

Inquiry into Auditor General Report No.202: Meeting Obligations to Protect Ramsar Wetlands (2016)

Ms Justine Curatolo

Organisation Name: Heritage Brumby Advocates Australia
Your position or role: President

Residential address:

Suburb:

State:

Postcode:

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

17th November 2019

Via online submission

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/paec/inquiries/article/4357>

Dear Senate Committee,

RE: Inquiry into Auditor-General's report no.202: meeting obligations to protect Ramsar wetlands (2016)

Thankyou for the opportunity to provide a submission to this parliamentary enquiry, ensuring the long term sustainability of the environment is essential to our organisation.

We have had some interaction with Parks Victoria through their unjustified treatment and poor considerations of the Australian brumby and its relationship with the environment.

We support the three key recommendations made in this report and acknowledge the vital role Ramsar wetlands play in the ecological value of the Australian identity.

We have become very familiar with the intersection between Ramsar wetlands and the brumby, when we advocated in Barmah in 2018 against the release of flood water to the site which had devastating impacts and was founded on unsound reasoning, in our opinion.

HERITAGE BRUMBY ADVOCATES AUSTRALIA inc

Heritage Brumby Advocates Australia (HBAA inc) is a legally registered association, formed in November 2018 to give voice to Australian wild horses. HBAA inc is an independent organisation with a focus on advocacy and systemic change, we work with all stakeholders and are not aligned to any political party.

Our primary purpose is to engage all stakeholders and advocate for the humane treatment, preservation and protection of the Australian Heritage brumby. We will do this through (but not limited to) creating awareness campaigns, letter writing and making submissions to ensure the voice of the brumby is heard.

We are not a rescue, we do not involve ourselves in individual cases, we do not raise money for brumbies

nor do we promote one rescue over another.

PARKS VICTORIA

HBAA inc have previously reported Parks Victoria to the ombudsman for their deliberate use of misinformation to promote their own agenda against wild horses.

Late 2018, HBAA inc, together with a number of others, we repeatedly notified Parks Victoria that the photos they were using and the information they provided to justify the wild horse management plan was incorrect. They intentionally used photos which showed environmental damage caused by wild pigs and wild deer to claim it was caused by wild horses and thus to justify their action (intentions for complete removal).

We reported this deliberate misinformation campaign to the ombudsman, in addition to reporting that the community consultation period by Parks Victoria of 4 weeks, included 2 weeks over the Christmas period when the office was closed. They relented to the pressure and extended the consultation period by another 4 weeks.

HBAAinc supports the humane removal of wild horses from parklands, we also support humane population management strategies which are built on factual information, however, Parks Victoria have repeatedly demonstrated through their lack of commitment to factual reporting, transparency with information (including financial costs, data collection etc) as well as refusing to work towards the best interests of the wild horses, which they are legislated to ensure standards of welfare are applied.

Parks Victoria, are a power unto themselves, they are reckless, without oversight and operate according to their own “opportunistic” whims.

It is interesting, to note that this report so clearly highlights the systemic disfunction inherit in a legislated body.

BARMAH BRUMBIES

In 2018, Parks Victoria, together with a number of water authorities flooded the Barmah national park, the environmental results were devastating for the wild horses in the area. The flooding destroyed access to all the feed for the wild horses forcing them into a small area on higher ground, which then caused environmental damage to the area. Brumby rescue groups offered to trap and remove the brumbies caught in this isolated area as they were also starving due to lack of feed. Parks Victoria declined this offer.

Brumby groups then offered to feed (at their own costs) the isolated and starving brumbies, Parks Victoria again declined this offer and threatened \$7,000 on the spot fines for anyone feeding the wild horses.

Parks Victoria then came out publicly, in the next year and used this environmental damage to “justify” their stance for complete annihilation of brumby population from the Barmah national park.

For more information:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-08/barmah-forest-brumby-cull-plan-released/10980790>

‘Murray Wilton, president of the Barmah Brumby Preservation Group said the horses were not solely responsible for the decline in native vegetation. He said about 90% of the 28 hectare park had experienced flooding recently, forcing the animals in to a small section of the park, causing many to starve.

“They (PV) are trying to tell the public that all of the problems are associated with the brumbies, when in the meeting and at other times, they have admitted that the major damage being caused to the Barmah National Park is the unseasonable flooding,” he said..

In response, PV outlined in the report, that “changes to the natural flooding regime due to river regulation”

had contributed to the decline in Moira grass in the park.’

CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, we at HBAAinc support the recommendations mentioned in this report regarding the Ramsar wetlands, we also support the humane removal of wild horses from park lands through a humane population management strategy which is based on facts and genuine stakeholder consultation.

If we can be of any support, or you would like some more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.
Yours sincerely,

Justine Curatolo

[Redacted]

President, Humane Brumby Advocates Australia inc.

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:

That the behaviour shown by Parks is systematic of a bigger issue of 'opportunistic' and reckless behaviour, they are an entity who needs to be held accountable for their actions, and justification of plans.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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President, Humane Brumby Advocates Australia inc.



Wild Horses are nomadic herbivores. They enrich their local environment and promote biodiversity with their unique digestive systems which allows for regeneration of seeds and grasses, as well as their selective grazing patterns which creates habitats for bugs and small birds.