



# *Australian Brumby Alliance*

(ABA)

## Brumby Resource Information-5.3

[www.australianbrumbyalliance.org.au](http://www.australianbrumbyalliance.org.au)

### *Why aerial shooting Brumbies is not Humane*

Information provided by National Park authorities, advisory bodies, groups and individuals; is increasingly promoting the concept that aerial shooting of Brumbies is the most humane option to manage overabundant Wild Horse/Brumby numbers.

The ABA is firmly of the view that any organisation, group or individual who puts forward such a concept in fact, highlights their distinct lack of practical knowledge about the subject.

Pro - aerial shooting lobbyists, seem to have accepted, without question, the advice received and used in national park material, that promotes aerial shooting Brumbies as being; the most cost effective, quickest and “most humane option for Brumbies”, for “rugged terrain” such as the steep sided, rocky and densely tree covered terrain found in Kosciuszko national park..

Park authority reviews for Kosciuszko NSW and Victorian Brumby management plans use similar wording in background material presented to public forums before they give multi-choice answers. The ABA’s view is that by presenting such limited material to public forums that national park authorities risk heavily skewing feedback responses. For any consultation process to be acceptable to the majority of us, background papers must provide unbiased and wide ranging views that at a minimum demonstrate how complex and variable the issues are.

Let’s not lose sight of the fact that to many of us, Australian Brumbies are seen as an *icon* of Australian culture, *not* inferior - as the term ‘feral’ suggests in official literature to describe Heritage Brumbies. We only need to look at the art work on our \$10 dollar note, the Brumby football teams, poems, books and songs etc. for proof of the Brumbies place in our history.

The ABA encourages readers to read the following detailed reports from two experienced people we believe are well qualified to explain why aerial shooting of Wild Horses is *not* humane, before deciding for themselves how *humane* Brumby aerial culling is.

#### **First Response from Mitch Kemp – October 2014**

*“I come to this with a unique set of skills and experiences which I believe puts me in a position to better understand more of the complexity of the issues involved. This experience includes 40 years of regularly visiting the Victorian Alps as an ATHRA member and having been raised in a cattle farming environment where the county was so steep that stock could only be mustered by horseback. Up until my late 20’s we had a sideline business as horse breeders, breakers and trainers specialising in Arabian horses. In fact, horsemanship has been practiced continuously in our family for many generations.*”

*My first full time job was as an apprentice gunsmith in South Melbourne working for Timothy Kidman-Reid. Tim was a descendant of the Sydney Kidman dynasty (once the greatest land holder in, not just Australia, but the entire British Empire). At the time Tim's family still owned massive amounts of land along the Murray, and elsewhere in NSW and in QLD and managing Brumbies was a particular problem for them in Queensland.*

*After my apprenticeship I came to work in the tree industry and then in 1990 I studied botany and later arboriculture. I've been a professional arborist and later a parks and natural environment manager in the government sector for a significant part of my working life before recently coming back to arboriculture as a consultant. These experiences afford me a detailed understand of the various aspects of environmental management including feral animal control, firearms and horse behaviour.*

*I regret to say that one of the tasks I had as an apprentice gunsmith was to help modify a very high powered rifle so that it would be suitable for killing brumbies in Qld on one of the Kidman cattle stations. Previous attempts to kill horses from mustering helicopters resulted in very mixed (and inhumane) results. My experience reinforced the **impossibility** of getting a clean, instant brain kill.*

***Head shots were often too difficult to achieve even for the best marksmen** and even if a head shot was executed it still didn't guarantee an instant kill **as often they ended up missing the horse's brain and taking out its jaw or something else instead.** The consequences of which was often seriously maimed horses escaping into tree cover where they would later die a slow and painful death.*

*Even in the calmest of weather, helicopters just weren't stable enough to provide an accurate shooting platform. It needs to be understood that all but the biggest and most powerful helicopters are **highly subject to being buffeted by light winds, updrafts and turbulence.***

*Due to the lack of kill shot success it was decided that the best option was to use a firearm that inflicted the maximum amount of damage so that a body shot (which could more easily be achieved) would bring a horse down quickly.*

*The firearm chosen was a rifle chambered in 458 Winchester Magnum with a 24 magnification power telescopic sight. This is about as big and powerful in calibre as rifles get. The next step up would only be 50 calibre military weapons which require a tripod mount.*

*I get the distinct impression that national park authorities and their advisors imagine shooting horses from helicopters is accurate and clinical and I can understand why. In the lack of any real experience with this task, a person would imagine Hollywood movie sequences which suggest that the sniper or marksman always hit their mark. But I can assure you the reality of shooting horses from helicopters is quite different.*

*It is violent and disturbing even for the most seasoned hunter or professional shooter. Its success is highly variable and when you're talking about flighty mountain brumbies who inhabit some of Australia's most rugged country and who have a highly developed fright and flight reflex, it's a whole lot more difficult than most people could possibly imagine.*

*And then imagine how traumatising it would be for members of the public to witness the results of this violence if carcasses are not quickly removed. And then there's the running costs of this kind of equipment which would be calculated in the thousands of dollars per hour.*

*I believe it's this clean, clinical and unrealistic perception that has led authorities and government bodies to assume that brumby control through marksmen in helicopters is superior to other control methods such as passive trapping.*

*If however we were to take the helicopter option off the table completely and invest more in sophistication, ingenuity and equine behavioural knowledge, into the passive trapping option, it would soon prove to be more humane, effective and efficient than any other option.*

*So if we discover this summer that the recent very cold winter just gone hasn't already reduced the brumby population to manageable levels, then it might be time to start thinking deeply about smarter management alternatives".*

Mitch then explains how humane the passive trapping is and reinforces the passive trapping techniques that have evolved to be used in NSW and Victoria. Mitch recommends that:

- *"If euthanasia was to be carried out on some horses it can be done out of sight of the mob so as not to alarm them. Ideally it would be under the supervision of a vet using a silenced subsonic firearm shot to the brain. This method provides much greater safety to the vet and handlers because it does not require actual contact with the horse".* And reinforces the ABA's understanding of why;
- *"Most horse vets will confirm that chemical euthanasia can be risky because a slightly incorrect can result in hyper excitement of the horse rather than death.*

Mitch then concludes *"It just seems to me that if we as a species have the intelligence to build and operate helicopters, we should be able to apply our intellect to a sophisticated method of humanely managing brumbies in the natural environment."*

## **Second Response - Helicopter Shooting of Animals a Technical View**

Submitted to the Kosciuszko (KNP) Horse Management Plan "Community Steering Group" meeting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2007 by Clive Edwards.

The use of Helicopters to shoot animals introduces a number of variables that limits the chance of successfully and humanely terminating the animal. These factors have been reviewed and have been broken down into a number of categories, they include:

### **Base Assumptions**

The weapon	7.62mm (.308) calibre semi-automatic rifle, we note that the Army now uses a .50 Calibre Rifle
The Target	Is a horse's heart for the purposes of obtaining an instant kill?

### **The Variables**

The variables that collectively and individually make it doomed to fail.

The Ammunition	<p>The .308 is a Military Round that is commonly used for Target Shooting and Hunting of Large Game. It has a reasonable flat trajectory and variance (drop) at 300 metres can be around 30 cm at the target. At more extreme ranges the drop can be more significant.</p> <p>Factory ammunition is either a Soft Point Round or ex-military ammunition known as "full Metal Jacket" (FMJ). The FMJ has significant problems as it is very accurate, but was designed as an "anti-personnel round" and therefore tends to pass through soft-bodied game without causing death.</p> <p>FMJ is preferred by many shooters as it is less expensive, (80%) but is less effective.</p>
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The Rifle	<p>Shooting over long distances is often done using a scope or a bipod to improve accuracy and stability. Neither of these tools is useful in a Helicopter where the movement of the transport can make it difficult to hold as target.</p> <p>The use of open rifle sights is preferable as it gives the shooter less variables and a better field of vision, but reduces the range at which accurate shots can be made.</p> <p>The Australian Army used to define the following ranges for the 7.62mm round :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 300 Metres Accurate Fire whilst a sniper is required to make a “head shot” at this range.</li> <li>• 600 Metres – Harassing fire and a Sniper is required to make “body shots” (to the torso) at this range.</li> </ul> <p>This accuracy is further affected by the rate of fire because, as the barrel heats up from the shooting (3-5 shots will suffice), the steel distorts and expands due to the heat, this further diminishes accuracy. Whilst the military are less concerned about such issues, it does affect the ability to shoot horses at the ranges likely to be encountered in the field.</p>
The animal	<p>Not only are they firing at a moving target the size of a football (a Horses Heart), but the frightened animal is moving at 60km/h over broken ground (making it move up and down and side to side) but the Shooter may equally moving.</p> <p>Now the shooter is aiming at a moving target at increasing range whilst seated on an unstable platform.</p> <p>If the pilot is pursuing the Horses then the shooters range is variable making it more difficult to judge each shot.</p>
The Helicopter	<p>Using a helicopter as a platform for fire introduces another set of variables the shooter.</p> <p>A helicopter constantly moves in the air, it moves backwards and forwards, side to side and up and down, particularly in the variable winds of the high country.</p> <p>The shooter is now seated on a moving platform and will constantly have to make adjustments to their fire at targets that will be 100 to 500 metres away and moving at speed.</p>
Downdraft	<p>A shooter, firing from the Helicopter, is firing into a downdraft, caused by the Helicopter’s Rotors.</p> <p>This variable wind will therefore cause variable deflection of any bullets fired from the Helicopter, thus diminishing the possibility of accurate fire at a small and moving target.</p>
Ground and wind conditions	<p>Most rifles are “zeroed” under specific “range” conditions.</p> <p>This creates a further variable to accuracy is the environmental conditions, in particular wind will change in different locations and over different ground (open vs. hillside or timber) thereby causing inconsistent behaviour in the bullet’s flight.</p> <p>In the same context of the above, the thermal conditions over this ground can cause minor variance in the bullet’s path.</p>

Buck fever	Many shooters suffer diminished judgement under live fire conditions. This is caused by the increased adrenaline under the situation. This often called “buck fever”.
Mob behaviour	A group of horses, under stress may “mill around” or behave as a mob when under fire. This may mean that the shooter does not get a clear shot with horses moving around or in front of a designated target. This increases the risk of a shot “going wrong” and not hitting the animal in the heart and a secondary animal being severely wounded.

*“The combination of a shooter, firing at a scared group of animals, from a rifle that has limited effective range and diminishing accuracy, that is then fired from an unstable platform, into variable environmental conditions, at a moving target, introduces too many variables to ever be effective.”*

***Acknowledgement:***

***Prepared from research by Tim Johnson, Snowy Mountains Horse Riders Association February 2007***

The Australian Brumby Alliance thanks Mitch Kemp and Clive Edwards for their technical reports, prepared from research by Tim Johnson, Snowy Mountains Horse Riders Association February 2007, on the complex variables that come into play when shooting a *moving target from a moving platform*, and their permission to use this information in the ABA’s Brumby Resource Information 5.3 “Why aerial shooting Brumbies is **not** humane”.

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