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Victorian Alps Wild Horse Management
Project Team
PO Box 20
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Dear Sir/Madam

RE: VICTORIAN ALPS WILD HORSE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the subject issue.

Bushwalking Victoria (BWV) represents the common interests of over 70 Victorian bushwalking clubs, within excess of 8,000 members. BWV also aims to proactively represent the interests of all recreational walkers in Victoria as well as walkers visiting from interstate and overseas. One of the common interests of BWV clubs and their members is the conservation of the ecosystems and natural landscapes through which they walk, so that they can enjoy the maximum variety of native flora and fauna and unspoilt scenery and ensure their preservation for future generations. Founded in 1934, BWV has a long history of active interest in conservation, including being one of a group of like-minded organizations pressing for legislation to create a comprehensive system of national parks in Victoria as early as the 1940s.

BWV is exceedingly concerned about the environmental damage that wild horses wreak in the Victorian Alps and, indeed, elsewhere in this State and nation. This severe damage is very well documented in your Information Sheet 2. The damage these horses inflict may be compared with that which was previously experienced with cattle-grazing in the high country, whose deleterious ecological effects were recognized by the Bracks government by their removal from the Victorian Alps. The damage from horses is potentially worse, because their teeth structure allows them to crop closer to the ground, and they are not there seasonally, but the whole year around. There is no doubt that they, too, should be removed from this most environmentally-fragile area.

The most telling statistic in the background papers you have supplied is that despite your ongoing endeavours to control the wild horse population through roping and trapping in the Alpine National Park, this population increased at about 21% per annum between 2003 and 2009 so that there are now an estimated 8,200-10,900 wild horses in the Victorian Alps, a population believed to be the largest it has ever been. Further, roping and trapping have only removed an average of 160 horses per annum from 2007 to 2012, and it is calculated that just to retain the current number of horses, 350-360 would need to be removed annually.

These statistics graphically illustrate that the current methods of control are failing dismally, and, one can logically conclude, the level of environmental damage they are causing is expanding at a commensurate rate as the population is increasing. If nothing further is done to attempt to control wild horse numbers in the Alpine National Park, then the damage they cause will eventually reach catastrophic levels, particularly as what they contribute in their own right must be linked with the increasing environmental effects of global warming.

Doing nothing more to control horse numbers than is done now, and assuming that bushfires, drought or disease do not slow their increase, then, based on 8,200-10,900 horses in 2012, there will be 21,269-28,272 by 2017, 55,165-73,330 by 2022 and 143,085-190,198 by 2027.

“Better Bushwalking for Victoria”

Bushwalking Victoria Inc. A0002548Y ABN 88 344 633 037
Promotes bushwalking, engages in activities that add value to the community and proactively represents
The interests of all recreational bushwalkers

Numbers of these magnitudes cannot be allowed to accumulate: the environmental impact will become completely unconscionable and the task of getting the numbers down incrementally harder. More effective action must be taken immediately, before the situation gets any worse. Native plants and animals are becoming increasingly rare, vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered: horses are not, and horses have the potential to push native species of plants and their dependent animals over the brink to extinction. This cannot, under any circumstances, be permitted to happen.

Current methods of control being employed in the Victorian Alps include roping, trapping and fencing, the latter having no effect on horse numbers whatsoever, but excluding them from some environmentally-sensitive areas. Roping and trapping have minuscule effects on overall horse numbers, which have increased at 21% per annum despite them.

Parks Victoria has stated that mustering, fertility control, chemical immobilisation and ground-shooting do not suit Victorian Alps conditions, which really only leaves the avenue of aerial shooting.

Parks Victoria has stated that aerial shooting: '... is considered to be an effective method where lethal control is desired and where numbers are high' (Information Sheet 4).

Background Paper 3 states that 'at the 2006 National Wild Horse Management Workshop, aerial shooting was accepted by most participants as a humane control method: "*The argument for aerial shooting is that it is humane, efficient and more cost-effective than many other techniques*" (national Wild Horse Management Workshop, Dawson *et al*, 2006, p. 70). It was considered essential that the technique be available in the future.'

Weaver 2007 and NSW NPWS 2006 "Considered aerial shooting the most effective way to reduce large populations of wild horses in inaccessible areas", while Parks Victoria has acknowledged that "Both ground and aerial shooting are acceptable methods under the Commonwealth Model Code of Practice for the Humane Control of Feral Horses."

It is therefore, difficult to understand why 'ground and aerial shooting are not being considered as options for controlling Victoria's wild horses as part of the current consultation' (Background Paper 3).

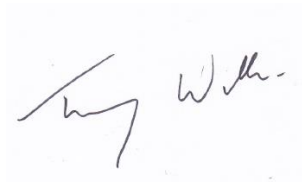
BWV does not pretend to have expertise on feral animal management techniques, but it is clear from the information presented that removal of the wild horse population or, at worst, its stabilisation at an ecologically acceptable level, will involve removal of many more horses from the Alpine area, that the techniques used to date have been able to achieve.

We do not accept that 'socio-political' considerations should override sound, proven management techniques. We also do not accept that 'socio-political' considerations can be used as an excuse for acceptance of continued environmental degradation of fragile and threatened ecosystems.

It is our position that the paramount consideration must be the protection of native plants and animals, and that a program of public education on the impact wild horses are having, and the impracticability of allowing them to continue to multiply must form part of the overall management program.

We urge that the position be accepted that the number of wild horses in the Alpine areas under consideration must be rapidly and radically reduced via a program using the most effective mix of appropriate, humane control methods.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Walker', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Tony Walker
President