



Brumby Bridges

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Saving the Kosi Brumbies

While governments want to kill Alpine Brumbies, the Australian Brumby Challenge and Equitana will be showcasing them in November

The ABA

The *Australian Brumby Alliance Inc. (ABA)* was established in 2008 to help facilitate the efforts of like-minded wild horse interest groups throughout Australia. We do this by sharing information and expertise as well as providing a collective voice in regard to the humane management, welfare, preservation and promotion of what we consider to be a National Treasure - *The Australian Brumby*.

ABA News

President's Chat

The Australian Brumby Alliance (ABA) fully endorses the National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) *Heritage Values* report by Context¹ which determined that “*the wild horse population is an attribute associated with the cultural heritage significance of Kosciuszko National Park (KNP) in relation to five criteria*”. However we are highly concerned that the proposal by NPWS to drastically lower the population by 90% to 600 ignores the Snowy Brumby's heritage significance, because it compromises their ability to survive changing environmental conditions. Wild fires killed 64% of KNP Snowy Brumbies in 2003, and with the intensity and frequency of wild fires increasing, repeated reductions in genetic diversity will inevitably lead to inbreeding and eventually their extinction. [See page 3....](#)

It has been an especially busy three months for member groups. SEQ Brumby Association has collected their first group of Kosciuszko Brumbies to gentle and rehome and VBA, SMBUG, HVBA, STB and the ABA have focused on completing submissions to the draft Kosciuszko National Park (KNP) Wild Horse management plan (WHMP). Colleen O'Brien and the VBA have been very busy with managing their Australian Brumby Challenge (ABC) trainers and preparing for the finals of the ABC at Equitana ([see page 7](#)) in Melbourne 17-20 November. I would encourage as many readers as possible to visit Equitana and watch the amazing ABC finals. The ABA also provided a short submission to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee (Victoria) this month.

Many in the general public have contacted ABA member groups to express their concerns at the plight of the Snowy Mountain Brumby and also written their own submissions to NPWS WHMP and key government ministers.

One concerned member of the public alerted us to the NSW Alpine Resorts Environmental 2013-14 report which is well worth a read. The list of reported impacts include:

increased nitrous oxide, sewage leaks, high numbers of pigs, deer, foxes and cats (but only 3 Brumbies).

Interestingly, Broad Tooth Rat populations which live in all resort areas, show “an increased presence in past 4 years” and have not only recovered to ‘pre–2003 fire’ levels but these populations continue to increase. Amazingly, while Brumbies are blamed for spreading weeds, in the resort report NPWS are actually planting “*exotic seed for slope stabilisation and grass cover*”! So, although NPWS remove Brumbies for lesser impact claims, when it comes to resort damage, NPWS simple offer words of encouragement and advice about ways to improve. [Read more page 4.....](#)

The Australian Brumby Alliance (ABA) wrote formally to ask the Hon Mike Baird, as Premier of NSW, to give the ABA his assurance that NPWS would seriously consider the significant factual concerns raised in our submission. We also asked the Premier to ensure the final plan will be based on due scientific process before it is signed off so those responsible are accountable to any future parliamentary scrutiny.

To conclude, the words NPWS used in their KNP WHMP draft have in fact provided all the evidence we need to show that Brumbies and the alpine flora, have co-existed for decades.

The draft KNP WHMP says that “Alpine flora is extremely diverse and many species are only found in the park” and “environmental impacts of horses have been of concern for decades”. If, in fact, Brumby impacts were as much of a problem as NPWS claim they have been for decades, then instead of alpine flora now being reported “extremely diverse”, it would be virtually non-existent!

I hope our readers enjoy the following great articles.

Jill Pickering

¹ [National Cultural Heritage Values Assessment & Conflicting Values Report](#) *The wild horse population Kosciuszko National Park* December 2015

Managing Viable Snowy Brumbies

While the ABA fully endorses the NPWS acknowledgement “that the wild horse population is an attribute associated with the cultural heritage significance of Kosciuszko National Park (KNP)”, the KNP Wild Horse management plan (WHMP) proposal to lower Brumby populations by 90% to 600 fails to fully reflect the Heritage significance of Alpine Brumbies found in their own commissioned report by Context. Increasing frequencies of wild fires that killed 64% of KNP Brumbies in 2003 will leave small numbers vulnerable to fire, inbreeding and extinction.

The draft plan talks of small wild horse populations in the 100’s being successfully retained in other situations, such as the USA. More recent genetic studies are showing that herd inbreeding has started to increase in these populations. Very few US horse management areas (HMAs) have 1,000 horses and none are now considered to have a long term minimum viable population (MVP) [ref *Using Science to Improve the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program*, Chapter 5 [Genetic Diversity in Free-Ranging Horse and Burro Populations](#)].

The chapter *Genetic diversity in free-ranging horse/burros*, states “the goal of genetic management is to maintain as much as possible of the standing genetic diversity of a population and thereby provide the raw material needed to respond to environmental changes”. [ref <http://www.nap.edu/read/13511/chapter/7>

Studies to monitor genetic diversity in US Mustang herds by E. Gus Cothran (University of Kentucky and Texas A&M University) have occurred since 2000 are showing that:

- Genetic drift—random change in allele frequencies between generations—is a strong force in small populations and can result in rapid loss of genetic diversity (citing Frankham et al., 2010).
- Herds that remain isolated over the long term will inevitably lose genetic diversity inasmuch as

maintaining or slightly increasing herd sizes will not offset the effects of genetic drift.

- Isolation and small population size, in combination with the effects of genetic drift, may reduce genetic diversity to the point where herds suffer from the reduced fitness often associated with inbreeding. That would compromise the ability of herds to persist under changing environmental conditions.

Furthermore, the Independent Technical reference Group (ITRG) advised NPWS to:

- In the short term (5yrs) – remove horses from key zones for asset protection, and moving towards acceptable numbers across the park, and
- In the long term (20yrs) – have strictly manage horses in designated parts of the park, unacceptable environmental impacts minimised, and the need to remove large numbers of horses minimised.

It is important to remember that the ITRG never stated an end population goal for short or long term stages. When we asked NPWS where their population target levels were derived for the short and long term stages, NPWS replied that they had used the USA Mustang herd levels of 100-200 to arrive at a long term target level of 600.

We strongly support the ITRG recommendation to carry out impact assessments when the short term phase is reached. The ABA recommends that assessments be conducted when numbers drop to 4,000 before any more Brumbies are removed. Because, unless assessments show horse specific impacts have actually been lowered, further reductions are of no benefit and simple reinforce what we have always said, that other causes *must* be investigated.

After reviewing the KNP WHMP draft plans, and Michelle Dawson’s 2002 study stating “the number of wild horses

across the NSW area of KNP could be kept at 3,000”, we urge NPWS to keep our Heritage Snowy Brumby population closer to 4,000 (but not less than 3,000) to:

- a) maximise their essential genetic mix,
- b) minimise the risk of inbreeding,
- c) maintain family groups and social interactions that define their wildness,
- d) allow for population recovery insurance against, for example, a death rate of 64% as occurred in the 2003 KNP severe wild fire, and
- e) still be able to use Brumby exclusion zones to protect clearly defined highly sensitive alpine areas.

In time, lethal control can be avoided and populations maintained by passive trapping. NPWS give a population growth of 7%-17%. So for example, taking a 12% increase average of 7-17% we could model the following outcomes:

- A population of 4,000 would require 480 Brumbies to be removed annually to maintain

the population at 4,000. Around 200 Brumbies can be trapped and rehomed annually and 280 births prevented by fertility control.

- A population of 3,000 would require 360 to be removed annually, 200 rehomed and 160 births prevented by fertility control.

Rehoming avenue could also be increased by funding rehoming groups or individuals provided they meet strict operating codes of practices before they can qualify for annual funding support.

Jill Pickering

NSW Alpine Resorts Environmental Performance Report 2013–14

The *NSW Alpine Resorts Environmental Performance Report 2013-14*, prepared for the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), makes a fascinating read. The report shows NPWS responding to *impacts caused by resort activities* with *advice and encouragement* to improve performance, whereas NPWS respond to impacts they see as Brumby caused, by total Brumby removal.

Highlights from the report include

The combined four NSW alpine resorts cover around 3000 hectares of KNP and in 2014 catered for 2 million visitors a year, and while this “*provides significant economic, employment and social benefits*” to NSW, 30,000 people on a busy day “*stress the park’s environment*”. The NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 seeks to

ensure developments do not cause *net loss of biodiversity* (p23).

Key 2013-2014 impacts includes:

- Water quality continues to be significantly impaired (p2)
- Resort mountain pygmy-possum populations remained stable (p2)
- Threatened species population: broad-toothed rat numbers have returned to pre-2003 fire levels (p3) and their post-2003 fire recovery continues
- Major ski slope works resulted in *no net loss* of biodiversity as they were offset (p3)
- Bog areas in proximity to the Snowtube at Perisher persist in good condition (p4)

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- Nitrous oxide levels above ANZECC guidelines (p10)
- Sewage spread down a grass slope (p14)
- Pollution had a significant effect on the stream biota (p10)
- New weed species are still *introduced by equipment/materials* (p24)
- *Encourage* resorts to replace ornamental plants with native species (p25)
- Native seed planted with *exotic* seed for slope stabilisation and grass cover (p26)

Perisher's snowmaking increased from 200 to 450 cubic meters/hour (p12), and snowmaking construction was offset by planting species to connect habitats separated by ski runs (p23).

Snomax is used to make snow in Australian ski resorts.

Resort Roundup Issue 25 Winter 2007

(<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/parkmanagement/ResortRoundup25.htm>) describes how the Thredbo resort uses

snowmaking machines that mix water, air and an additive called Snomax.

However Snomax is *banned* in Austria and Germany (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3360831/Could-Swiss-skiing-holiday-make-ILL-Snomax-fake-snow-banned-Austria-Germany-used-Alps-bad-health-says-French-study.html#ixzz4K0lBeTiK>) due to concerns that Snomax may be bad for your health, yet this potential health risk and presumable potentially negative environmental risks are not referred to in the resort report.

So next time NPWS accuse Brumbies of lesser impacts we could suggest, as with resorts, impacts are addressed with *advice, encouragement* and biodiversity *offsets*, not death threats.

Jill Pickering

The full resort environment report can be found at:

<http://www.thredbo.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Alpine-Resorts-Environment-Report-2013-2014.pdf>

Subscribe to ABA

The screenshot shows the Australian Brumby Alliance website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the text 'Australian Brumby Alliance' and 'Email ALERT'. Below this is a banner with the text 'Save Our Snowy Brumbies!' and several small images of brumbies. The main content area features a section titled 'ABA Submission to the KNP Draft Wild Horse Management Plan' with a link to view the submission. Below this is a section titled 'Take Action Now!' with a link to 'Help the Kool Brumbies' and another link to 'Sign an online petition by clicking the links below'. The bottom of the page has a footer with the text 'Page | 5'.

Anyone can now subscribe to ABA and receive Brumby Bridges, media releases, email alerts and other information of public interest. In early 2016, we established a MailChimp account and created a subscriber form for the ABA Website.

Member Groups can now take advantage of getting their news out to a wider interest group and promoting ABA subscription

within their own groups to give a national perspective on Brumby issues.

To subscribe, simply visit the ABA website (www.australianbrumbyalliance.org.au) and fill in the Subscription form on the left hand sidebar.

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Member News

Australian Brumby Horse Register

The Australian Brumby Horse Register launched the **ABHR Showcase Brumby Of the Year Awards** in the 2013/2014 show season. Running each year from the 1st July until 30th June, all Brumbies registered with the ABHR have a chance to win this prestigious award for each State.

This award is not about winning, it is about recognising

those that are willing to get out there and give it a go! The ABHR awards a Brumby from each state who competes in the most classes at all agricultural shows and horse breed shows. This includes not only Brumby classes, but any classes - even in the Un-official rings! Winners are announced at the completion of the show season and the winning brumby from each state is awarded with an engraved trophy.

The results of the 2015-16 Showcase Brumby of the Year:



NSW winner
GF Consider It Done
owned by Elisha Bates



WA winner
Mt Weld Onyx Allure
owned by Selena Cardilini



Victoria winner
VBA Blondie
owned by Sandra Varker

Save the Brumbies (STB)

Finally spring is approaching and we are all very relieved as it has been a cold, hard winter at our New England Brumby Sanctuary. We have been feeding out vast quantities of hay twice daily as paddocks are bare and the mares need lots of nourishment to feed their foals.

Since the draft plan of management relating to the KNP horses was made public, emails, interviews, both here and overseas have been ongoing, time consuming and stressful. Public outrage is high and we, together with other groups, are doing our best to convince NPWS to **revise the draft plan**.

I met recently with local National Party M.P. Melinda Pavey; documentation of submissions prepared by the ABA, Sentient and STB Inc. was handed over to be presented directly to the Premier, Mike Baird. This is an attempt to gain the Premier's attention since all previous correspondence to Minister Speakman and NPWS has, to date, been ignored. We all hope for a more promising outcome in relation to the final plan.

Our Bellingen Sanctuary played host to two groups of TAFE students studying animal husbandry and environment studies. Much interest was shown in the horses and our

programs and the horses enjoyed lots of attention and many treats and cuddles.

Trapping in Guy Fawkes N.P. has been intermittent and due to the large number of horses we are maintaining in the fertility control trial we have not taken any for rehoming so far this year.

All are welcome to attend our Christmas social and Open Day on Sunday 11th December at New England Brumby Sanctuary.

Horse handling, BBQ, entertainment and quality weanlings available to approved people. For more news go to our website:

www.savethebrumbies.org Jan Carter President STB Inc.



STB Barnaby, now happily placed in a forever home

Victorian Brumby Association (VBA)

We are now around 100 days into the Australian Brumby Challenge (ABC) and our 27 Brumbies and their trainers are going incredibly well! The ABC is entirely volunteer driven and we owe a huge debt of gratitude to Sandy Radke and Sandy Varner, who are doing such great work on the website. The weekly updates are adding up now and it is wonderful to be able to click on each trainer and follow their journey throughout the challenge! Please jump on and have a look around:

www.australianbrumbychallenge.com.au and of course,

the finals are just around the corner, at EQUITANA in Melbourne in November – we hope to see you there!

This winter, we have taken in thirty-three new Brumbies from the Kosciuszko National



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Park in NSW. These Brumbies range in age from weanling through to older adult mares and stallions and we are excited at their potential and happy to have them home and safe at our Brumby Junction sanctuary. Three of the mares have already had their new foals, it's just wonderful to see the babies enjoying the paddocks and being cared for by the larger family mob that they're living in.



September also brings our *Brumby Gentling Workshop* – a five day workshop where people get to train their very own Brumby youngster from totally unhandled! It's a great opportunity for people to be closely involved in the training process and meant that we could take on an extra ten yearlings, with the new program in place.



We've had some significant flooding recently, losing most of our internal east-west fences, which has thrown a spanner in the works! Repairs and clean up are ongoing and keeping all of us very busy!



As a charity, fundraising is an important ongoing function. We have found some wonderful sponsors for our pregnant mares and are thankful for this! We have also worked hard to develop our annual Brumby calendar – this year's theme is *'Positively Wild'*. We are delighted with it



and can't wait to start sending them out to our supporters!

Hoof Prints – Other items of note....



Sandra Hall, past Vice President of the ABA sent in some pics she took of Northern Territory Brumbies when she visited recently. She writes:

We were south west of Alice Springs on the Mereenie Loop. <http://www.outback-australia-travel-secrets.com/mereenie-loop-road.html>.

I am part of the Leadership Group for Australian Certified Equine Hoofcare Practitioners. We use the desert Brumbies as our guide for trimming our domestic horses. The environment, movement, diet and hoof wear are all important in the good management of domestic hooves.



This year the grass was knee high and the horses were all as fat as butter and some even laminitic, which I guess is a good thing to know too, as it proves that any horse will founder if the conditions allow them to.



The leadership group runs hoof trimming workshops in many parts of Australia. This is the website <http://www.australianhooftrimmers.com/>

If anyone would like to host a workshop, visit the website above.

The Editor's Tail

Since the June issue there has been so much going on with wild horse management issues. Many people across Australia and overseas have voiced their views online, in the media, at public rallies and directly to governments and government agencies to help save Australia's Alpine Brumbies. Some people in ABA, Member Groups and elsewhere have particularly put in an enormous effort to fight for the right of wild horses to be treated humanely and with respect. It has been a distressing time and it is far from over yet.

Amidst all of this, the [Australian Brumby Challenge](#) is a welcomed opportunity to show Australia how great our Australian Brumbies are. I for one, will be at the finals of the ABC which will be held at [Equitana](#) November 17-20,

when many Alpine Brumbies – now under so much threat in the wild - will no doubt do us proud. Whether you can go to Melbourne or not, this is a chance to put a top spin



on the situation and promote the ABC, getting the message out that these are great horses that are worth more than bullets.

Hope to see some of you at Equitana!

Australian Brumby Alliance Inc.

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ABA Member Groups

- ☞ Australian Brumby Horse Register
- ☞ Coffin Bay Brumby Preservation Society Inc. (SA)
- ☞ Hunter Valley Brumby Association (NSW)
- ☞ Kaimanawa Heritage Horses (NZ)
- ☞ Save the Brumbies Inc. (NSW)
- ☞ Snowy Mountains Bush Users Group (NSW)
- ☞ South East Queensland Brumby Association
- ☞ Victorian Brumby Association