



Australian Brumby Alliance (ABA)

Resource Information Sheet-5.1

www.australianbrumbyalliance.org.au

Humaneness of Current Brumby Management Options

The most effective, humane, sensible way to manage Brumby numbers that keep both the environment and its Brumbies healthy is to have an ongoing management program. First we need to identify viable, sustainable population numbers that will not overtax their landscape. Working to an identified, viable population level will then set the number to be removed on a regular basis to sustain that population level. Rehoming groups can then plan for how they may be able to take on rehoming work and increase the chance that more Brumbies can be rehomed under the parks management plan, rather than the current more ad hoc approach.

Unhealthy Brumbies means their environment is unhealthy. Better to manage sustainable, viable populations that can result in healthy Brumbies living in healthy environments.

Some people have suggested that Brumbies in National Parks should be re-located to an area outside their homeland park. The ABA cannot see how this concept can work since;

- The area found must be identical to their current location because evolution through *survival of the fittest* has selected Brumby genes to best survive in that environment. Each brumby is - what his environment has shaped him to be in order to survive.
- Secondly, Brumbies that have lived a century or more in many current *home* locations only became unwanted as each of their home territories were decreed a national park. What's to stop Brumbies being evicted from a new area they may be relocated to, if say, that area was later also designated a national park? Better to keep managed Wild Horse populations living where they already are.

The ABA makes the following recommends on methods to (and *not to*) use, to lower Brumby numbers to known sustainable levels that can be incorporated into park management plans on public land where they have lived for generations such as, Crown, forest or national parkland.

1. Identify sustainable Brumbies numbers and ways to manage to that number

1.1 Identify the area's Wild Horse carrying capacity;

- Grade the ecosystem's *health* with the aim of maintaining/increasing biodiversity that does not risk the long term survival of its species. The resilience of each ecosystem directly affects population diversity and survival. Overabundance of any species will negatively impact on the ecosystem's viability;
- Define the scale and structure of the problem; measure positive and negative impacts by source; compare all impacts from, for example; pigs, goats, horses, dingos, rabbits, humans, vehicles, fires and other weather extremes;

- Once the scale and structure of impacts are known, identify the number of Brumbies each area can carry before its ability to seasonally regenerate is compromised; and
- Create a management plan to maintain wild horse numbers at the level identified.

1.2 Overall humane considerations

- Wild Horse management is a complex issue that requires case-by-case consideration;
- There is no method of removing or killing Brumbies that does not cause some level of stress or risk of injury and associated suffering;
- The primary concern must be to ensure that, where Brumby management is proven to be necessary, any stress or risk of injury is avoided or minimised;
- Where it is clear that a reduction in the population is justified as necessary in order to reduce any adverse impacts attributed to Brumbies to a sustainable level, *the most* humane option of all options available must be used;
- RSPCA Australia defines humane killing as *when an animal is either killed instantly or instantaneously rendered insensible to pain until death supervenes*;
- Lethal methods must only be used when all other, non-lethal, humane and effective alternatives able to achieve the management plan aims have been reviewed; and
- Measures to manage wild horse populations must plan to manage all adverse impacts rather than simply reducing the number of animals present in the environment.

2. Options to manage Brumbies without removing them from their environment

2.1 Exclusion Fencing

RSPCA Australia support the use of exclusion fencing for the purposes of asset protection of some high value areas provided that fences are designed, installed and maintained in such a way that reduces the likelihood of passing horses or other park animals becoming entangled in or injured on the fencing, or being prevented from accessing necessary resources.

2.2 Fertility Control

Fertility control offers a potential future non-lethal approach and has been used in the USA for over 30 years. The precedence for Australia to conduct fertility programs is already set for a limited number of species. Now is the time to develop protocols for overabundant Brumby populations here. Fertility control application continues to improve and vaccines can now be imported to Australia under strict protocols and administered by dart gun without the need to trap first. Costs to import, administer and manage fertility control are less than 5% of the \$1074 NPWS said in 2014 it costs them to trap each Brumby. As with any new program, strict procedures must be established to ensure fertility control on Brumby populations are humane and well-regulated. In particular the program must ensure Brumby populations remain at or above genetically viable levels in each plan habitat.

3. Humaneness of current methods used to remove excess Brumbies

3.1 Passive Trapping

This involves setting up trap yards using portable panels covering a small area. Brumbies are then encouraged to enter the yards with for example, salt licks, food, water or coacher horses. After a few days familiarisation, the trap gates are ‘set-up’ to close. Wild horses require a period of time to adjust to human presence to minimise stress levels, before being removed from the area. Passive trapping is more humane than mustering horses into trap yards.

Trapping must be carried out in accordance with current best practice procedures with special consideration given to the welfare of wild horses not used to human contact and confinement.

The Sharp and Saunders model code of practice (COP) for the humane control of feral horses and the associated standard operating procedure for the trapping of feral horses *advocates*:

- avoiding foaling season, or excessive weather conditions,
- employing strategies to mitigate impacts on non-target species,
- daily trap inspections with increased frequencies in extreme weather,
- provision of water at all times and feed for periods over 24 hrs, and
- using traps that provide shade, shelter and sufficient space to avoid overcrowding.

3.2 Slow Ground Mustering into traps

This involves using riders to manoeuvre the horses, no faster than the pace of the slowest horse in the group, into trap paddocks. Mustering must be carried out in accordance with current best practice with special consideration given to the welfare of wild horses not used to human contact or confinement. RSPCA support the stance on mustering from the Sharp and Saunders model COP for the humane control of feral horses and associated SOP [standard operating procedure] for the mustering of feral horses and associated SOP for the mustering of feral horses which *advocates*:

- the use of coacher horses,
- carrying slow ground mustering out in cool or mild weather,
- quiet handling,
- not during the foaling season,
- the muster pace is set to accommodate the slowest horses, and
- portable panel yards are used to minimise the distances horses are mustered.

3.3 Slow Aerial Mustering into traps

This involves using helicopters to manoeuvre horses, no faster than the pace of the slowest horse in the group, into trap paddocks. Low stress aerial mustering has been shown to be effective in inaccessible areas. The same conditions for 3.2 also apply.

3.4 Brumby Roping/Running

This is a traditional method of catching brumbies using riders chase and rope a running horse. Parks Victoria permits this method by arrangement with the Alpine Brumby Management Association (ABMA) and permit the ABMA to tie the Brumbies they rope to a tree on one meter of rope while more are roped. Brumbies are then loaded onto trucks and taken to the abattoir, although a few are rehomed by the ABMA. Parks Victoria made the exception to permit the ABMA to use their dogs to flush out Brumbies in the bush before they are roped.

ABMA *bulk* or *contract brumby running* is not considered be a humane or effective control method. Roping horses will cause stress and anxiety in the horses and has the potential to cause serious injury. It can also result in separation of foals from mares. The number of Wild Horses that can be removed by this method is low compared to other methods.

4. Outcomes for Wild Horses removed under a population reduction plan

4.1 Non-Lethal outcome

The only alternative to lethal outcomes for wild horses removed from their park environment is to adjust to domestic life. It takes time for Brumbies to adjust to close human proximity. Rehoming groups have developed a range of skills to gentle wild horses in the least stressful manner and provide a transition ‘space’ from wild to domestic. It takes around 3 - 6 months to accustom a wild horse to human touch and ground handling to a level the Brumby can be caught in an open paddock, led by the halter, have its feet picked up and learn to float load.

Rehoming when done humanely by experienced operators, and with strict protocols and best practice used for transport, training and rehoming, can be a humane option. We accept the number of wild horses able to be rehomed is relatively low but its humaneness is relatively high when done properly and when compared to being transported for slaughter.

4.2 Lethal outcomes

The biggest issues in wild horse management is how stressed horses become during control activities, how prone they become to injury and the high risk of foals being separated. This means that the control method selected, must be one that reduces these key concerns to the minimum. If the wild horses are being rehomed (non-lethal option), the stress level must be balanced with the eventual positive outcome. If the outcome is death, then the option selected must be the one that results in the least risk of these major issues.

4.2.1 Transport to abattoirs

This option is unacceptable due to the accumulated stress and risk of injury associated with mustering, yarding, transport and eventual slaughter. When wild horses are removed live, there can be significant adverse welfare impacts resulting from their confinement, handling, loading and transport as they are not used to confinement or close contact with humans. Prolonged or excessive stress can result in severe and life-threatening physiological reactions or injuries and must be avoided. The degree of stress and risk involved will differ for each individual animal depending on many factors such as age and health. Wild horses should only be transported for the purpose of relocation or rehoming otherwise they should be shot at the capture site.

5. Humaneness of current methods to shoot Brumbies inside the national park

5.1 Euthanasia of wild horses held in trap yards

Proper knock box facility WITH SCREENING at the end of the race so following horses do not see the horse in front shot. Use gun, or bolt gun. Death must be confirmed before the horse is dragged out. Ideas for the carcass; refrigerated truck or container is present to enable the meat afterwards for i.e. Zoos. Choppers could bring the freezer container in and out.

Note: Brumby euthanize by injection is not appropriate due to the close proximity of humans, handling and restraints required to administer the injection which *significantly* increases;

- Results in the horse experiencing intense, prolonged stress levels before death,
- High risk of injury to both horse and handler, and
- High risk of extreme pain from the injection missing the struggling horse's vein.

[It may be appropriate to use tranquilisers and barbiturate overdoses by veterinarians on an injured horse, barely moving and if a kill gun shot is not available and ground contamination risks from the drugs used can be managed]

5.2 Ground shooting horses roaming free.

This involves shooters on the ground locating the horse and ensuring a kill shot is delivered.

This is **not** considered humane because

- The shooter is unable to keep up to a scared, bolting wounded horse.
- The ability to achieve a clean kill shot is low.
- A high flight response will result in adjacent horses scattering, and
- Foals will be quickly separated from their dams. Those not followed up will
- Starve to death because their dam is dead, wounded or too distant to be reunited.

5.3 Aerial shooting wild horses [see also number “5.3 -Why Aerial Shooting is not humane” of the ABA’s Brumby Resource packages for more detail]

This involves shooting horses (moving target) from helicopters (moving platform).

Aerial shooting of wild horses is favoured in WA, NT, SA and Qld to quickly reduce Brumby populations considered overabundant and where land managers want remove Brumbies so they can increase the grazing available for cattle production. Governments, national parks, forest managers and land owners frequently claim aerial shooting is a more cost effective way to quickly reduce Brumby numbers, it is essential that the killing method chosen is based on the most human option *without* reference to costs. All options, no matter the costs, must be considered. If lethal control by aerial shooting is proven to be necessary, the shooting must be administered under correct protocols. Note: [RSPCA support the stance on shooting from Sharp & Saunders’ Model COP for the humane control of feral horses and the associated standard operating procedure for ground and aerial shooting of feral horses].

Aerial shooting is **not** considered humane because;

- It fails to meet the RSPCA definition of humane killing as *when an animal is either killed instantly or instantaneously rendered insensible to pain until death supervenes.*
- It is not possible to guarantee a kill first shot every time,
- The high risk of horses being injured running over uneven or steep terrain, and
- It is impossible to ensure ground back-up can promptly kill each wounded horse.

Note: In the absence of humane, effective, non-lethal alternatives, lethal options could be considered provided all following factors are in place to ensure aerial shooting is humane.

- it must only be carried out by experienced, competent shooters and pilots who know how to shoot, when to shoot and when not to shoot.
- it must be done according to best practice standard operating procedures
- it must only be carried out under conditions where animals can be easily located, targeted and followed up.
- control programs should include monitoring, verification and evaluation activities to ensure they are achieving the outcomes they set out to achieve.

Aerial shooting is carried out as a covert operation with very limited ground back to check each downed horse and promptly euthanize injured horses or motherless foals. To date, any access by independent welfare groups to evaluate the humaneness of the operation has been denied and reports rarely made public.

All aerial shooting programs must include monitoring, verification and evaluation programs that are conducted by truly independent organisations and every result publicly released.

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