harm to native animals, including competing for food and habitat, destroying habitat, and preying upon native animals.

Control programs and priorities are outlined in the NPWS Regional Pest Management Strategy and are carried out for these and other pest species to reduce their impact using a range of different techniques. This is called an integrated pest management approach. The humane treatment of animals is a primary objective and consideration of all NPWS pest and animal management programs, all of which abide by relevant state and federal animal welfare legislation, standards, guidelines and codes of practice.

Damage from wild horses is not unique to the Snowies, but is particularly problematic in Kosciuszko National Park because of its many fragile and unique ecosystems. NPWS has been surveying the number of wild horses as well as their impact on the park since 2001.

Wild horses are large, heavy and hard-hooved animals that damage Australia's native environment in various ways. Their increasing population in the Snowies is causing damage to riverbeds, streams, natural bogs, wetlands, vegetation and soil structure when they forage for food or seek water. This means we must manage their population to protect Kosciuszko National Park.

Fast Facts

In the early 1800s there were estimated to be around 3,500 wild horses across all of Australia and less than a few hundred in the Snowies.

There are now around 400,000 wild horses in Australia, the largest wild horse population in the world (2011 Commonwealth Feral Horse and Feral Donkey info sheet on www.environment.gov.au)

An estimated 6,000 wild horses are living in the Kosciuszko National Park (Australian Alps National Parks 2014 aerial survey data)

Research shows that the numbers of wild horses in KNP increases annually between 6% - 17% with current management practices (Aerial surveys of Australian Alps 2001, 2003, 2009, 2014)

Feedback Form

Complete and return this form for your chance to win
a NSW NPWS All Parks Annual Pass valued at \$190.

Question 1.

On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is 'Leave the wild horses in KNP alone' and 10 is 'Remove all the wild horses and protect the sensitive environmental values of KNP', where do you rank and why?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Question 2.

Now consider each management or control method outlined in this guide (see section 4). What types of control are acceptable to you and why? (rank each method using a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is 'Not acceptable' and 10 is 'Acceptable'.

Trapping and removal then
rehoming or transport to abattoir

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Aerial or ground mustering

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Fertility control

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Ground shooting

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Brumby running or roping

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Fencing

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Aerial shooting

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Do nothing option

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Question 2. continued

Are there any other control methods or management approaches that we should consider?

Question 3.

What does the 'humane' treatment of wild horses during population control and animal management mean to you?

Are there other concerns relating to the issue of wild horse management within KNP that your kitchen table discussion group would like to provide feedback on?

[illegible]

Name

How many people attended your “Kitchen Table Discussion”?

<https://engage.environment.nsw.gov.au/protectsnowies>

Please tear middle pages out

What we know.

How National Parks currently manages the problem

3

In 2006, the Plan of Management for Kosciuszko National Park was reviewed and redeveloped setting out how the park would be managed into the future. As part of this process NPWS recognised the need for a series of sub-plans, and the Wild Horse Management Plan is one of these. The first wild horse management plan for the Kosciuszko Alpine Area was implemented in 2003 with the current park-wide Wild Horse Management Plan developed in 2008 and implemented by NPWS since that time. This consultation process is part of its review.

NPWS's current wild horse management approach is to use trapping and removal with re-homing of horses where possible, or transport to abattoir if re-homing is not possible. This management approach was the most acceptable to the community when the last plan was developed. It is not meeting the plan's objectives of reducing the overall wild horse population or reducing the impacts wild horses are having within the park.

A range of population control methods could be used by NPWS to address the problems of wild horse management in KNP. Each has strengths and weaknesses regarding the risk of injury to people and horses, the cumulative stress on horses, and the relative costs. Each also has limitations based on terrain, the number of horses in an area, and the chances of re-homing captured horses. Like most pest control, an integrated pest management approach would have the greatest chance of success, where the use of a range of methods could be used where they are best suited to the situation and conditions.

- 2,600 horses have been removed from KNP through trapping since 2002.
- In recent years, there has been rehoming demand for approximately a third of horses trapped and removed. The remainder are transported to abattoir for euthanasia.



Kosciuszko wild horse stallion
manure mound in Thredbo Valley
L. Morrell/OEH



Broad-toothed Rat
Mastacomys fuscus
K. Green/NPWS

What we know.

Methods that could be considered to manage the wild horse population

4

Below is a brief description of known management and control options:

Trapping and removal then rehoming or transport to abattoir

Horses are lured to portable and semi-permanent yards using mineral blocks or molasses. Horses enter the yard of their own will, triggering a gate that encloses them in the yard. Horses may be trapped singularly or in whole groups up to 10 at a time. Horse social groups can be disturbed if some are not trapped. Horses are loaded directly on to a truck or trailer for removal from the park therefore yards can only be placed in areas that have vehicular access. Horses may become highly stressed or injured during this process. It can be very labour intensive taking many weeks to establish and lure horses to a yard which must be checked daily.

Trapping and euthanasia at trap site

Horses are trapped as above, however if there is no option of re-homing they are professionally euthanased at the trap site, removing the stress to horses of loading and transport to abattoir for euthanasia.

Aerial or ground mustering

Horses are mustered using either (or a combination of) helicopter, horse riders or all-terrain vehicles to herd and move them into a yard using long fences and suitable terrain to guide them to the yard. They are then loaded for transport and removed or euthanased on site as above. This method relies heavily on access and finding a suitable location and terrain. There are safety and injury risks to personnel and horses. Mustering places more stress on horses than lure trapping. It is possible to capture a large number of horses at one time where populations are dense.

Fertility control

Several techniques of fertility control exist or are under development, and vary in cost and effectiveness. These include

- surgical de-sexing (gelding or spaying) of males or females
- contraceptive implants for females
- immunocontraception - where males or females are immunised against their own sperm or eggs.

All three techniques require horses to be trapped or mustered and handled so the method has risk of injury and practical and financial limitations. While surgical de-sexing is permanent, it requires sedation and veterinary assistance. Although some fertility controls can be administered by dart rifle, the range of these rifles means that horses must be trapped or mustered and yarded for the dose to be delivered effectively. These controls wear off over time meaning horses need to be re-captured and retreated every few years.

Ground shooting

Using trained and qualified shooters, this can be effective in relatively accessible country and was a traditional method of controlling horse numbers when their populations were smaller. In some terrains it can be difficult to follow up a wounded animal and ensure it is killed quickly. Ground shooting is currently used to euthanase injured or very ill horses.



Wild horse road safety warning sign. Snowy Mountains Highway, Kosciuszko National Park. D Isaacson/OEH

What we know.

Methods that could be considered to manage the wild horse population continued

Brumby running or roping

Brumby running involves pursuing and roping horses from horseback, then leading them to where they can be loaded on to a truck and removed or yarded and euthanased. It can target horses in more remote areas than trapping but only removes individual horses and requires suitably skilled riders. With this method there is a risk of injury to riders and horses, both those ridden and pursued, in remote and difficult terrain so not all areas are suitable. There can be high and prolonged stress for horses being pursued, roped and then led to yard or transport. Horse social groups can be disturbed. This practice was a traditional method to manage horse numbers when their populations were smaller.

Fencing

Fencing horses out of sensitive areas is an option for very small areas of particular concern. It is not commonly used to control animals on public land because it can restrict public access and affects the movement of native species. For larger areas such as the alpine area, or along the Alpine Way or Snowy Mountains Highway, fencing would be very expensive to erect and maintain. It would also have significant visual impacts, require grids for public access roads and trails, and could hinder management operations such as firefighting. It could pose safety risks to the public in creating a barrier across the landscape and to horses that become stranded on the road side of a fence. Many areas are not suitable for fencing due to terrain, vegetation and ongoing maintenance requirements.

Aerial shooting

This involves the shooting of animals from helicopters using highly trained, qualified single shooter, pilot, and navigator. An advantage of aerial shooting is that the shooter can locate and get close to the animal, keep track of and follow all animals in a group, and if in rare occurrences, an animal does not die immediately, it can be rapidly followed up and euthanased. Recent research has shown that aerial shooting conducted in appropriate circumstances is very humane with minimal cumulative stress on an animal due to short pursuits and a rapid time to death. Aerial shooting is very cost effective for densely populated areas, but as densities drop the cost can rise. Aerial shooting has not been used as a control method for horses in NSW national parks since 2000.

Do nothing option

Some people believe that the wild horse population within KNP is not an issue of concern and that horses should be left alone to let nature take its course. The wild horse population has few limiting factors to its growth other than major wildfires or extreme snow or drought events. Horses have no natural predator and have access to large water and feed resources within KNP. Without management it is expected that the population would dramatically increase and spread into areas where currently wild horses do not exist, before it reached a natural limit. This would be to the detriment of other values of the park as well as impacting on neighbours and other land managers. NPWS is required by law to protect and conserve the native plants, animals and ecosystems of Kosciuszko National Park for current and future generations.

In conclusion above are all methods used to control and manage wild horse populations in differing areas and situations outside NSW. These and other methods put forward in the consultation process will be considered as part of the review.

Getting the balance right

Wild horse management is one of the most challenging issues for NPWS to address. There is a wide range of very strong but different views and opinions within the community as to the impact of wild horses on the environment, whether or not horses should be managed and how they should be managed. Here are some perspectives provided by some of our stakeholders to consider: The National Parks and Wildlife Service does not necessarily support or refute the views and opinions expressed in the following stakeholder perspectives, but provides them for consideration by participants in the current consultation process.

5

Snowy Mountains Horse Riders Association, est 1985

In the 1840s, domestic horses were set loose by our pioneer ancestors thus becoming “Brumbies” which our families then managed until the 1980’s.

Brumbies are an integral part of the high country’s natural environment as they have adapted well with the mountains. When over 120 years of mountain grazing ended, the brumbies became sacred as they are the last link to our treasured Man from Snowy River heritage. The brumbies can make excellent riding horses, pack horses, children’s ponies, pets and companions.

For nearly 10,000 years humans and horses were partners. This interaction was the most taken for granted relationship in human history. Human Civilization exists today thanks to horses. We believe that all horses have earned the right to be treated differently from other non-native animals.

Wild horses are utilised in reserve areas for restoring the ecosystems overseas and there is no peer reviewed scientific studies stating that brumbies in the Snowy are causing any damage. The brumbies have existed for over 170 years and have never caused extinction of any species.

NPWS have stated that their impacts were negligible up until recently. WHY? We do not believe that the numbers have increased at all but due to the extreme 2003 fire re-growth encroaching on their usual areas the brumbies have been forced to concentrate into some areas.

We agree that alpine areas should be kept horse free. We still offer to remove brumbies as we have done for generations, humanely and respectfully and for free.

We will never condone shooting!

NSW National Parks Association (NPA) and the Nature Conservation Council (NCC)

The NPA and the NCC, as non-government conservation groups whose aim is to promote and protect the environment and national parks, are jointly submitting their views on the management of wild horses in the Kosciuszko National Park.

In a recent survey it is estimated the current wild horse population is in excess of 6,000 animals and growing with predictions it will double in four and a half years. If left unchecked the population will continue to degrade the resources of the park and impact on water quality flowing from the Murray, Snowy, and Murrumbidgee rivers. These rivers are estimated to contribute \$9.6 billion to the national economy by providing water to downstream communities and agricultural industries.

The known impacts the horses have on the park include the:

- Degradation of riverbanks and fouling of the water placing pressure on aquatic life
- Competing with native fauna for food and spreading weeds throughout the park
- Loss of native flora and fauna where the horses degraded ecosystems

The NPA and the NCC believe current management strategies are not adequately controlling the wild horse population and are hampering the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service’s ability to protect the park’s resources.

Further the NPA and the NCC’s believe NPWS primary concern should be the park’s ecosystem rather than the protection of feral animals and supports the culling of the wild horses to protect the park now and into the future.

The Hunter Valley Brumby Association

The HVBA is a Brumby rescue organisation with the ambition to protect and promote brumbies in our local region, the Hunter Valley, and more widely. Animal welfare is our primary concern and we work hard to ensure Brumbies across Australia are treated humanely, that is, free of pain, stress and fear. We believe in the humane, evidence based management of Australia's Wild Horses and the existence of sustainable wild herds. Brumbies make excellent pets/working horses and re-homing should form a major part of any management plan.

Scientifically it would be impossible to remove all the Kosciuszko horses, and the heritage and tourist value they add to the region also make this an undesirable goal. We must find humane, permanent population control measures, such as passive trapping, mustering and fertility control, which can keep the numbers at a sustainable level, free of inbreeding and with minimal impact on their environment. The Code of Practice for Aerial Shooting of Wild Horses states that "Aerial shooting should not be carried out if the nature of the terrain reduces accuracy ... and prevents the humane and prompt despatch of wounded animals", this method cannot be carried out humanely and should not be used. Being such an important issue the Kosciuszko Management Plan is likely to set the tone for management across Australia, this is one reason it is vital to make sure we do it right.

Please visit hvba.com.au for more detailed explanations of our views on this Management Plan and everything else Brumby.



Colong Foundation for Conservation

Current mustering and passive trapping methods are ineffective, expensive and fails to prevent the degradation of natural heritage within National Parks. Under current management feral horse populations in the Park will continue to swell towards ecological carrying capacity.

Park visitors now have their enjoyment diminished by feral horses. They can no longer drink from mountain streams badly polluted by feral horses. Visitors are disgusted by the damage feral horses have caused. Stallions menace park visitors that they see as intruders into their territory. Even driving through Kosciuszko National Park now has an increased risk of collision with the growing number of feral horses.

The feral horse management in a National Park must ensure the security of its natural values. The control of feral horses has to be ten times more effective than the current programs. Management must remove 70 per cent of the feral horse in an intensive campaign to have any chance of lasting suppression now that pest numbers are out of hand.

Aerial shooting of feral horses is the only proven and humane method that can properly protect native plants and animals, as well as the enjoyment of visitors who come to Kosciuszko National Park. For these reasons:

The NPWS must undertake feral horse management that provides the most humane and effective methods of reducing their numbers in Kosciuszko National Park in the shortest possible time period. These methods must be based upon aerial shooting from helicopters under strict protocols and supervision.

'Environmental horse damage
in Kosciuszko National Park
Dion Isaacson/OEH'

Thank you

Thank you for your assistance and involvement in helping us review the Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horse Management Plan.

For further detailed information on wild horse management within Kosciuszko National Park or further involvement in the community and stakeholder engagement process please visit the 'Protecting the Snowies' website at:

<https://engage.environment.nsw.gov.au/protectsnowies>

or email: protect.snowies@environment.nsw.gov.au

Please record your groups responses to the questions on the feedback form in this guide. Use extra paper if required and return to Straight Talk via reply paid mail, email or online submission.



Wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park. D. Isaacson/OEH



