

# Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc



ABN 38 686 119 087

PO Box 29 Wentworth Falls NSW 2782

Phone: 0490 419 779

E-Mail: [bmcs@bluemountains.org.au](mailto:bmcs@bluemountains.org.au) Web Site: [www.bluemountains.org.au](http://www.bluemountains.org.au)

## Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Phone: [+61 2 6277 3526](tel:+61262773526)

[ec.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:ec.sen@aph.gov.au)

[seniorclerk.committees.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:seniorclerk.committees.sen@aph.gov.au)

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### **Submission to the Senate inquiry on the impacts and management of feral horses in the Australian Alps.**

To the Committee Secretary,

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society (the Society) is a community-based volunteer organisation with over 900 members. Our mission is to help protect, conserve and advocate for the natural environment of the Greater Blue Mountains. In fulfilling its mission the Society advocates for the protection of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and to increase awareness of the natural environment in general.

Our Society fully supports strong action to reduce the feral horses in the Australian Alps to protect this beautiful, fragile and valuable natural habitat for our native flora and fauna and for people to enjoy today and into the future.

As a conservation organisation, we are very concerned about damage caused by invasive species in all national parks including the damage caused by wild horses to the environment, ecology and heritage values of the Kosciuszko National Park (KNP).

In 2016, a comprehensive review into the environmental impacts of wild horses by the ITRG (Independent Technical Reference Group) clearly documented that feral horses have a severe, negative impact on the environmental values of the KNP and this issue must be managed to limit further environmental and ecological harm.

KNP is a UNESCO Biosphere reserve - it is the only alpine zone in mainland Australia, with large sub-alpine areas and peatlands which must be protected. Kosciuszko NP has over 200 species of alpine flowering plants and provides important habitat to native endangered species.

Feral horses trample over delicate areas causing compaction, erosion, vegetation and habitat loss as well as damage to waterways such as causing collapsing banks, damage to peatlands, channel widening, water pollution. Forty threatened species are listed as being impacted by the activity of these wild horses, such as the Corroboree Frog, the Mountain Skink as well as alpine wildflowers.

A survey by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service in November 2022 estimated the number of feral horses at 19,000, up from 14,000 in 2020. (1)

NSW and Victorian state governments have not managed the impact of feral horses and have been well off-track in reducing their numbers, unable to adequately protect habitat for threatened native fauna and flora, heritage values and ecological communities.

The Australian Government has an obligation to protect the heritage values of the Australian Alps. This obligation is not being met due to the increasing number of feral horses.

The Federal government's framework outlining an action plan specifically designed to secure and restore threatened species populations in national parks will be unattainable if feral horse numbers are not reduced and managed urgently and into the future.

Other responsibilities such as protection of matters of national environmental significance under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. need to be met urgently.

We call upon the Senate Enquiry to use all information available to develop a policy to manage and decrease the numbers of feral horses to protect this important UNESCO Biosphere reserve.

We ask the Environment Minister, Tanya Plibersek, to use powers in the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act to require states and territories to effectively and urgently remove feral horses from the Australian Alps National Parks.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We urge you to consider the issues raised in this submission.

Yours sincerely,



Annette Cam  
President  
Blue Mountains Conservation Society  
[bmcs@bluemountains.org.au](mailto:bmcs@bluemountains.org.au)

[www.bluemountains.org.au](http://www.bluemountains.org.au)  
<https://www.facebook.com/Blue-Mountains-Conservation-Society-137594649645830/>

(1) <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/pest-animals-and-weeds/pest-animals/wild-horses/kosciuszko-national-park-wild-horse-management/tracking-the-wild-horse-population>