



# Australian Brumby Alliance

Australian Brumby Alliance presentation to the Parliament of Victoria Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee

[www.australianbrumbyalliance.org.au](http://www.australianbrumbyalliance.org.au)





# ABA Australian Brumby Alliance

## Who are the Australian Brumby Alliance (ABA)

Founded in 2009, ABA is a collective of brumby rehoming and lobby groups in Australia and NZ.

AUSTRALIAN  
BRUMBY  
HORSE REGISTER



[www.abhr.com.au](http://www.abhr.com.au)



KAIMANAWA  
HERITAGE  
HORSES

NEW ZEALAND



save  the brumbies



HOOFS  
2010  
INC.



# ABA Presentation Themes

1. What we do and why we care
2. Brumbies in perspective
3. Alternative paradigms
4. Preferred approach to Brumby management
5. Conclusion



# **Australian Brumby Alliance**

## **What does the ABA do?**

- ABA Promote Sustainable Brumby/Wild Horse management
- Advocate common causes of member groups (government & public etc.)
- Rehomed nearly 1,000 Wild Horses since 2009

## **Our Goals**

- Sustainable Horse numbers living wild (in Barmah, Bogong and East VicAlps)
- Humane, minimally invasive management
- Working with Government & NGOs (i.e. Agencies & the public etc.)
- Research (social life, genetics and sustainable numbers)

## small Brumby herds living wild

### **Parks Victoria Micromesh Wild Horse survey 2012 (Vic);**

- **55%** agreed (**21%** disagreed) that horses are part of the spirit and heritage of Victoria
- **48%** agreed (**29%** disagreed) that horses should be able to roam freely in the bush
- Tourism – **43%** horse positive impact (**15%** horse negative impact)

### **ABA Lonergan Wild Horse survey 2019 (Vic);**

- **84%** support further research (on wild animal, extreme weather & human impacts in VicAlps/BHP)
- **82%** Believe Brumbies are an important part of Australia's history to preserve.
- **88%** Support small Brumby herds showing little negative impact (VicAlps/BHP)

# ABA Court Action - only option left

ABA took Parks Victoria to Court to stop entire Brumby populations being eradicated. The case was lost, however, the Judge:

- Accepted the continuing presence of brumbies in the Australian Alps contributes to National Heritage Values relating to high country pioneering history, but that
- Culling ALL Bogong High Plains horses, while 1,200 remain in East VicAlps is not significant enough (under the EPBC Act) to detract from their overall heritage values.



Cabena: Bogong Horses heading to India in Myrtleford sales 1890'S

Waler Exports to Market Zones 1861 to 1931					
	Indian	African	S.E.Asian	E.Asian	<u>Total</u>
N.S.W.	52284	19791	10919	8216	91210
Vic.	152742	22108	16636	2400	193886
Qld.	121519	21432	4045	10733	157729
S.A.	22667	908	513	90	24178
W.A.	4723	5697	7248	1357	19025
Tas.	2	282	0	0	284
Total No.	353937	70218	39361	22796	486312
Total Exported	486312				
Total value	8,171,278 (Pounds)				

# Brumbies in perspective: Relative horses, deer, pigs numbers

The Victorian Auditor-General's 2016 report highlighted significant concerns directly related to Parks Victoria, such as their:

- Inability to recognise and act on emerging threats (news examples below)
- Inability to evaluate actions to inform and improve further planning (ABA examples next slide)

News samples:

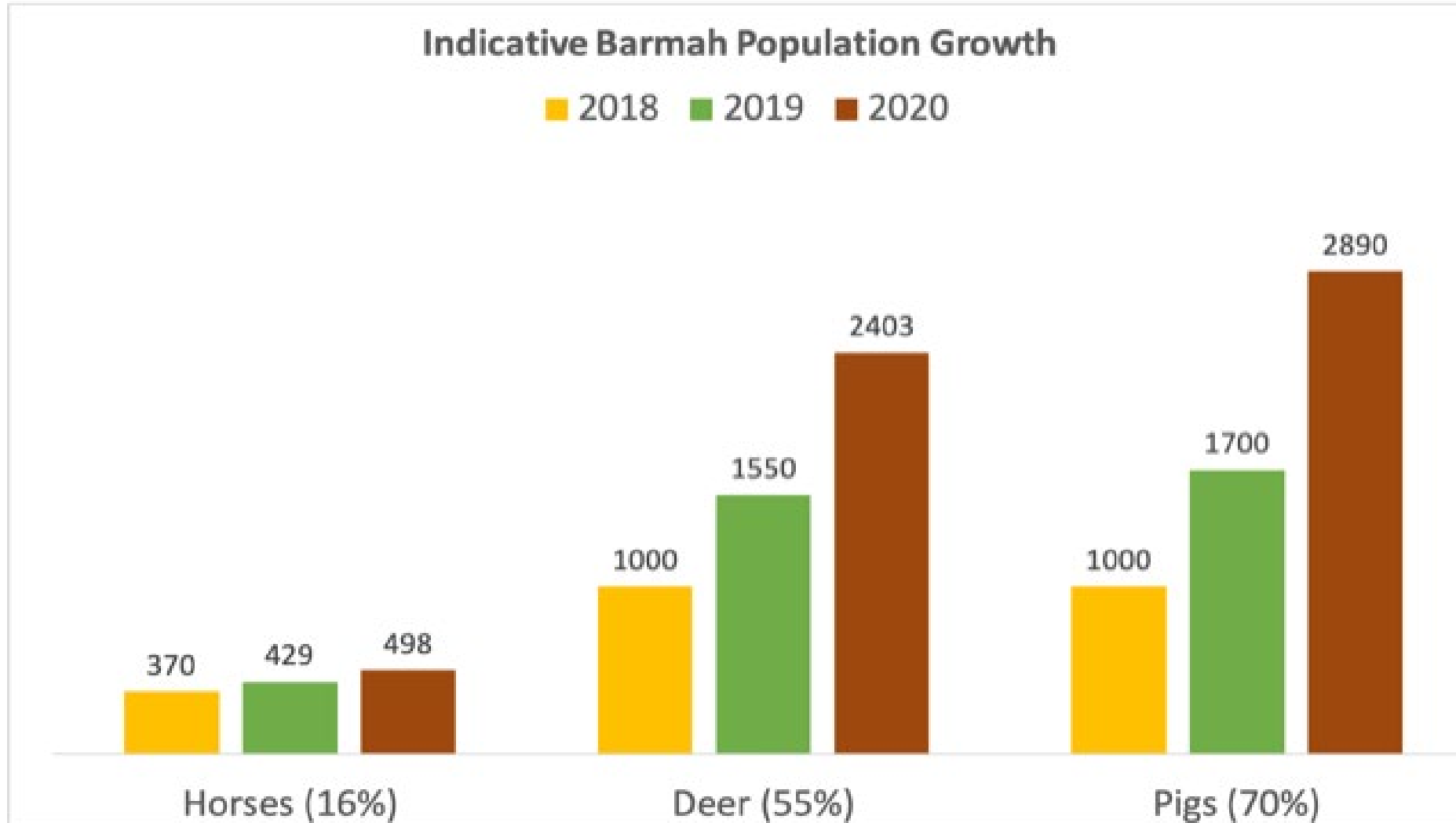
2015 - Environmental damage increasing with Victoria's **rapidly expanding deer** population  
<https://invasives.org.au/blog/feral-deer-on-the-rise/>

2018 - Deer populations in south-east Australia **soaring with estimated 1 million** in Victoria alone, wreaking havoc on farms and the environment <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2018-10-06/deer-wreaking-havoc-farms-environment/10343406>

2019 - Deer invasion expected to worsen with estimations Victoria's deer population of **about 1 million is growing by 30 %** annually <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/deer-invasion-wreaking-havoc-on-prime-wine-country-20190428-p51hz3.html>

2020 – Victorian Deer Management Strategy released (for **sustainable deer** populations)

# Brumbies in perspective: Scale of the problem using Barmah projected population increases



2018 - Total of 34 deer culled but pig data absent (p48 Parks Victoria's Strategic Action Plan 2020).

2019 Cull data not known yet?



# Brumbies in perspective: Impact vs Amenity

Ecological impact is rarely if ever acknowledged because of the strong belief of Australian environmentalists; that since horses are introduced, heavy hard hoofed animals, they must only cause damage in Australia.



Horse track=impact    Footpath



Mountain-bike path



Barmah Motorcycle River Ride - Victoria Australia

Motorsport amenity

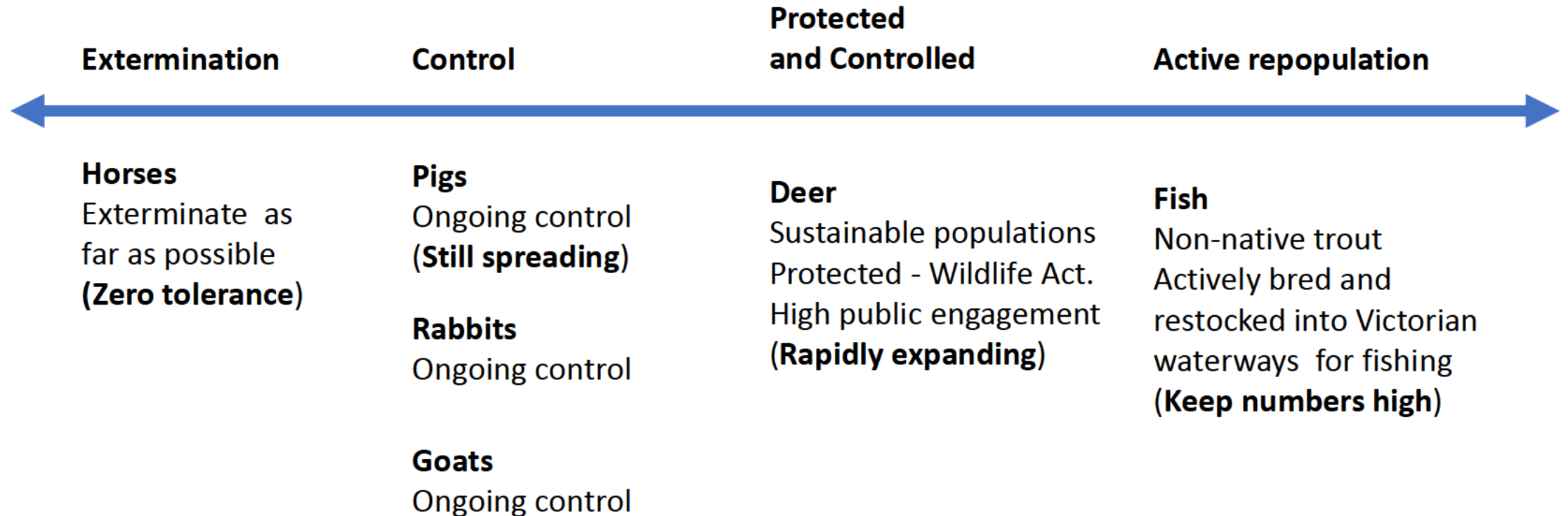


Whether you're a seasoned four-wheel driver or you've never left the bitumen, this part of the High Country offers a fantastic off-road experience. From rugged backcountry trails to old forestry tracks, there is a range of routes to suit all levels of ability. Our National Parks and state forests are filled with tracks and roads for four wheel drive and dirt bike enthusiasts.

Contact the [Visitor Information Centres](#) for detailed maps and up to date trail conditions.

If a horse walks along forming a track, that track = impact = bad, **but** if humans walk on a track, that track is called a footpath (not impact). Logic?

# Brumbies in perspective: Inconsistencies across non-native species management



# Brumbies in perspective: Environmental research examples

Objective and robust studies are required to identify what is actually happening to sensitive native species. Existing Victorian horse studies have significant inaccuracies.

## Out of Context

- **Soil compaction** quotes go back to horse tracks in Dyring's 1990 thesis,
- In fact ABA found Dyring's data shows less than 1% of her study area contained compacted tracks, **leaving 99.826% of study area free** of horse compacting tracks.

## Casual science

- 18 discrete dung piles counted along a single 50 m transect.
- In fact ABA **found 98% of area free of horse dung.**

# Brumbies in perspective: Research examples

## Cut & Paste

- Draft Bogong horse study said VicAlps dung took 5 yrs to decompose (Meagher 2004)
- **BUT** Meager 2004 referred to Australian Alpine cow dung (changed after ABA alert)  
(Note: Horse dung decomposes in 1 ¼ years)

## Jump to Conclusions

- Despite relatively small (11 horses-2 foals) present, soil and vegetation condition has measurable **declined** in many sites ..... supporting concept of **accumulative damage**.
- No thought to why - or other potential causes? Over 100 deer were shot in this area during the study period!

# Brumbies in perspective: Research examples continued...

## **Falsely allocate blame**

- Cross-examined in court, this Bogong High plains study admitted several sites labelled horse only damage **were in fact deer only damage**.
- Damage quantified as better or worse, however **change did not exceed 2%** except for 4-5 sites which changed to 5%.

## **Circumstantial evidence**

- We asked how the study knew only horse damage was recorded? The reply; photographed or recorded damage with horse dung or a hoof print nearby as sufficient to categorise the impact as horse-only damage.

# Alternative paradigms

For 2 years we've urged Parks Victoria to partner in horse studies to identify if, and what density, small horse populations can continue living wild.....

## Photo example not from the study

Thanks mate,  
they will  
never know  
there are 300  
of us to one  
of you



I'll be in deep sh\*t with  
the ABA for skewing  
Parks Victoria's study  
results !!!!!

- Because ergo there is horse dung, and no sign of either the horse or the deer.
- blame by association.

# Alternative paradigms cont... Work together to harness positive horse impact to slow environmental decline



**Skinks by Brumby Dung (2018 VicAlps)**



**Frogs spawning in hoof prints (2020 VicAlps)**

**Save energy** slashing grass for the Sun Moth - horses will do it for free

Dung Insects feed skinks – pug holes shelter frog spawn - **Investigate before** their horses benefactors are **culled**

## Alternative paradigms cont ...

Ecological impact is rarely if ever acknowledged because of the strong belief of Australian environmentalists; that since horses are introduced, heavy hard hoofed animals they must only cause damage in Australia (source: ABA).



Figure 4. Cowombat Flat, Alpine National Park, 27 February 2020 – Horses grazing near fenced enclosure.

Alternative Approaches – Example:

Cowombat Flat 2020 fires – This horse grazed area survived intact while its surrounds experienced catastrophic fires.

- Parks Victoria implement horse urgent cull May 2020 to leave post fire grass for native species to use.
- We resisted saying horse grazing kept a fire refuge for native species of open space short, green grass.



# Solution: ABA partner with Parks Victoria to assess, and plan, for Sustainable Brumby Management

Goal	Action
<b>Long term Vision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No longer significantly impacting on priority environmental &amp; Aboriginal cultural heritage values,</li><li>• Ongoing management through partnership/community collaboration, and</li><li>• Brumby heritage researched, created and displayed.</li></ul>
<b>Government Funding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• \$1,750,000 to develop/implement Brumby Management Program (Vic)</li></ul>
<b>Management Actions</b>	<p>ABA-PV 5 year horse research, including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Robust studies to identify positive/negative impacts at varying density levels including social behaviours, genetics and grazing patterns</li></ul> <p>Implement population control:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dart deliver fertility control (PZP/GonaCon)</li><li>• Passive trapping</li><li>• Formalising/regulating rehoming process (re-set as fertility control expands)</li><li>• Genetic “safety net” minimum nos.</li></ul>

# Conclusion: Together - we can do this!

Help slow ecological decline by harnessing sustainable horse numbers that:



- Maximise positive (minimise negative) horse impacts
- Promote key stakeholder joint environmental research
- There IS a workable solution to help native species and ensure future generation experience Australian wild horse heritage