

PLENARY SPEECH NOTES

THE KOSCIUSZKO SCIENCE ACCORD

Presented by (Honorary) Associate Professor Graeme L. Worboys, Fenner School of Environment and Society, The Australian National University, 8 November 2018

GOOD EVENING

It is my pleasure to introduce and speak to the “Kosciuszko Science Accord”.

ABOUT THE ACCORD

The Accord is a succinct statement from scientists, individuals and organisations.

It concerns the impacts of feral horses on Kosciuszko National Park and its natural National Heritage values.

It also concerns the regressive 2018 NSW “*Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act*”.

PREPARATION

The Accord text was developed by many scientists and interactively improved and peer-reviewed over a number of weeks.

It has benefited from the content of the Kosciuszko Science Conference Abstracts in its development.

POSSIBLE REFINEMENT

The logistics of interactively refining the Accord text further at this Conference were considered impractical.

For this reason, the Accord has been kept very brief and to the point.

PURPOSE

The “Kosciuszko Science Accord” is a statement for politicians, policy makers and the media arising from contributions from scientists provided at this Conference.

It is a “call to action” to the NSW Government and is supported by published peer-reviewed evidenced-based science: “The Kosciuszko Science Conference Abstracts Book”.

TO THE NSW GOVERNMENT: FIRST CALL TO ACTION ACKNOWLEDGE THE DAMAGE

Scientific evidence provided at this Conference has confirmed the landscape scale of feral horse damage to the National Heritage values of Kosciuszko National Park.

Guided by ecological and scientific advice, anyone witnessing this damage and its extent is appalled that this could happen to an Australian national park which is a National Heritage listed property.

Recognising the extensive damage begs some questions: How could the NSW Environment Minister Gabriel Upton and Deputy Premier John Barilaro not have seen this damage? Have they ever inspected, with scientists, ecologists and park managers, the Park-wide damage caused by thousands of feral horses? If they have seen it, why have they not responded to these impacts? In the absence of any action, why has the Premier of NSW not intervened to protect one of Australia’s greatest national parks?

SECOND CALL TO ACTION: RECOGNISE NATIONAL PARKS ARE FOR CONSERVATION

Previous politicians responsible for Kosciuszko have responded differently.

Some of Australia’s greatest politicians and statesmen have contributed to the conservation of Kosciuszko National Park. It has been a bipartisan political position for 75 years. When Kosciuszko has been threatened in the past, politicians have stepped in to protect this great Park.

McKell

In 1943, after 120 years of stock grazing in the mountains and at the request of soil conservationist Sam Clayton, the Premier Sir William McKell inspected the mountain catchments. Clayton was extremely concerned about extensive soil erosion in the catchments. Something had to be done.

McKell stated:

“(...) I went down there and examined it and saw what I considered to be one of Australia’s greatest tragedies. I had pictured the whole area, the whole catchment area as probably Australia’s greatest catchment, but it was completely devastated. It was being eaten out, the snow vegetation and sphagnum moss which is such a tremendous asset to the area, which soaks up the snow and allows it to seep away and keeps the streams and rivers going all the year. That was completely eaten out. I was appalled. I said ‘Well now, this has to stop’. (...)”

The statesman McKell had a grand, intergenerational vision for the mountains:

“(...) when I was a boy I often used to sit along-side the Snowy River, I could hear the Snowy say, ‘I can work for Australia’. As a consequence of that there developed in me a tremendous affection for the area and I always thought of its tremendous possibilities and value. Not from the economic point of view but from the view of the people, what a great asset it would be if we could have that area, so as to preserve it and keep it for the people for all time (Stanley nd).”

On the 19th April 1944, McKell’s promise to stop the damage was enacted. His Kosciusko State Park Act was assented to and stock grazing was banned from the highest peaks.

Tully

The Minister for Lands in McKell’s Government, Jack Tully delivered the second reading speech for the 1944 Act. In addition to the intrinsic values identified by

McKell, Tully reinforced the economic value of water and the importance of the mountain catchments.

“As this great watershed will be of value as the source of snow waters going into our most important rivers and forming but large reservoirs, the first essential is to see that whatever water runs from this snow country shall be pure and free from silt and shall not take the surface soil with it”.

Lewis

Protection of the mountain catchments was a bipartisan view. In 1967, the Liberal Minister for Lands, Tom Lewis sought the best professional conservation management of the mountain catchments. He established the National Parks and Wildlife Act and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. This Act recognised Kosciuszko as a National Park, and required its professional management guided by ecological principles, science and a plan of management. Lewis established the foundation for what has been recognised internationally as world’s best protected area management practice.

1969

Lewis went further. In 1969 the Liberal Government banned all remaining stock grazing from the Park

For 75 years, these bipartisan initiatives recognised the primary purpose of Kosciuszko National Park as a protected water catchment and as an natural landscape of national significance.

THIRD CALL TO ACTION: REPEAL THE LEGISLATION

The NSW Government’s 2018 *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act* destroyed this 75 year bipartisan vision for the intergenerational conservation of Kosciuszko National Park.

Achieved by a single-interest community group and opportunistic politics, the Act is harmful to the water catchments, Australian native plant and animal species, the integrity of the National Heritage listed mountains, and is an act of regression and vandalism to one of Australia’s greatest national parks.

It is against the national interest for Australia.

The Act formalises and protects the presence of a feral animal within the Park when best practice management would remove these introduced animals. It gives precedence to feral horse protection over the conservation of all other Park values, and transfers of management planning for the feral horses from professional NPWS managers to a narrowly defined Community Advisory Panel appointed by the Minister.

It withdraws the provisions of the Kosciuszko statutory plan of management for any defined horse protection areas.

It undermines the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act and the status of Kosciuszko National Park as a protected area and as a National Heritage Place.

The Third call of this Kosciuszko Science Accord is to repeal this anti-conservation legislation and to reinstate fully previous legal protection for Kosciuszko National Park.

FOURTH CALL TO ACTION REMOVE FERAL HORSES

The fourth call to action is to remove feral horses from Kosciuszko and to cooperate with Victoria and the ACT for feral horse removal across Australian Alps national parks.

This includes the use of aerial culling and other effective means for removing the feral horses.

Research modelling presented at this Conference has shown that aerial culling is the only feral horse removal method that can effectively reduce numbers in what is otherwise an expanding population of thousands of feral horses.

FIFTH CALL TO ACTION RESTORATION

The NSW Government is called on to restore feral horse damage to the catchments and species habitats.

Wetland after wetland across all of the headwater catchments have been incised and drained by feral horses. These wetlands need to be re-dammed and restored.

Headwater creeks and streams need to be restored for the Murray, Murrumbidgee and Snowy River headwater catchments. These are the headwater streams of our mightiest rivers, which are currently damaged and eroding.

Habitats for *Mastacomys*, Stocky Galaxias, the Northern Corroboree Frog, Mountain Crayfish and other species need to be restored.

Erosion control of the steep slopes of Byadbo and the Lower Snowy is needed to achieve soil stabilisation and restoration of these catchments.

SIXTH CALL TO ACTION SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

The final call of the Kosciuszko Science Accord to the NSW Government is to:

- Use scientific evidence as the foundation for management and policy decisions for Kosciuszko National Park;
- Utilise the evidence presented by 21 scientists to this 2018 “Feral Horse Impacts: The Kosciuszko Science Conference”;
- Re-appraise and utilise the scientific advice provided by the “Independent Technical Reference Committee” to the NSW Government 2016 Wild Horse Management Plan process;

- Adopt the preliminary findings of the “NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee” which identified the feral horse as a threatening process; and
- Heed the advice of major science-based organisations such as the Australian Academy of Science, the Australian National University, Deakin University and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

NEXT STEPS

You have been provided with two copies of the Accord. A light green copy to keep and a light yellow copy to sign and leave with us if you are supportive of the Accord.

A collection box is in the Foyer

If you would like more time to consider the Accord statement before signing, please return a signed e-copy by Monday 12th November 2018 to fsesea@anu.edu.au

THANK YOU