

Parks Victoria Feral Horse Technical Reference Group: summary of key advice.

Control Techniques:

Trapping: Supported with appropriate oversight of holding conditions, times and trap design.

Mustering: Supported a potential supervised trial to test efficacy and welfare issues associated with technique in appropriate terrain.

Roping (Brumby Running): Group recommended an independent assessment of the welfare issues associated with the technique including practices, protocols, assessment of participants, oversight and compliance before consideration as a preferred technique. Stronger application of standard operating conditions for roping is needed, including documentation, photo recording, run durations, holding durations, transport conditions.

Fertility control by darting: Not supported as process and protocols not well-developed in Australia and there are long timeframes for population reductions.

Shooting free horses (ground or aerial): Supported by the group as potentially the most humane control methods, but not considered in the plan at this stage due to insufficient public support.

Live capture, rehoming and transport:

Rehoming: To ensure the best possible humane standards are met, what protocols can be put in place to assist brumby rehoming groups in locating horses with responsible owners? The group noted that microchipping or a registry of horses removed from Crown land may assist in tracking outcomes.

Decision process for rehoming: The TRG suggest that welfare outcomes are better tracked and served by simplifying the final destinations to just two outcomes (rehoming or being put down under strict protocols).

Capacity of the community to rehome horses: A process is needed to assess community capacity to take and rehome horses, including consideration of appropriate decision triggers for alternative approaches when rehoming capacity is reached. If community rehoming capacity is reached, horses should be put down onsite under strict protocols rather than transported to eventually be put down.

Condition assessment of captured horses (euthanasia assessment): If captured horses are ill, injured or are in sufficiently poor condition, onsite euthanasia should be used. The onsite condition assessment should be based on veterinary standards and standard body condition score system. Training for staff/contractors may be required. Heavily pregnant mares cannot be transported, a decision process on how to assess and process pregnant mares is required.

Horses being euthanised or put down onsite: To be undertaken by licensed and accredited shooter, using veterinary standards.

Live transport: The group noted the following issues for consideration:

- Expectation to meet Victorian livestock Land Transport Regulations. Regulations on transport of heavily pregnant horses.
- Vehicle type, expectations, restrictions, terrain, time and distance travelled, duration off feed and water.
- Potential lack of oversight of current practices.

Carcass disposal: Transport offsite: Transport and expense issues were noted related to isolated geographic isolation and access issues, e.g. in some locations use of helicopter sling transport may be required.

Leave on-ground onsite: Issues of public amenity, and attracting and growing wild dog populations should be considered.

Bury onsite: Issues of potential Aboriginal cultural site impacts, logistics problems, potential to contaminate groundwater.

Bury offsite: Consider EPA authority and issues for appropriate disposal.

Horse final destinations:

If final destination of captured horses is known to be abattoirs/knackereries, it is considered a better animal welfare outcome to put down animals onsite and reduce transport impacts/trauma. Transport distances to available facilities may be long.

Saleyards: Potential for loss of control and knowledge of the final destinations of captured feral horses.

Processing as meat: Questioned whether there was social license for this option. If final outcome is known to be meat processing, it is more humane to put down animals onsite and reduce transport impacts/trauma.