



James Purcell's potential conflict of interest

Description



James Purcell MLC with Haylaman, one of the many racehorses he owns or co-owns with his family and trained by his son, Aaron Purcell, through the Purcell business, Enjoy Racing. This image is taken from the [Enjoy Racing website](#).

OPINION – Carol Altmann

Port Fairy MLC **James Purcell** has been front and centre of the [push to allow racehorses to continue to access Killarney beach](#) for training – he has spoken about it passionately in State Parliament and launched a petition on the issue – but did you know that he also owns or part owns multiple local racehorses?

I didn't.

Mr Purcell is also director of Enjoy Racing, a syndicate heavily involved in many of the horses trained by his son, **Aaron Purcell**, who operates under the name Enjoy Racing.

I didn't know that either.

What I did know, because Mr Purcell has been very clear on this, is that he has been a long time *supporter* of horse racing and, to quote his own website, “enjoys racing in his spare time”.

But enjoying and supporting horse racing is an entirely different thing to owning racehorses and having a direct financial interest in their success or otherwise.

It's a bit like saying Rupert Murdoch enjoys reading newspapers and supports journalism.

Or, to use another comparison, the bloke putting a bet on down at the local TAB is someone who *enjoys* racing – but, of course, he doesn't own the horses or have intimate ties to the industry.



James Purcell's son and professional horse race trainer, Aaron Purcell. Image: racing.com.au

In politics, as so many politicians have come to learn the hard way, perception is everything, so I am at a loss as to why Mr Purcell has not been completely and utterly transparent in declaring his potential conflict of interest when speaking and campaigning on *anything* to do with horse racing.

What Mr Purcell has declared is this: he is director of a company called Tiger Bronze which owns Enjoy Racing.

If you check the State Parliament Register of Member Interests (as some of us do), you will see Tiger Bronze listed under Mr Purcell's name. But that is it.

There is no explanation of what Tiger Bronze does (it sounded liked a tanning salon or gymnasium to me), and certainly no mention of Enjoy Racing.

When I asked Mr Purcell, through his chief of staff, why he hadn't listed Enjoy Racing or added details of what the Tiger Bronze company involved, the reply was this:

"The requirements are to list the companies and trust, not to list the activities of the companies".

In other words, he has covered the bare minimum for disclosure.



The issue of whether racehorses should be allowed access to Killarney Beach has thrown a spotlight on James Purcell's horse racing interests.

Given the [recent and very damaging furore](#) around former Premier **Denis Naphine** and Wannon MP **Dan Tehan** sharing an interest in a racehorse (Spin the Bottle) with Midfield Group supremo **Colin McKenna**, I would have thought Mr Purcell would be bending over backwards to ensure he listed every single one of his racehorse interests by name.

As it happens, that list would include a horse called St Jean (total prize money so far \$187,524) that has James Purcell and Colin McKenna among its owners.

Other MPs openly list their racing interests by name, and update that list when it changes.

Mr Purcell's response to why he hadn't done the same was this:

"In regards to owning racehorses, James has never shied away from this publicly. The horses are not listed on the register of interests as we are unsure if they need to be, but have put in an enquiry to the Deputy Clerk and have not heard back at this point".

HERBERT, Steven Ralph (Northern Victoria Region)	
Gift exceeding \$500	Add —
	Melbourne Victory home game tickets and includes Chairman's Functions
Other substantial interest	Delete —
	Share in racehorse Senatus
	Add —
	Share in racehorse Sea Devil

Steven Herbert is among the MPs who openly declare their racing interests in the State Parliament Register of Members Interests.

What makes all of this so important, of course, is Mr Purcell's active campaigning on horse racing issues, like that of allowing racehorses to access our local beaches, or building new training facilities at the Warrnambool Racecourse.

In my view it is not enough to say, as his spokeswoman put it, "it is widely known that James owns racehorses and he has never disputed or hidden this fact".

Not hidden, perhaps, but damn hard to find unless you know where to look.

Some of the horses in which Mr Purcell has an interest include: Haylaman (Total prize money to date: \$117, 513), Initiator (\$152,843), King of Dudes (\$339, 280), Siga La Vaca (\$61,920), St Jean (\$187, 524), Kilowatt (\$31, 802), Written Era (\$18,700), The Ten Bob (\$45,820), Swacadelic (\$294,287).

Mr Purcell could easily choose to be so much more transparent.

For example, when Mr Purcell stood up in Parliament on September 15 and urged Racing Minister **Martin Pakula** to "intervene" and "work with the Warrnambool Racing Club to fund the upgrading of a synthetic training track and to provide an uphill gallop at the Warrnambool Racecourse", **he should have made it crystal clear that he owns/part owns racehorses.**

But he didn't.

And when Mr Purcell [launched his online petition](#) to allow racehorses at Killarney virtually all year round, he again should have made it crystal clear that he owns/part owns a lot of racehorses.

But there was not a single word.



Two of Aaron Purcell's horses in training at Warrnambool's Lady Bay.
Image: Enjoy Racing website.

Mr Purcell also recently wrote a Facebook post (Sept 23) saying that his son's horses "have never used Killarney Beach and I doubt they ever will".

What he forgot to add, however, is that his son's training website, Enjoy Racing, proudly says "we have access to some of the best beaches in the country at Warrnambool, Killarney and Port Fairy".

If Mr Purcell took this approach, then people could make up their own minds about his impartiality on horse racing issues – not after the horse has already bolted.

**** This is the last piece I will be writing under the Bluestone Magazine banner. Bluestone Magazine is coming to an end, but the website will remain live until (all being well) a new project is launched in 2017. Keep updated by following Bluestone Magazine on [Facebook here](#). Thankyou to everybody who has believed in independent media enough to support Bluestone Magazine for the past three years – I hope you will continue that support for the next venture.***
Carol Altmann

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