

Kosciuszko feral horse numbers explode – NSW Government must act

Aerial shooting is urgently needed to stop feral horses destroying Kosciuszko National Park, the Invasive Species Council said today after the release of a report showing horse numbers in the Australian Alps have tripled since 2003.

“Horse numbers in the Alps have exploded, showing that the current control program is an abject failure,” the council’s policy officer Dr Carol Booth said.

“Feral horse numbers in the Alps have risen from 2369 in 2003 to 7679 last year, including 4300 in Kosciuszko National Park.

“That’s probably more than 15 times the number of horses that could be found in the Alps when Banjo Paterson wrote his famous poem *The Man From Snowy River*,” Dr Booth said. In another five years the number could exceed 20,000 feral horses, including 12,500 in Kosciuszko National Park.

“Under the current trapping program no more than 300 horses are removed from Kosciuszko a year. Obviously, it’s not working.

“Trapping alone cannot contain feral horse numbers, which are increasing at a rate of about 20% annually through breeding, adding more than 800 a year to the population, a number that is rapidly growing.

“Trapping is also very expensive, costing the NSW taxpayer \$250,000 a year. This sort of expenditure makes little sense when more than two-thirds of the trapped horses are taken to abattoirs.

“We call on the NSW Government to urgently reintroduce aerial shooting to reduce horse numbers. It is the only method available to humanely reduce horse numbers, and it should be done with rigorous welfare oversight according to protocols approved by the RSPCA,” Dr Booth said.

“Without a new approach, the sensitive alpine areas in the internationally significant Kosciuszko National Park will be ruined.

“There are welfare advantages in effective control. There will be more suffering in the future if much larger numbers of horses have to be killed, and we should be concerned about the welfare of native species adversely affected by horses.”

Feral horses damage the slow-growing alpine and sub-alpine plants of the Australian Alps, foul wetlands, trample vegetation, erode streams, spread weeds, create a vast network of tracks and threaten the safety of motorists.

The report was prepared for the Australian Alps Liaison Committee, which is made up of the parks agencies for the national parks in Victoria, NSW and ACT.

Contact

Carol Booth on 0448 868 984 or email carolbooth@invasives.org.au.

The Invasive Species Council campaigns for better laws and policies to protect the Australian environment from invasive plants, animals and pathogens.

web: www.invasives.org.au | email: isc@invasives.org.au