

Does horse racing rule our town?

Proud to sponsor a race on Koroit Cup day



Carol Altmann – The Terrier

One of the many things that struck me while working through the plan to allow commercial racehorse training on our wild beaches is that all three of our local MPs – Dan Tehan, James Purcell and Roma Britnell – have strong ties to horse racing.

Federal MP Dan Tehan, although his office was oddly reluctant to make this clear, shares a very successful racehorse with the CEO of the Warrnambool Racing Club, Nick Rule, among others.

Independent MP James Purcell has an interest in numerous racehorses and his son is a professional trainer.

State Liberal MP Roma Britnell, who as far as I know doesn't

own a racehorse, has a horse race named in her honour and holds a Warrnambool Racing Club membership.

Which of our local MPs, then, will argue that our beaches should not be used for racehorse training on an industrial scale?

Which of them will lobby to instead increase protection of the Belfast Coastal Reserve?

None of them.

Instead, all three of our local MPs have started from the point that we need to reach a “compromise”, a “balance”, a “give-and-take” on having thoroughbred racehorses pounding along sections of beach between Killarney and Warrnambool and up and down the dunes at Levy’s Point.

Not one of them has said that large numbers of racehorses should not be in a coastal reserve in the first place.

At least Roma Britnell, in an email to me via her media advisor Jarrod Woolley, said she had “a number of concerns” about the draft management plan for the reserve.

When I asked what those concerns actually were, however, there was no more information forthcoming.

This is why documents released to the Belfast Coastal Reserve Action Group under Freedom of Information make for such a revealing – and depressing – read.

They spell out that commercial, large-scale racehorse training in the Belfast Coastal Reserve is virtually a fait accompli.

The correspondence between the various bodies involved in the draft plan never questions why racehorse training should be

allowed, but how it will be managed.

At first I felt like giving up and not even bothering to write a submission. What was the point, the cards were already stacked, right?

But then it occurred to me that this is the very reason why other voices need to be heard, or those with the most power, the most access, and the most influence will simply roll right over the top with impunity.

We elect people to represent our views because we don't have the time to wade through reports, but this time, I am sorry to say, those of us who want to see this reserve preserved are on our own.

So please make the effort, either by filling out the online survey or emailing a submission, via this link:
www.engage.vic.gov.au/belfast

10 good reasons why we must say no to horses and dogs



By Carol Altmann

Why horses and dogs don't belong in the conservation and conservation/recreation zones that will stretch from Killarney Beach to Warrnambool:

1. At least 54 species of "conservation significance" live there, including five listed as critically endangered, particularly the Orange Bellied Parrot, 10 listed as endangered, 20 as vulnerable, and 16 listed as threatened. (draft report p86-87)
2. There WILL be a negative impact on these species. Not "perhaps" or "maybe": there WILL be a negative impact that reduces their chances of thriving or even surviving. (p29, p33, p34-35)
3. The traditional owners of this country have made it very clear that they do not support racehorse training in the reserve. (p22, p64)
4. Racehorse training at Levy's Beach WILL cause damage to Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in this area and any artefacts will have to be removed and stored before it begins*. (p64)

5. Horse training WILL cause erosion**. Not perhaps or maybe: it WILL.

6. Every coastal plan for this area in the past 40 years has emphasised the need for MORE protection, not less. This includes the W'Bool City Council's own Warrnambool Coastal Management Plan, signed off just four years ago.

7. It ignores the Land Conservation Council framework set down for this area in 1978, knowing it would come under increased pressures. As a result of the LCC, the majority of public land in the area was officially set aside in 1979 as a conservation reserve. The LCC emphasises low-impact recreation, conservation and protection. (p83)

8. There are no numbers on exactly how many racehorses would use the most sensitive areas of Levy's Point, Golfies and Rutledge's Cutting. (p63-64)

9. Monitoring this area is already difficult because of its isolation.

The area already suffers erosion and damage caused by illegal activities. (p61)

How will the WCC, Vic Police and Parks Vic have the time and resources to monitor it in the future?

10. The bottom line? Commercial racehorse training is not recreation and it is not conservation. This is not anti-horseracing, it is just fact.

Please have your say on the draft management plan for Belfast Coastal Reserve, by March 16, here: www.engage.vic.gov.au/belfast

* The full extent of Indigenous artefacts and cultural sites in this area is not known due to either out-dated or insufficient data. The plan says more studies need to be done.

** There also needs to be more studies into the full impact of

horses on beaches, but two referred to in the draft report (p80-81) confirm that horses cause erosion. Here is part of the summary from a 2001 study of horse riding in D'Entrecasteaux National Park, WA:

"Horse riding altered plant species composition, increased the area of bare ground and decreased height and cover of vegetation. Significant impacts occurred after only low levels of horse use. The findings indicate the need for a database on horse riding impact in Australia so that, where horse riding is allowed, impacts can be properly assessed and effectively managed."

<http://www.publish.csiro.au/pc/PC020256>