



NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

Summary of representations

**Draft amending plan to the Kosciuszko National
Park Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan 2021**



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Introduction

The Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan (the plan) was adopted in 2021 under the *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018* (the Act).

In accordance with section 11 of the Act, on 29 July 2023 the Minister for the Environment directed the preparation of a draft amending plan to enable use of aerial shooting as a method for control of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park, together with various ancillary supporting amendments. The process for preparing and adopting an amending plan is set out in the Act and includes the public exhibition of a draft amending plan.

A draft amending plan to the Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan was prepared by a delegate of the Secretary of the Department of Planning and Environment. The draft amending plan was placed on public exhibition from 8 August 2023 to 11 September 2023.

A total of 11,002 representations were received in response to public exhibition of the draft amending plan. Given the large number and importance of representations received, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) formed a dedicated team to review all representations. A total of 16 staff were tasked with reviewing the submissions over a 6-week period. Over 1,500 hours of staff time was taken to complete this important task.

Representations were received from individuals as well as a broad range of organisations. The community's interest in this draft amending plan, and the effort the public have made to make representations, is appreciated. All submissions received are valued and have been carefully considered.

This report summarises the representations received during public exhibition on each proposed amendment and outlines recommendations in response.

Feedback was received on Amendments 1-5. No specific feedback was received on Amendment 6. Most of the feedback received focused on the proposal to include aerial shooting as a control method in the plan (Amendment 5.2).

Many representations also raised points about various aspects of the Act, existing adopted plan and associated operational matters. Many of these points were not of direct relevance or were beyond scope of the proposed amendments to the plan but have been considered and are summarised within this report.

Further detail about representations on each specific amendment is outlined below – presenting the points raised both in opposition to, and in favour of, the amendments.

Note that for ease of analysis and to ensure accurate reporting of the range of issues raised, feedback on Amendment 5 in the draft amending plan (dealing with wild horse control methods) is separated into 3 points in this report:

- Amendment 5.1 (Ground shooting) page 5
- Amendment 5.2 (Aerial shooting) page 6
- Amendment 5.3 (Community support for wild horse control) page 12.

Representations on draft amending plan

Amendments 1 and 2 (Executive summary and Matters considered)

Amendment 1 proposed a change in wording to the executive summary in the plan to reflect the plan amendment process.

Amendment 2 proposed a change in wording to section 2 of the plan to reflect the plan amendment process. Feedback on Amendments 1 and 2 is summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1

What points were raised in the representations?	Recommendations
Representations provided broad statements in opposition to Amendments 1 and 2.	No change to draft amending plan. Most feedback in opposition to these proposed amendments was general in nature and did not relate specifically to the proposed text changes. The proposed changes are required to ensure that adopted amendments are reflected in the plan.
Representations provided broad statements of support for Amendments 1 and 2.	No change to draft amending plan. Points raised in support were consistent with the draft amending plan.

Amendment 3 (Updated population size information)

Amendment 3 proposed to update information on the size of the wild horse population, based on the most recent population survey (section 5 of the plan). Feedback on Amendment 3 is summarised in Table 2 below.

Table 2

What points were raised in the representations?	Recommendations
<p>Representations expressed opposition to the update of population size information on the basis that respondents considered that the population estimates as stated in section 5 of the Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan were inaccurate and/or based on unreliable survey methods.</p> <p>Issues raised by representations included concerns that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the distance sampling method used by NPWS is not an appropriate method to count wild horses • counting horses from the air lacks precision • NPWS surveys did not count sufficient horses to be statistically accurate • NPWS surveys are undertaken in areas with dense horse populations and these densities are then extrapolated out over areas of the park with less densities • the stated population numbers do not align with estimates by people on the ground. 	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>Regular scientific surveys undertaken in accordance with international best practice are conducted to reliably estimate the population of wild horses in the park.</p> <p>Surveys are designed and analysed by an experienced expert, and results are peer-reviewed by independent experts from the CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) and Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.</p> <p>Survey design is regularly reviewed and continually improved to take into account the best available science and feedback from experts and stakeholders.</p>
<p>Representations provided a broad statement of support for Amendments 3.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>Points raised in support were consistent with the draft amending plan.</p>

Amendment 4 (National standard operating procedures)

Amendment 4 proposed to include a reference to the national standard operating procedure for the aerial shooting of feral horses (section 6.1 of the Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan). Feedback on Amendment 4 is summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3

What points were raised in the representations?	Recommendations
Representations expressed opposition to inclusion of a reference to the national standard operating procedure, on the basis that they considered that aerial shooting should not be undertaken and that reference to the standard operating procedures was therefore unnecessary.	No change to draft amending plan. An update that references the existing national standard operating procedures is necessary to ensure that operational practices outlined in the plan are up to date, noting NPWS will prepare a park specific standard operating procedure for aerial shooting of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park.
Representations expressed support for inclusion of a reference to the national standard operating procedure.	No change to draft amending plan. Points raised in support were consistent with the draft amending plan.

Amendment 5.1 (Ground shooting)

This amendment proposed that the definition of areas where ground shooting may be undertaken is altered from ‘areas of park that have been closed to ensure safe implementation of ground shooting’ to ‘any area of the park’. Feedback on Amendment 5.1 is summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4

What points were raised in the representations?	Recommendations
<p>Representations expressed concern about the proposed removal of a requirement for shooting to occur during park closure, on the basis that ground shooting without a park closure would be unsafe.</p> <p>Representations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> noted that the current requirement of the adopted plan for sections of the park to be closed limits the likelihood that park users may enter an area where shooting may occur expressed concern that removal of this requirement may result in visitors being present in areas where shooting operations are being undertaken, thereby increasing safety risk. 	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>NPWS will implement rigorous protocols to ensure visitor and public safety before any shooting operations commence and during such operations. This will include implementation of measures set out in standard operating procedures, shooting operations plans, job safety analyses, notification risk assessments and checklists, and (where necessary) closure of areas to public access while operations are underway.</p> <p>NPWS will also communicate relevant safety messages through a broad range of communication channels.</p>
<p>Representations expressed support for ground shooting (and aerial shooting) in any area of the park.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>Points raised in support were consistent with the draft amending plan.</p>

Amendment 5.2 (Aerial shooting)

This amendment proposed to include aerial shooting in the list of control methods available for use in controlling wild horses in the park (section 6.2 of the Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan). Feedback on Amendment 5.2 is summarised in Table 5 below.

87% of all submissions provided feedback on Amendment 5.2. Of these, 82% expressed support for aerial shooting as a control method, and 18% expressed opposition.

The most frequently raised points in opposition to Amendment 5.2 were:

- concerns about impacts on animal welfare (73%)¹
- accuracy of wild horse population estimates (36%)¹
- adequacy of existing control methods to achieve the plans objectives (8%)¹
- environmental impact of carcasses left in situ (6%)¹
- emotional impact on people (5%)¹
- ineffectiveness as a control method (5%)¹

The most frequently raised points in support of Amendment 5.2 were:

- inadequacy of existing control methods (88%)²
- acceptability of animal welfare outcomes (83%)²
- accuracy of population estimates (78%)²
- safety (73%)².

¹ Expressed as a percentage of submissions that expressed opposition to aerial shooting

² Expressed as a percentage of submissions that expressed support for aerial shooting

Table 5

What points were raised in the representations?		Recommendations
Wild horse welfare	<p>Animal welfare outcomes are not acceptable.</p> <p>Representations expressed opposition to this amendment on the basis that it will have a significant and unacceptable impact on the welfare of wild horses.</p> <p>Concerns about aerial shooting included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aerial shooting cannot be sufficiently accurate to guarantee an instant death • it is not possible to check every horse to ensure shooting has been effective • shooting may separate foals from mares and disrupt herd structure. 	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>Evidence to date suggests that best practice aerial shooting would lead to equivalent welfare outcomes to other forms of lethal control, and better outcomes than several of the current techniques.</p> <p>The literature supports that the keys to successful aerial operations depend on using highly skilled and experienced shooters and pilots, ensuring multiple shots ('overkill'), and shooting in relatively open areas. When skilled operators work in open areas with multiple shots to each animal, the outcomes for animals are consistent with the highest animal welfare standards. Aerial shooting results in welfare outcomes that are equivalent to and better than all other control operations.</p> <p>If aerial shooting is approved and subsequently used as a control method, NPWS will achieve the highest animal</p>

What points were raised in the representations?	Recommendations
<p>Animal welfare outcomes are acceptable.</p> <p>Representations expressed support for the amendment on the basis that the animal welfare outcomes are acceptable.</p> <p>Representations highlighted that this method has been used effectively to control numerous feral animal species.</p>	<p>welfare standards consistent with relevant Commonwealth and/or NSW animal welfare legislation, regulations and codes of practice through adherence to a rigorous and comprehensive NPWS standard operating procedure.</p> <p>The procedure will be developed by NPWS with independent expert veterinary and animal welfare advice. Compliance with the procedure will be subject to regular auditing by animal welfare experts.</p> <p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>Points raised in support were consistent with the draft amending plan.</p>
<p>Wild horse population size</p> <p>Population estimates are not accurate or valid.</p> <p>Representations expressed opposition to this amendment on the basis that the proposal is not justified because wild horse population estimates are incorrect.</p> <p>Issues raised by representations included concerns that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the distance sampling method used by NPWS is not an appropriate method to count wild horses • counting horses from the air lacks precision • NPWS surveys did not count sufficient horses to be statistically accurate • NPWS surveys are undertaken in areas with dense horse populations and these densities are then extrapolated out over areas of the park with less densities • the stated population numbers stated do not align with estimates by people on the ground. <p>Representations recommended that wild horse control should cease until the methodology for population assessments was changed and another population assessment was completed.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>Regular scientific surveys undertaken in accordance with international best practice are conducted to reliably estimate the population of wild horses in the park.</p> <p>Surveys are designed and analysed by an experienced expert, and results are peer-reviewed by independent experts from the CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) and Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.</p> <p>Survey design is regularly reviewed and continually improved to take into account the best available science and feedback from experts and stakeholders.</p>

What points were raised in the representations?	Recommendations
<p>Population estimates are sufficiently accurate.</p> <p>Representations expressed support for this amendment on the basis that wild horse population estimates are sufficiently accurate, that the population is excessively large and that it is having a significant negative impact on the park.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>Points raised in support were consistent with the draft amending plan.</p>
<p>Target should be for eradication.</p> <p>Representations recommended that wild horses should be eradicated rather than reduced in number.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>Population targets are set in the existing adopted plan. No change was proposed in the draft amending plan.</p>
<p>Existing control methods</p> <p>Aerial shooting is required because existing control methods are not sufficient.</p> <p>Representations expressed support for this amendment on the basis that the existing control methods alone are not adequate to achieve the plan's targets, as set out in the fact sheet accompanying exhibition of the draft amending plan.</p> <p>Representations contended that the wild horse population was very large, having a significant negative impact on park values, and that aerial shooting was the only feasible method capable of protection of park values through the rapid reduction of the wild horse population.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>Points raised in support were consistent with the draft amending plan.</p>
<p>Aerial shooting is not required because existing control methods are adequate.</p> <p>Representations expressed opposition to this amendment on the basis that existing control methods are adequate to achieve the plan's objectives.</p> <p>Representations highlighted that the current control methods have only been implemented since the plan's adoption in 2021, and that it was therefore too soon to conclude that these methods could not achieve the plan's targets.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>The Secretary is legally required to reduce the wild horse population in Kosciuszko National Park to 3,000 by 30 June 2027 in accordance with the adopted plan. Despite significant efforts by NPWS to increase the rate of wild horse removal since the plan was adopted in 2021, existing control methods will not enable the target population of 3,000 wild horses to be met by this deadline.</p> <p>Control methods such as passive trapping and rehoming or removal to a knackery, and ground shooting, are limited by several factors, including the size and terrain of the park, the mobility and distribution of wild horses, and a limited number of people able and willing to rehome wild horses.</p>
<p>Objection to the use of lethal control methods.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>Other lethal control methods are already provided for in the adopted</p>

What points were raised in the representations?	Recommendations
<p>Representations expressed opposition to the lethal control methods identified in the plan and the proposal to add aerial shooting to the list of available control methods on the basis that lethal control methods are unnecessary and/or inappropriate.</p> <p>Some representations raised this point from an animal rights perspectives, objecting to the use of lethal control on any sentient animal, while others raised it in relation to wild horses alone.</p> <p>Representations that raised an objection to the use of lethal control methods often suggested that non-lethal control methods such as passive trapping and rehoming, or reproductive controls, should be used instead.</p>	<p>plan. No change to these existing control methods was proposed in the draft amending plan.</p>
<p>General feedback on existing control methods.</p> <p>Representations included advice to improve existing control methods and opposition to existing control methods.</p> <p>Representations promoted reproductive control, passive trapping and rehoming as alternatives to lethal control methods.</p> <p>Representations recommended that effort applied to current control methods, including rehoming and reproductive control, should be increased.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>These points are acknowledged but are not directly relevant to the scope of proposals set out in the draft amending plan.</p> <p>As set out in the fact sheet and supporting information for the public exhibition of the amending plan, it is not considered that current control methods or non-lethal control methods will be sufficient to meet the target wild horse population required by the adopted plan.</p>
<p>Emotional impact on people</p>	<p>Representations expressed opposition to this amendment on the basis that it will cause unnecessary and significant emotional distress to people.</p> <p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>The sensitive nature of this issue and the close attachment of some people to wild horses is acknowledged and respected.</p> <p>The closure of areas subject to shooting operations (where necessary), and the development and implementation of standard operating procedures for shooting and carcass management will assist in minimising distress within sections of the community.</p>
<p>Effectiveness of aerial shooting</p>	<p>Representations expressed opposition to this amendment on the basis that aerial shooting will not be effective, or less effective than alternative control methods.</p> <p>Points raised included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> aerial shooting is costly <p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>There is a long and successful record of aerial shooting being used in the control of feral animals. NPWS has extensive experience in undertaking aerial shooting operations to manage a range of feral animals across the state.</p>

What points were raised in the representations?	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wild horses will take cover when they hear a helicopter preventing them from being found • shooters will miss horses due to the challenges of shooting a moving target from a moving platform. 	<p>Aerial shooting of wild horses has been effectively undertaken on other land tenures elsewhere. The development, implementation and regular review of NPWS standard operating procedures will ensure that this method of wild horse management is effective.</p>
<p>Environmental impact of carcasses left in situ</p> <p>Representations expressed opposition to this amendment on the basis that it will result in the carcasses of lethally controlled wild horses remaining in situ throughout the park that will result in an increase in feral predators and the pollution of waterways and catchments.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>The potential impacts of carcasses on environmental, cultural and social values within the park will be managed through adherence to standard operating procedures for aerial shooting and carcass management plans.</p> <p>The carcass management plan will include provisions to ensure, as far as practicable, that carcasses are not within designated distances of major waterways and busy visitor areas such as campgrounds.</p> <p>Most carcasses will be left to decompose in place and not moved or collected. This is standard practice for feral animal control on public and private land and is consistent with the longstanding practice in the park with deer and pig control.</p> <p>If aerial shooting of wild horses proceeds, enhanced and targeted control of pigs and wild dogs will be implemented to ensure the temporary availability of carcasses does not lead to an increase in these feral species.</p>
<p>Control of feral animals</p> <p>Representations highlighted the impacts of feral animal species on park values and recommended their control.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>While the impact of feral animals is acknowledged, this point is not directly relevant to the amendment.</p> <p>NPWS is carrying out the biggest feral animal control program ever undertaken in New South Wales. In Kosciuszko National Park and the surrounding region, more than 10,000 feral animals were removed, including 6,800 deer, in the 3 years to the end of 2022.</p>
<p>Environmental impact of wild horses</p> <p>Representations opposed and/or challenged statements in the plan recognising the negative environmental impact of wild horses on the park.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>The negative environmental impacts of the wild horse population are significant, identified in scientific research, and addressed in the existing adopted plan. These include impacts to threatened species and communities such as the endangered alpine sphagnum bogs and associated fens ecological community, endangered Max</p>

What points were raised in the representations?	Recommendations
	<p>Mueller's burr-daisy, critically endangered northern corroboree frog, and vulnerable broad-toothed rat.</p> <p>Wild horse damage has been recorded to historic sites (such as huts) and Aboriginal objects. Aboriginal people have expressed concern about negative impacts of wild horses on Aboriginal cultural landscapes.</p> <p>A change to the description of environmental impacts was not proposed in the draft amending plan.</p>
<p>Representations supported statements in the plan about environmental impacts of wild horses on the park.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>This point is beyond the scope of the amendment process and consistent with the draft amending plan.</p>
<p>Safety of aerial shooting</p> <p>Representations expressed support for the amendment on the basis that it can be implemented without exposing people to safety hazards.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>Points raised in support were consistent with the draft amending plan.</p>
<p>Cultural heritage value of wild horses</p> <p>Representations highlighted the cultural heritage value of the wild horses and advocated for their protection.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>This feedback is beyond the scope of the amendment process. Adoption of the draft amending plan will not impact the heritage value of the wild horse population identified in the existing adopted plan.</p> <p>The adopted plan requires 3,000 wild horses to be retained in the park to enable wild horse heritage values to be protected, consistent with the Act. The amending plan does not propose to change this.</p>

Amendment 5.3 (Community support for wild horse control)

The amendment proposed to remove a statement from the plan highlighting that the adoption of aerial shooting as a control method could impact the community’s support for the removal of wild horses from the park. Feedback on Amendment 5.1 is summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 6

What points were raised in the representations?	Recommendations
<p>Representations expressed opposition to this amendment on the basis that maintaining social licence remains an important consideration and therefore should continue to be addressed in the plan.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>The importance of maintaining social licence is acknowledged and will be supported by adherence to rigorous standard operating procedures developed by NPWS with independent expert veterinary and animal welfare advice. Compliance with the procedures will be subject to regular auditing by independent animal welfare experts.</p> <p>Regular and ongoing provision of information to the community about the outcomes of implementing the plan will occur.</p>
<p>Representations expressed support for the removal of this reference.</p>	<p>No change to draft amending plan.</p> <p>Points raised in support were consistent with the draft amending plan.</p>

Amendment 6 (Minor amendments)

The amendment proposed to update statements about the appointment of the wild horse advisory body and the list of references to the plan.

Table 7

What points were raised in the representations?	Recommendations
No specific comments were made in representations.	Updates are recommended to the draft amending plan to ensure that reference citations are correct.