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Collector: Web Link 1 (Web Link)
Started: Wednesday, October 18, 2023 8:53:07 AM
Last Modified: Wednesday, October 18, 2023 8:59:47 AM
Time Spent: 00:06:40
IP Address: [REDACTED]

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Q1

First name

[REDACTED]

Q2

Last name

[REDACTED]

Q3

Organisation name (if relevant)

Gloucester Environment Group

Q4

Email address

[REDACTED]

Q5

Phone number

[REDACTED]

Q6

Yes

Can we contact you about your submission (if required)?

Q7

I am representing an environmental group

What best describes you?

Q8

North Coast

Which of the following regions best describes your location/area of interest?

Q9

I agree to have my submission published with my name or company/organisation

The Commission publishes submissions on its website for transparency. If you do not want your personal details or responses published, please tell us below.

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Q10

To what extent are the NSW environment, industries and communities currently impacted by invasive species?

Heavily

Q11

To what extent do you think existing programs in NSW are effectively managing invasive species?

Poorly

Q12

What, if any, are the key barriers to effective management of invasive species?

Lack of will and lack of resources

Q13

How has invasive species management changed since the introduction of the NSW Biosecurity Act 2015 legislation and associated programs and plans?

Cannot really answer that

Q14

What are the future risks posed by invasive species to the NSW environment, industries and communities?

Loss of biodiversity in an environment where there has already been a huge loss.

There is an acute problem in the region of the Barrington Tops with the spread of Scotch Broom and brumbies. Far to little is being done to eradicate them.

Q15

What opportunities do you see to improve the outcomes of invasive species management in the future?

Providing adequate resources to tackle the problem and strong laws that ensure that private land-owners also deal with invasive weeds and animals on their land.

Q16

Respondent skipped this question

Any other comments?

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 18 October 2023 9:07 AM
To: NRC
Subject: Invasive Species Management Review
Attachments: THE CURSE OF SCOTCH BROOM.docx

[REDACTED]

I have sent an online submission to this Review on behalf of the Gloucester Environment Group but there was no provision to attach any documents. I wrote an article for the Manning Community News about the issues of Scotch Broom and Brumbies in the Barrington Tops National Park. I attach the article.

Please treat this as being part of the Environment Group submission.

Regards

MBRUMBIES AND BROOM.

INVADERS OF THE BARRINGTON TOPS

Gloucester is marketed as a gateway to the World Heritage Barrington tops.

The National Parks & Wildlife Service (NP&WS) website has this to say about the Barrington Tops:

Most of Barrington Tops National Park is declared wilderness; large, natural areas of land that, together with their native plants and animal communities, remain essentially unchanged by modern human activity. Wilderness areas in NSW represent the largest, most pristine natural areas within NSW - the last of Australia's wild and untamed places. The edges of the wilderness area of Barrington Tops are easily accessible; some of the most spectacular views in the park are from Careys Peak and Devils Hole and Thunderbolts lookouts. You'll notice the varied textures of the forest below you, with the ranges of the Barrington Wilderness running east and south from the plateau like the fingers of an outstretched hand.

For the past couple of years access from Gloucester to the Barrington Tops National Park via the Scone Road has not been possible because of a major landslip. However, many of us in Gloucester were delighted when it was recently reopened, and once again we could plan a bushwalk to the area, which we did in January.

One of the most popular spots for those visiting the National Park is an area called Polblue where there is a camping ground and easy access to a walk around Polblue swamp, about which the NP&WS website has this to say:

The Polblue Swamp track will take you on a short journey through the wetlands and high-altitude forests of the Barrington Tops Plateau. You'll see the smooth dark trunks of black sally, snow gums with scribbles on their bark and be dwarfed by the towering mountain gums.

From the forest edge, watch as grasses give way to a dense growth of sedges crowding the moss of the swamp. If you're walking in spring or summer, you may see rare ground orchids along the track and it's a good walk for spotting wombats and kangaroos.

On the day of our walk, we stopped for a bite to eat near the camping ground and then did the trek around the Polblue swamp. From the start it became clear that the area did not quite match its description. There were two things that we noticed.

The first thing was brumby damage. On the way to the Tops we had seen quite a few wild brumbies on the side of the road and in many places the Polblue swamp walking track showed quite a bit of evidence of horse hoof damage and horse manure. I knew of the feral horse problems in Kosciuszko National Park but was unaware that they were also an issue in the Barrington Tops.

However, what was also concerning as we walked the track was the huge amount of Scotch Broom infestation which in some places had completely overrun any native vegetation.

Scotch Broom¹, like many other plant and animal pests, was brought to Australia by the early European settlers. Apparently, it was imported here in the early 1800's by Governor King as a

¹ The botanical name for Scotch Broom is *Cytisus scoparius*

substitute for hops, and unfortunately it was well suited to some Australian conditions and quickly spread. It seems to particularly enjoy parts of the Barrington Tops. The 2014 Broom Management Manual² (the manual) tells us that it has infested about 10,000 HA of the Tops and each plant can live up to 30 years.

The manual also tells us that a mature Scotch Broom plant can produce over 15,000 seeds and can generate soil seed banks of up to 50,000 seeds per square metre. It can be spread by water, by humans and by animals and seed germination can be stimulated by fire, cultivation, weed control works and by the digging of animals.

The manual explains that Scotch Broom can adversely affect native plant habitats and can impact native animals by excluding native plants relied on for food, by modifying their habitat and by harbouring feral animals.

I knew that Scotch Broom infestation in the Barrington Tops had been a problem for many years. I seemed to recall that the late Kerry Packer donated funds to help deal with the issue. However, it seemed clear from our bushwalk that it was still a serious problem, so I contacted the Gloucester office of the NP&WS for comment about what is being done to deal with the Broom and brumby infestations. Ranger Peter Beard was happy to chat with me and answer a few questions such as:

- How long had Scotch Broom been a problem in the Barrington Tops NP?
- What area of the NP is presently infested with Scotch Broom? The 2014 manual says about 10,000 ha.
- For the last 5 years what are the various methods that have been used to try and deal with the Broom infestation?
- What are the impediments to effective control?
- Is the infestation getting better or worse?
- Could more be done?
- As you know when I visited Polblue in January I saw lots of Broom near the swamp walk. Has that area had any attention since then? Details?
- Is the Broom infestation a threat to the Park's listing as a world heritage site?

Peter informed me that Scotch Broom had been a problem in the area since about 1964 and that unfortunately there has been no real reduction in the area infested in the last 10 years. The problem does not seem to be getting better or worse. The fires of 2019-2020 apparently resulted in a mass germination event.

Peter said that the main control methods for Broom are physical removal, spraying and biological controls, although whether work can be carried out depends on many variables such as weather, access, availability of resources, plant biology and plant location. Volunteers are relied upon for much of the physical work and I was heartened to hear that since my visit to Polblue in January there have been 8 days of volunteer work with up to 20 volunteers each day resulting in the removal of lots of mature Broom plants.

The authorities often boast about the creation of new national parks but do not seem so keen to publicise the problems encountered in properly maintaining and improving the existing parks. I was quite disappointed to observe the state of the Polblue area in January as I am sure would have been many other visitors to the area. I was also surprised that the area of infestation was not being reduced despite the best efforts of the local NP&WS staff, who from my observation work extremely hard and are passionate about preserving and improving the bushland under their control. However,

² Broom Management Manual. NP&WS and Australian Government 2014

it seems fairly obvious that the authorities who control the purse strings do not unfortunately regard this issue as being important enough to devote sufficient funds to allow the NP&WS to properly deal with the Scotch Broom curse. As the manual explains, Scotch Broom can adversely affect native plant habitats and can impact native animals which is quite undesirable, particularly when NSW is facing a biodiversity crisis.

So far as feral horses are concerned, we are all aware of the political pressure that was applied to the NP&WS when they wanted to prevent the fragile ecosystem of the Kosciusko Nation Park being destroyed by huge numbers of wild brumbies. The brumbies issue is still clearly one of some sensitivity because when I raised it with Peter Beard, he referred me to the media section of head office. I asked them what was being done about the brumbies issue and was told that their numbers were being monitored and that a Feral Horse Management Plan was being prepared. That caused me to ask:

- When was work on the Plan of Management commenced?
- In the last 5 years has there been any brumby culling in the Park?
- Is there any reason why all brumbies in the Park cannot be culled immediately?
- Has there been any political pressure on the NP&WS not to cull brumbies?

A less than illuminating response came from NP&WS Senior Media Manager, and was as follows:

- The overarching plan of management for Barrington Tops National Park was adopted in 2010. This guides all aspects of the Park's management including the monitoring of horse numbers.
- Wild horses have not been culled on Barrington Tops National Park.
- As with all park management activities, managing wild horses on national park (sic) requires a well-considered plan that reflects contemporary events and circumstances prior to commencing operations.

I will have to leave it to the reader to draw their own conclusions from that response about what is being done or going to be done about the wild horses in the Barrington Tops. Not much so it seems.

There is nothing pristine about bushland that has been invaded by brumbies and Broom and in my view both problems need much more attention. Let's hope that our newly elected state government will find the much needed resources to effectively deal with these issues so that the true state of the Park matches the marketing.

