



Australian Academy of Science

Ian Potter House, Gordon Street, Canberra ACT 2601

Secretary Science Policy Professor David Day FAA

1 June 2018

The Hon. John Barilaro, MP
Deputy Premier, Minister for Regional New South Wales,
Minister for Skills, and Minister for Small Business
Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

CC: The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian MP, Premier of New South Wales
CC: The Hon. Gabrielle Upton MP, New South Wales Minister for the Environment

Dear Mr Barilaro,

The Australian Academy of Science is writing to express great concern about the *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Bill 2018* (the Heritage Bill), currently before the New South Wales Parliament. **The Heritage Bill places a priority on a single invasive species over many native species and ecosystems, some of which are found nowhere else in the world. It is incompatible with the principles that underpin Australia's world-leading protected area system, and with our commitments as a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity.**

Leading research on the impacts of feral horses locally and from around the world provides clear scientific evidence of environmental damage done by this invasive species. This research provides a significant and reliable knowledge base for decisions affecting management of the Kosciuszko National Park and other national parks under New South Wales jurisdiction. This research was summarized in the recent preliminary determination of the NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee,¹ supporting a proposal to list habitat degradation and loss by feral horses as a Key Threatening Process. Reports from bog, stream, and dry habitats²⁻⁴ in Kosciuszko and Victoria indicate a wide range of ecosystems are degraded by feral horses. This research leads **the Academy to expect substantial negative impacts on species and ecosystems within the Park arising from the provisions of the Heritage Bill.**

Under the proposed legislation, the wild horse heritage management plan will prevail over the *NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, Section 81(4), and will prevail over the 2006 *Kosciuszko National Park Plan of Management*, a legal instrument established under that Act. This Plan of Management was developed according to transparent, consultative, legislated processes to provide a best-practice plan for the management of all Kosciuszko National Park values. **The Heritage Bill risks the removal of established management zones, catchment protection and environmental planning provisions as defined in the Plan of Management.** The Wild Horse Community Advisory Panel to be established under the



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Heritage Bill has no requirement for representation by people with scientific qualifications in areas associated with the conservation of nature, nor does it require qualifications in cultural heritage research. This arrangement will see scientific advice all but removed from the management of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park.

The Bill therefore prioritizes protection of one invasive species over many native species and the fragile ecosystems in Kosciuszko National Park, and it does so against the considered professional advice of scientists and researchers.

The Australian Academy of Science calls upon the Berejiklian Government to withdraw or substantially amend the *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Bill 2018* as currently constituted, and to respect and uphold the primary purpose of protected areas, to conserve Australian native species and ecosystems, natural phenomena and indigenous and historic cultural heritage. The Academy looks to the Berejiklian Government to ensure that national park management decisions are informed by the best available scientific advice, as is already the case for National Park Plans of Management established under the *NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*.

The Academy would welcome the opportunity to meet with you at a mutually convenient time to discuss the Heritage Bill. Please contact Senior Policy Analyst Dr Stuart Barrow (02 6201 9464 or stuart.barrow@science.org.au) if you would like to arrange such a meeting.

Yours sincerely

Professor David Day FAA
Secretary Science Policy

The Academy acknowledges the input and expertise of the following scientific authorities in the preparation of this submission:

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References:

1. The Preliminary Determination of the NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee can be accessed at the following link:
<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/threatenedspecies/determinations/PDF/eralHorsesKTP.pdf>
2. Tolsma, A. and Shannon J. (2018). Assessing the Impacts of Feral Horses on the Bogong High Plains, Victoria. Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research. Unpublished client report for Parks Victoria, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Heidelberg, Victoria. (See https://engage.vic.gov.au/application/files/3615/1572/4458/Assessing_the_Impacts_of_Feral_Horses_on_the_Bogong_High_Plains_ATolsma_2018.pdf)
3. Robertson, G., Wright, J., Brown, D., Yuen, K. & Tongway, D. An Assessment of Feral Horse Impacts on Treeless Drainage Lines in the Australian Alps. (The Australian Alps national parks Co-operative Management Program 2015)
<https://theaustralionalps.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/2015-feral-horse-impacts-report.pdf>
4. Bishwokarma, D., Freudenberger, D. & Pulsford, I. Preliminary investigation into the impact of pest horses on the White Cypress Pine-White Box Woodlands of Kosciuszko National Park. (Australian National University, Canberra, Australia, 2014)