

SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACTS AND MANAGEMENT OF FERAL HORSES IN THE AUSTRALIAN ALPS – CANBERRA CROSS COUNTRY SKI CLUB (CCCSC) SUBMISSION

The Canberra Cross Country Ski Club (CCCSC) welcomes the chance to provide its views for the Senate's inquiry into the impacts and management of feral horses in the Australian Alps. This is a critical issue for Australia's alpine areas. The large, and growing, number of feral horses is significantly degrading the alpine environment. Strong and timely federal action is required.

CCCSC is a community organisation focused on cross-country skiing. Its membership of around 130 mostly resides in Canberra and neighbouring areas of regional New South Wales. Our activities are focused on the Australian Alps, particularly – but not exclusively – the Snowy Mountains. Many of our members have a strong relationship with the Australian Alps going back decades, formed from time spent skiing there, as well as engagement in non-snow activities at other times of the year.

The damage being done to the alpine environment by the existing population of horses is a matter of deep concern to our members. This concern is heightened by the continued growth in horse numbers. Aspects of this damage, including to local waterways, have been readily visible on visits by club members to affected areas – for example in the Tantangara area of Kosciuszko National Park (KNP). Many alpine environments are relatively fragile, and vegetation can be slow-growing, making them particularly vulnerable to damage by large, hard-hooved animals like horses. Species whose range is restricted to parts of Australia's alpine areas are made more vulnerable to extinction if their habitat is degraded. There is an imperative to greatly reduce horse numbers in order to protect unique and vulnerable ecosystems, including water catchment areas.

Delaying action will compound the problem. The number of horses that would eventually need to be removed from alpine areas will grow. State government action has not been effective. The introduction of NSW legislation giving specific protection in KNP to horses, an introduced, non-native species, to the detriment of endemic flora and fauna, was a seriously adverse development. The subsequent adoption of a target reduction in horse numbers in the park to 3000 has so far resulted in little action on the ground and horse numbers in the park have continued to increase.

CCCSC supports the reform of Australia's national environmental law to provide for rapid intervention by the federal government to pursue the effective management of areas of national and international environmental significance. There need to be provisions applying to National Heritage Places that would require the effective management of invasive species. CCCSC further supports the introduction of a national plan to address the threat to natural environments posed by feral horses. The federal government needs to work with state and territory governments to advance progress in addressing this issue.

Finally, CCCSC considers that, with the need for strong action to address the feral horse population, consideration should be given to the most effective means to cull numbers. Given that high standards of marksmanship are required of those undertaking the culling of invasive species by firearms in national parks, we note RSPCA advice that shooting, ground or aerial, is often both more humane and effective than trapping and transporting horses. We consider it important that managers of national parks have a suite of control methods, including shooting, available to them for the effective management of the wild horse population.