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Paddy Pallin Research Grant

Outcomes of feral horse management methods for horses, people and the environment - a One Welfare approach

University of New England

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Project Summary

Feral horse (*Equus ferus caballus*) numbers in Australian national parks are increasing, with latest population estimates suggesting more than 25,000 individuals live in the Australian Alps alone. Unfortunately, as numbers soar, Australia has become the world leader in this problem and, to its shame, is trailing the pack in delivering solutions.

Management of feral horse (FH) populations typically requires culling to reduce numbers and impacts. Alternatives include capture either for permanent removal/relocation or application of putative fertility control interventions prior to re-release. All these have been proposed for FH management, and all are subject to challenges, costs, and potential welfare threats.

The debate over FH management exists within a volatile political and social context. Extensive ecological evidence has been insufficient to influence FH proponents and policymakers. The welfare insults caused to FHs by interventions have to date not been considered. Currently, FH management is at an impasse and a fresh approach is needed to advance the discussion. That is why the One Welfare model holds such appeal.

By evaluating potential stressors experienced by rehomed FH and comparative responses in domestic horses, an objective model comparing impacts between cohort groups will be developed. Physiological measures such as glucocorticoid metabolite concentration in faeces will be used to compare the short-, mid- and long-term effects of trapping, transporting and retraining in FHs removed from national parks. This research will assist stakeholders to address the ethical controversies surrounding FH management using the One Welfare framework. This novel approach should keep more people at the decision-making table than previous models.

Working with horses and their owners at the coal-face as an equine trainer and coach, I attained a unique understanding of the relationships people develop with horses. These relationships are often powerful and steeped in tradition rather than science. By prioritising horse, human and environmental welfare in this research project, and using objective measures to quantify animal welfare impacts, I hope to appeal to concerned and passionate FH proponents to promote acceptance and understanding of the broader issues involved in the FH management debate.

Biography of Victoria Condon

- B. App. Sc. (Medical & Applied Biotechnology)
- Master Animal Sc.
- Ass. Dip. Equitation Sc.

I have been a primary producer and equestrian coach/trainer for over 20 years. During that time, I have held positions as a Technical Officer for NSW Department of Agriculture at Wagga and the Pastoral & Veterinary Institute in Hamilton, Victoria. My interest in animal welfare and desire to implement change led me to complete a Master of Animal Science degree at Charles Sturt University, Wagga, in 2020. I wrote a dissertation on associations between traditional apparatus and ridden horse welfare in Australia, which was subsequently published in the *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*: (<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jveb.2021.10.014>).

I am an academic member of the International Society for Equitation Science (ISES). I attended the 2016 ISES Conference in Saumur, France, and was a member of the organising committee for the 2017 ISES Conference in Wagga, NSW.

I am currently a PhD Candidate at the University of New England, Armidale, supervised by Professor Paul McGreevy.