

Public Perceptions towards Wild Horses in Victoria - Key Findings

Three Key Findings

1. The Victorian community:

- Has a limited awareness of the actual size of the wild horse population
- Has generally positive associations with wild horses
- Is unlikely to view wild horses as a pest animal
- Is not consciously aware of the impact that wild horses can have on the environment
- Has only a basic understanding of wild horse management techniques and strategies

2. However, while most of the Victorian community has a limited knowledge of wild horses:

- The community is open to receiving information and being educated about the wild horse issue
- Once consulted and informed of the problem, there is general community support for the introduction of animal control methods to limit the growth of the wild horse population
- The preferred methods of management are mustering and fertility controls. The majority of residents feel that shooting wild horses is not an acceptable solution and it is not supported by most respondents.
- Key reasons for respondents feeling differently about wild horses and their management after being presented with some basic information are generally based around not knowing how large the wild horse population is or the damage wild horses cause to native flora and fauna

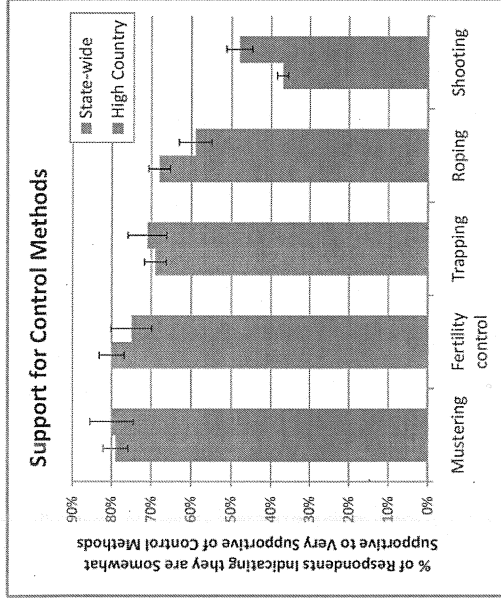
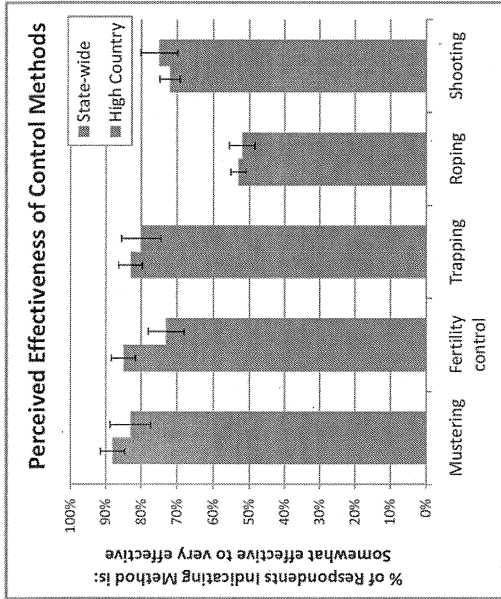
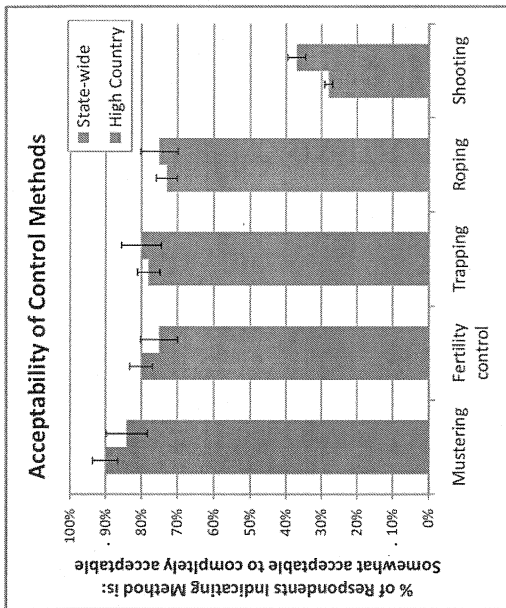
3. Overall,

- Even when informed, the community still see wild horse as different to other pest animals. When considering wild horse control methods the key criterion for most is that the specific animal control methods used on wild horses cause the least amount of stress and pain to the animal
- The lack of support for shooting indicates that, for the most part, the majority of the community does not believe that shooting horses is a humane method of control

Implications

- ⇒ ***Strategically, there is a clear opportunity for Parks Victoria to educate and inform residents about the size of the wild horse population and the impacts wild horses have on the environment***
- ⇒ ***There are differing levels of community support for different wild horse control methods and this should be taken into account when developing wild horse management programs.***

Acceptability/Effectiveness/Support of control methods



The figures above show levels of acceptability, perceived effectiveness and support for a range of wild horse control methods (questions 11 & 12) as indicated by state-wide and high country respondents.

The table below shows the same results as indicated above & mean ratings for Qs 11 & 12, comparing statewide and High Country respondents

	Acceptability		Perceived Effectiveness		Support	
	Somewhat acceptable to completely acceptable	Mean ratings	Somewhat effective to very effective	Mean ratings	Somewhat supportive to very supportive	Mean ratings
Mustering	State-wide	4.00	88%	3.82	79%	3.53
	High Country	3.89	83%	3.67	80%	3.63
Fertility control	State-wide	3.69	85%	3.67	80%	3.69
	High Country	3.60	73%	3.46	75%	3.56
Trapping	State-wide	3.68	83%	3.57	69%	3.19
	High Country	3.81	80%	3.49	71%	3.32
Roping	State-wide	3.34	53%	2.75	68%	3.08
	High Country	3.48	52%	2.65	59%	2.98
Shooting	State-wide	1.95	72%	3.54	37%	2.22
	High Country	2.32	75%	3.52	48%	2.58

Bold type and red/green colours= statistically significant difference between State-wide and High Country (top table) and metropolitan and non-metropolitan residents (bottom table)

A Snapshot of Victorian Residents and Their Views towards Wild Horses in Victoria

Victorian residents and wild horses	
Park visitation past 12 months	51% had visited a Victorian National Park or Forest. 18% had visited the Victorian High Country, 4% had visited the Barmah Forest or Barmah National Park and a further 4% had visited both
Awareness of wild horses	65% were aware that wild horses are in Victoria, whilst only 50% knew that they are specifically in the Victorian High Country
Native or introduced	76% were aware that wild horses are not native to Australia
Sightings	19% stated that they have seen wild horses in Victoria
Preferred name/identification	60% preferred the name brumbies/28% preferred the name wild horses
Knowledge of population size	Respondents significantly underestimated the population – average of 3,175 vs official estimate of 10,000
Expectations of future population size	36% expected the population to increase/21% expected it to decrease
Perceptions of wild horses in Victoria	55% agreed/21% disagreed that wild horses are part of the spirit and heritage of Victoria
	48% agreed/29% disagreed that wild horses should be able to roam freely in the Victorian bush
	41% agreed/35% disagreed that wild horses damage the environment in Victoria
	22% agreed/49% disagreed that wild horses are a pest animal in Victoria
Perceived impact of wild horses on:	
Tourism	43% positive impact/15% negative impact
Cultural heritage values	38% positive impact/20% negative impact
Agricultural production	15% positive impact/35% negative impact
Streams and wetlands	17% positive impact/38% negative impact
Native wildlife	13% positive impact/37% negative impact
Native plants	16% positive impact/50% negative impact
Support for implementation of control methods	Moderately high – 62% supportive/14% unsupportive
Key reason for supporting wild horse control	Damage to native flora and fauna
Key considerations for determining support for different control methods	Most humane method/least stress or pain for the animal
Effect of providing basic information on wild horses during the survey	57% of respondents indicated that they now felt differently about wild horses and wild horse control methods
Beliefs regarding Victoria's public lands	87% agreed that Victoria's public lands are important areas that should be protected by controlling pest plants and animals