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## **The Cultural Significance of Alpine, Bogong and Barmah Horses**

*Submitted by the Australian Brumby Alliance to the  
Alpine-Bogong-Barmah Round Table meetings 14/15-Feb-17*

Community stakeholders frequently explain their reasons for keeping Wild Horse populations in Barmah, Bogong and Alpine regions, by using words such as; *cultural values, heritage* and *cultural significance* to do justice in describing the many values we hold for Wild Horses. This Australian Brumby Alliance (ABA) paper will focus on Wild Horse heritage values.

*The Oxford dictionary* helps to clarify these descriptive words by explaining *heritage* as an “inherent sense of transmission, legacy, and inheritance”, and also that “*Cultural heritage* is finite, non-renewable, vulnerable to damage or destruction, and frequently contested”. [Link <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195389661/obo-9780195389661-0119.xml>]

*Article 13 of the Burra Charter*, states that “*cultural values* refers to those beliefs which are important to a cultural group, including but not limited to political, religious, spiritual and moral beliefs and is broader than values associated with cultural significance”, and that;

- *places of cultural significance* enrich our lives and give a deep and inspirational connection to community and their landscape and to past and lived experiences”, and
- *places of cultural significance reflect diversity of our communities, tell us who we are, the past that formed us, irreplaceable, precious and must be conserved for present and future generations in accordance with principle of intergenerational equity.*

### **Two opposing themes present at our Round Table discussions around:**

- a) Wild Horses, are an introduced animal that causes impacts in park areas, so have no place in national parks, and
- b) Wild Horses have lived for 100-200 years in Alpine, Bogong and Barmah; are now embedded in our social significance, represent expressions of Australian identity for future generations to see and learn from, so do have a place in park landscapes.

### **Where to from here;**

The ABA believes that the recent discussion on *adaptive management* has opened a positive way forward to for Park’s Victoria and Round Table interested communities to work together to identify culturally significant horse populations in three regions over a period of time, that will not compromise the long term survival of park values, nor that of our heritage horses.

Australia’s Wild Horses represent a valued and irreplaceable part of our cultural history.

## **The Heritage and social significance of Victoria's Wild Horses**

The Australian Brumby Alliance (ABA) fully supports the retention of managed wild horse populations in park areas to reflect their unique cultural heritage, consider for example:

- Early settlers were reliant on horses to create and retain living standards, not only for their survival, but to service their increasing numbers.
- Before mechanisation arrived, settlers depended on the horse for farming, feed, cattle droving, logging, communication, transport, sport, policing and warfare, etc.
- Descendants of early settler domestic horses were recorded living wild within a few decades of the first fleet, in mountainous regions and the Barmah district.
- Wild Horses caught from these regions were actively sought out as strong, dependable horses to be used as army remounts and to pull war artillery and supplies etc.
- Today's Wild Horses are descendants from the same Brumby populations that served overseas in three wars. Thousands of horses, and soldiers died - only *Sandy* returned.
- A distinct tourist industry has developed around the iconic Brumby, attracting visitors from overseas and around Australian to come to see Brumbies living wild and free.
- Brumbies have inspired the human spirit for 200 years, as evidenced through painting, poetry, songs and stories as people express their deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape and to the past and to lived experiences.

### **Is there a framework to rationalise these two themes?**

The answer is yes. We live in a rich and diverse society. Conflict over differing values arise often and are best managed when people work together to accommodate differences. The Act (page 1) covers a broad range of interests to be retained for the benefit of the public.

The ABA considers that the *National Parks Act 1975*, the Greater Alpine plan 2016 and the Burra Charter 2013 provide a framework to retain native flora and fauna values and Wild Horse populations that represent a living part of post-European social and cultural history.

The ABA recognises the skilled land care practices Aboriginal people provided as custodians for "Country" for decades until European settlement, and the efforts by Traditional Owners to retain their heritage values. Now it is our turn to strive to retain Wild Horse heritage values.

### **The National Parks Act 1975:**

In the ABA's opinion, retaining controlled, culturally significant, heritage valued, wild horse populations in parkland falls within the National Park Act 1975's mandate to *preserve* and *protect* broad spectrum of interests such as *landscape* or *features* ..... *for the public benefit*. Protecting native flora and fauna is also vital, and our stakeholder meetings have investigated ways for both cultural values to co-existence, rather than one value versus another.

### **The Greater Alpine National Parks Plan 2016:**

The plans fundamental intent is to protect and enhance the outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values within the parks. [pv]

The ABA supports need to protect and enhance "outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values, and assumes that the word *cultural* includes Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. However, the plan seems to infer that Alpine, Bogong and Barmah non-Aboriginal cultural values do not have equal protection, since it seeks to remove small, isolated horse population.

While it can be argued that there are more Wild Horses in the Victorian Alps, each horse area represents a distinct bloodline that has evolved separate to, and distinct from, other areas.

The lives of early settlers revolved around working with horses and local landscapes, creating what became local traditions, history and events that told each community who they are, the past events that formed them and in particular, to help new generations learn of their origins.

The Alpine plan 2016 references the Burra Charter, but does not seem to align its Wild Horse management with the Charter's intentions to value all types of places of cultural significance including natural, Indigenous and historic places with cultural values.

**Cultural significance in the Burra Charter are those which, for example:**

- Enrich people's lives, often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape, to the past and to lived experiences.
- Are historical records, important expressions of Australian identity & experiences.
- Reflect the diversity of our communities, telling us about who we are and the past that has formed us and the Australian landscape,
- Irreplaceable and precious and must be conserved for present and future generations in accordance with the principle of inter-generational equity.

The Charter offers a way forward that puts conflicting cultures in perspective.

**Managing conflicting values**

The Burra Charter considers all aspects of cultural and natural significance and states that *this is especially important in cases where they conflict*, and that *Co-existence of cultural values should always be recognised, respected and encouraged*. The Charter also acknowledges that conflicting cultural values may affect policy development and management decisions.

**Alpine, Bogong and Barmah Wild Horses must be retained because we believe they:**

- Enrich many people's lives and provide a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape, to the past and to lived experiences.
- Reflect the diversity of our communities, telling us about who we are and the past that has formed us and the Australian landscape.
- Are part of the Australian population's identity that is irreplaceable and precious and must be conserved for present and future generations, and as such
- Fit within the Act's objective of the "*use of parks by the public for the purpose of enjoyment, recreation, or education*", and
- Fit within the Burra Charter's focus on places of cultural significance and values.

As such, the ABA strongly believes that Victoria's Wild Horses have demonstrated the need to be supported, and have a place within Parks Victoria's plan intent to protect and enhance the outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values within the parks,

**In conclusion;**

The Round Table meetings have provided valuable opportunities to hear of different cultural values to be worked through. Constructive, and we feel realistic, Wild Horse management options raised so far can be expanded at our next meeting. However, for the plan to succeed, we need a way forward that builds on offers of support put to Parks Victoria to work together on Wild Horse populations in three Victorian regions, so that the long-term viability of native flora and fauna, *and* the long-term viability of Wild Horse populations can be achieved.

Jill Pickering,

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For Round table meetings 14 & 15 February 2017