



Trish Doyle MP

Member for Blue Mountains



02 4751 3298 | bluemountains@parliament.nsw.gov.au | 132 Macquarie Rd Springwood NSW 2777

New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly

Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Bill 2018

5 June 2018

In speaking in debate on the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Bill 2018 I echo the sentiments of my Labor colleagues who have already spoken about the proposed legislation. It is remarkable to me that a bill on a strictly environmental matter was introduced to the Chamber not by the Minister for the Environment but by the Deputy Premier and "Minister for TAFE Cuts". It is remarkable because this matter is completely unrelated to the Deputy's Premier's ministerial responsibilities. Yet, here he is, introducing a bill for reasons that we can only speculate on.

As my Labor colleagues have explained, the bill would put wild horses—a beautiful animal but, nevertheless, an introduced pest—above all other ecological, environmental and cultural values within the Kosciuszko National Park. That fact alone speaks to the absurdity, recklessness and short-sightedness of the bill. For that reason, Labor is opposing the bill and will be repealing it in government in the fullness of time.

The concern for us in the meantime is the environmental destruction and degradation of our national park by wild horses that will be allowed to run unchecked, causing irreversible damage to soil, water, rare and threatened species and the endangered ecological communities that are unique to the Kosciuszko National Park. We can always tell that a government is in terminal decline by the legislation or the agenda it enacts in the final months before an election it expects to lose.

Instead of introducing measured, sober policymaking and sensible legislation the "Leadership B Team" and a collection of hangers-on and political deadwood on the frontbench are in here week after week ramming through all the weird and wacky garbage, the fringe nonsense and the special interest insanity that their major donors and preselectors are desperate to see written in to the statutes before they lose office. And so it is with this brumbies bill.

The bill was written by a Nationals member of Parliament, but not one currently holding office. It certainly was not written by the most derelict Minister for the Environment, Minister for Local Government, and Minister for Heritage in living memory. The bill is the personal project of Peter Cochran, a former member for Monaro and a business owner who has monetised horse treks through the national park. That is what this is actually about. It is about the personal profits and self-interest of a former member of Parliament and Nationals identity from the area represented by the Deputy Premier. It is not about heritage, the environment or even about animal welfare, as some proponents of the bill have attempted to make it.

In fact—and I say this as a person who grew up in the bush and worked on farming properties—it is bewildering to me that the very people who ought to understand the importance of controlling pest species are the ones lining up to support the bill.

Opposition members will not be swayed by the misty-eyed carry-on of The Nationals members who wish to twist this debate and argue the merits or not of managing pest species in our national parks and on our farming lands. Labor is the only party in this place that can be trusted with our national parks.

Labor's legacy of creating, expanding and protecting crucial areas of pristine wilderness is unmatched by any other political party. I note the work of Bob Debus and Bob Carr during the 1990s and 2000s, who signed into existence vast areas of national park across New South Wales, and reiterate that Labor will do everything in its power to protect that legacy from the wreckers and environmental vandals in The Nationals. To that end, Labor has a six-point plan to protect the Kosciuszko National Park.

We first promise to ensure that the Kosciuszko National Park Plan of Management is the primary management document guiding the operation of the park. We will do this because we understand that the best people to make decisions about the health and future of a national park are the experts within the National Parks and Wildlife Service itself. They should not be undermined or tripped up by ad hoc legislation that diminishes their capacity to do their jobs in line with their professional experience and expertise. Secondly, we will restore the resources to the National Parks and Wildlife Service that the Liberal-Nationals Government cut and restore the capacity to protect the pristine environment and threatened species of the Kosciuszko National Park. We commit to this because we have seen the impacts of the relentless cutbacks this Government has made. Unlike the incompetent and derelict Minister for the Environment, Labor shadow Minister Penny Sharpe will stand up in the Cabinet room for our national parks and will not take a back seat to a member who runs garbage legislation through Parliament on behalf of his or her preselectors and donors.

Thirdly, Labor will minimise the impacts of pest species, both plant and animal, through adequately funded and effective control programs. That includes wild pigs, dogs, deer and horses. The fourth point of our plan is that we will conduct a scientific assessment and count of the horse population in consultation with key stakeholders. The fifth point is we will ensure that the cultural value of wild

horses is acknowledged and we will manage the wild horse population in a manner guided by the 2016 Draft Wild Horse Management Plan. We will maintain the ban on aerial culling and pursue humane and ethical population management practices such as fertility control and a rehoming program. The last point in the plan is that Labor will repair the mountain catchments by establishing a highly trained Kosciuszko works crew dedicated to halting erosion and restoring and repairing the slopes, wetlands and mountain streams that are currently under threat as a consequence of the wild horse population in the park.

I note for the Government's benefit—though I expect it does not care—that the proposed legislation has faced universal condemnation by environment groups, the scientific community, academic experts and national parks service staff. Stakeholders from the tourism industry, recreational fishers, land rehabilitation groups and wild horse rehoming organisations have also opposed the plan. On the other side of the debate we have The Nationals and former member for Monaro Peter Cochran boasting on social media about the bill and the benefits they expect to reap from it. I oppose the bill in its entirety.

The Blue Mountains community—located as it is wholly within a national park—understands the importance of allowing national park staff, conservationists and environment experts within the scientific community to guide the management planning of our national parks. National parks are enjoyed by tourists and visitors, but that is not strictly speaking their reason for being. Our national park estate exists as an exercise in conservation, environmental management and protection. National parks do not exist only to provide a playground for tourists—especially where the use of the park by tourists causes damage to endangered ecological communities or puts at risk the biodiversity and physical condition of unique landforms and river systems.

If tourism can co-exist alongside conservation values and the pristine environment in our national parks then we are all the more fortunate. But we cannot prioritise one use, one activity or one small business venture over the overwhelming evidence, which tells us that these landscapes must be protected and preserved. I hold very grave concerns about the creeping commercialisation of our national parks more broadly.

Under this Government every opportunity to monetise and commercialise our national park estate is pursued. Likewise, the ever more frequent commercial letting of our botanic gardens and public spaces such as The Domain and Hyde Park continues apace.

This Liberal-Nationals Government is an untrustworthy, reckless and—very possibly—corrupt outfit, so I oppose the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Bill.

I oppose the bill and commend Labor shadow Minister for the Environment Penny Sharpe for crafting the principled, thoughtful and sensible position the Opposition has brought to this debate.