



# Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horse Capture and Rehoming Program – Statement of program intent

## Context

The *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018* and the Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan provide the framework for the management of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park.

The objectives of the Act and plan may be summarised as follows:

- identify and protect the heritage value of sustainable wild horse populations in Kosciuszko National Park
- maintain the other environmental values of Kosciuszko National Park
- achieve these objectives by reducing the population of wild horses to 3,000 by 30 June 2027, with wild horses only present in retention management areas.

The plan also provides a framework for approving and implementing methods of removal to achieve the population target of 3,000. This includes provisions to ensure that removal methods are consistent with best practice animal welfare standards.

Capturing wild horses (using passive trapping or mustering) and the provision of those horses to rehomingers is one of the approved methods for removing wild horses from Kosciuszko National Park to meet the population target of 3,000.

Since the plan commenced (November 2021 to June 2024), an average of approximately 390 wild horses per annum have been provided to rehomingers.

The number of wild horses captured and provided to rehomingers is subject to:

- the level of demand from rehomingers
- compliance with the plan, including the requirement to retain 3,000 wild horses in retention management areas
- limitations on the ability to safely capture and remove wild horses consistent with best practice animal welfare standards.

The level of demand from rehomingers is qualified by rehominger preferences for wild horses that meet specified criteria relating to sex, age, colour and other characteristics. Wild horses that are captured by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, but which are not wanted by rehomingers, are sent to a knackery. Since the plan commenced (November 2021 to June 2024), an average of approximately 260 wild horses per annum have been provided to knackeries.

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### **Program objective**

The objective of the Kosciuszko National Park wild horse capture and rehoming program is to contribute to meeting the requirements of the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act and Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan by achieving and maintaining the population target of 3,000 wild horses in retention areas in Kosciuszko National Park.

### **Roles and responsibilities in relation to rehoming**

#### **National Parks and Wildlife Service**

The roles and responsibilities of NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service in relation to the capture and rehoming of horses in Kosciuszko National Park are determined by the National Parks and Wildlife Act, the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act and the Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan. Noting that NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service itself is not a rehomer:

- NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service is responsible for assessing and approving rehoming applications for the purpose of ensuring, so far as practicable, the rehomer is suitable, including from an animal welfare perspective.
- NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service is responsible for capturing wild horses, transporting them to NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service temporary holding yards and holding horses in the yards until the horses are collected by or on behalf of an approved rehomer. This must be carried out in accordance with the following standard operating procedures and related requirements
  - NPWS H002 Passive trapping
  - NPWS H003 Removal for domestication (rehoming)
  - Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines: Land Transport of Livestock (Animal Health Australia 2012).
- Compliance with these standard operating procedures and standards and guidelines will ensure that best practice animal welfare standards are met by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service in undertaking these activities.
- Ownership and all responsibility for wild horses transfers to the rehomer on the transportation date, being when horses are loaded onto a transport vehicle and collected by the rehomer (or other person approved by the rehomer) at the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service temporary holding yards or other location specified by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service is also responsible for the effective administration of the rehoming program. This includes:

- establishing risk-based criteria against which applications from potential rehomers are assessed
- consistent application of those criteria in deciding who to approve as rehomers
- periodic review of whether approved rehomers continue to meet the criteria
- periodic review of the proportion of wild horses provided to rehomers that are sent by rehomers to a knackery

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- referring any allegations related to animal welfare, or matters arising from periodic review of data as outlined above, to the appropriate agencies
- effective communication and engagement with agencies who have responsibilities for the welfare of horses
- management of program data.

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service Domestication (Rehoming) Guidelines set out:

- pre-requisites for approval as a rehomer (such as relevant experience and property suitability)
- requirements that need to be met on an ongoing basis in order to retain approved rehomer status.

The guidelines are applied by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service in making decisions about the administration and implementation of the program. A breach of the guidelines by a rehomer is not a breach of the law and NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service cannot take legal action to enforce the guidelines. However, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service will revoke or suspend the approval of a rehomer who fails to comply with the guidelines.

### **Animal welfare and other authorities relevant to private land**

Once horses leave the control of NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (on the Transportation Date), the rehomer is responsible for the welfare of horses and compliance with all relevant laws.

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service does not have statutory powers which enable it to enter private land for purposes related to the management of domestic animals (including rehomed wild horses) or to otherwise regulate private landholders and their management of horses.

A number of other agencies have statutory powers and functions related to the management and welfare of horses on private land. These include the RSPCA NSW (with respect to animal welfare matters under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*), Local Land Services (with respect to biosecurity matters) as well as local government and the NSW Police.

Animal welfare agencies, such as RSPCA NSW or their interstate counterparts, are responsible for considering and (if warranted) investigating complaints or allegations about the welfare of horses on private land. This includes horses that were originally sourced from the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service rehoming program.

Other agencies may also have a role in relation to the welfare of horses on private land, depending on the particular facts and circumstances, including but not limited to NSW Local Land Services, NSW Police, and local government.

Where specific allegations are received by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service in relation to rehomers, or matters are identified through the periodic review of data and returns as set out above, those allegations/matters will be referred to the appropriate authority or organisation, in accordance with the guidelines. NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service may also suspend the rehomer while that matter is considered.

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### Rehomers

Rehomers are responsible for the welfare of horses from the moment they are loaded on to transport at the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service yards (or other location specified by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service) and collected by the rehomer (the transportation date), including in circumstances where the rehomer is using a transport provider.

Rehomers:

- assume **ownership** of the horses once loaded on to transport and collected at the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service holding yards (or other specified location)
- are responsible for all arrangements and costs associated with the transport of horses from the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service holding yards or other specified location
- are responsible for the **welfare** of wild horses from the moment horses are loaded on to transport at the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service yards or other specified location, including obligations under all relevant animal welfare legislation, guidelines and codes
- are responsible for compliance with any legislative obligations applying to the use of land for the rehoming of wild horses, including obtaining landowner's consent (if the applicant is not the landowner), relevant planning, land use, biodiversity, heritage, environment protection, and health and safety laws.

Environment and Heritage.

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