

Historic trainers to pay \$341.25 per horse for beach access



A stunning aerial shot of Rutledge's Cutting looking back to Levy's Beach by Justin Williams iXplainIT Technology Training.

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

While the battle over large-scale racehorse training at Levy's Beach rages on, details are emerging on how historic training will be managed at Killarney and the super-sensitive Rutledge's Cutting.

One of those details is that Parks Victoria will charge a licence fee of \$341.25 per racehorse, per year.

In the past, the only fee that applied was the Moyne Shire Council annual permit fee of \$100 per trainer, regardless of how many horses were trained.

This helped open the floodgates for dozens of racehorses to be piled onto the beach, including those trained by some of the wealthiest in the business.

Unlike Levy's Beach, Killarney and Rutledge's Cutting will not be made available for racehorse training all year round, but limited to 1 Feb to 15 December at Killarney and from 1 April to 31 July at Rutledge's.

Permit applications for "historic" trainers to access Killarney and Rutledge's Cutting closed on February 4 and are now being processed by Parks Victoria and while it won't reveal how many applications were received, they are understood to be a relatively small number.

The reasons for this, no doubt, are the now strict conditions around getting a historic licence and the limitations of that licence, both of which reflect the environmental sensitivity of the area.



Killarney Beach was at the centre of protests like this one in 2016 to stop large-scale racehorse training after big trainers moved in and dominated the beach. Image: Belfast Coastal Reserve Action Group.

Rutledge's Cutting, in particular, is a habitat for the critically endangered Orange-bellied parrot and a significant breeding site of the Hooded Plover, plus it attracts large flocks of migratory shorebirds.

Here are some other key points of the new licence arrangement:

trainers must live in either Moyne Shire or the City of Warrnambool;

they must prove they have continuously used the Belfast Coastal Reserve for training since 2008;

they must have a stable of no more than 10 racehorses;

if a trainer doesn't apply for a licence now, they cannot apply in the future;

the licence must be renewed every two years;

the licence is not transferrable;

only trainers who do not wish to use Levy's Beach/Hoon Hill can apply;

Killarney: a maximum of six horses on the beach and four in the water at any one time;

Rutledge's Cutting: a maximum of 15 horses per day, with up to four on the beach at any one time.

This list sits in sharp contrast to Levy's Beach which, as it stands, is set to become the sacrificial lamb within the

coastal reserve with plans for up to 800 racehorses a week, including 200 a week on the long “Hoon Hill” dune.

The licence fee for Levy’s Beach has not yet been revealed, but it is expected to be around \$400 per horse, per year.

In the past, racehorse trainers used the beach illegally, and for free, with authorities turning a blind eye until – like Helen Reddy’s classic “I am Woman” lyric – the numbers became too big to ignore.

By contrast, Rundell’s Riding School has accessed the beach for more than 20 years by paying an annual permit with conditions, and recreational riders were allowed as part of low-impact use.



Questions are now being asked by some city councillors as to whether Lady Bay is enough to meet the demands of racehorse trainers. Image: Enjoy Racing website.

Racehorse training is also set to resume at Warrnambool’s Lady

Bay on March 31, after the summer break, with up to 96 horses on the sand each day. This number may drop to 50 per day if Levy's goes ahead and the Warrnambool Racing Club pays \$400,000 toward a new horse wash-down/bespoke carpark at Lady Bay.

Trainers pay the council an annual flat fee of \$225 to access Lady Bay, regardless of the size of their stable. There is also a daily beach access fee per horse of \$6 and \$2.50 for swimming.

All eyes are now on whether, following the removal of former big-gun trainer Darren Weir, the Warrnambool City Council will decide that Lady Bay is enough to accommodate the demands of trainers, without the need for Levy's.

Cr Michael Neoh certainly opened this door as a possibility at the last council meeting, when he asked for the numbers to be crunched.

We shall wait and see.

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