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ABA Press Release 28-Sept-2014

Reality Check for Skiing Brumby ‘Scientists’

Two environmental scientists Don Driscoll and Sam Banks are on a cross-country ski trip in a notorious section of Kosciusko National Park known for periodic snow dumps – it is called Dead Horse Gap for a reason. They stop to photograph Brumbies beside a dead mate and conclude trapping does not work and aerial culling will. Next quantum leap is to conclude 1,800-11,300 Brumbies will die of dehydration and starvation over the next 10 years in the park, but omit to say where 180-1,130 carcasses from this year currently are.

The scientists then refute their own argument *trapping does not work* and *aerial culling will* by drawing a graph to show how a *high trap/no cull* approach would in fact reduce populations to 3,000 in 10 years. The Brumby 2014 count estimates 6,000 Brumbies in the park. Hard comprehend such wide ranging, inconsistent scientific claims.

The article is correct that the current Kosciusko National Park Horse Management plan decided not to aerial shoot but use trap and muster options. This decision is vindicated by comparing the horse number count of 4,200 taken 2009 to this year’s 6,000. Clearly by trapping 2,000 Brumbies in this period the potential increase was halved - trapping IS a proven management tool. Brumby numbers trapped annually have also increased since 2009 as management skills developed, providing many Heritage Brumbies the chance to be rehomed. Sadly unwanted Brumbies go to abattoirs. Consider euthanizing Brumbies not being rehomed at the trap site - with appropriate protocols and under vet supervision to reduce their stress time to death, never ever aerial shoot in the Snowies.

Whether Brumbies cause damage or not avoids the key issue. Any species, especially us humans, can cause damage. We must identify what population levels each ecology can sustain, without losing resilience, or the ability to bounce back from transitory impacts. Identify the damage source, is it humans, horses, pigs, goats, deer and native wombat and manage the species levels in the most humane way.

Finally, to the scientists nearly knocked off their skis, perhaps next time ski slow enough to successfully navigate obstacles such as dung and enjoy the scenery.

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