

Hi Tony, maaaaaate: the ties between the WCC and racing

The local Liberal Party ructions have exposed – again – the deep ties between the W'bool City Council and racing.

We just signed up to 76,800 horses on our wild beaches



By Carol Altmann

The full power of the horse racing industry in Victoria has been laid bare.

In 118 pages, the [Belfast Coastal Reserve Management Plan](#) released this week ties itself in knots to justify the

unjustifiable: allowing full-scale racehorse training along one of the few, accessible wild beaches in our area.

At no time, unlike with the dirt-bike riders or off-road drivers, did the State Government consider banning racehorse training on the stretch of beach between east Killarney and Levy's Beach, which is home to a breathtaking array of endangered birdlife and indigenous cultural heritage.

No, from day one, it has been a case of the government working out how to accommodate racehorses, as if they have been on our beaches for thousands of years and have wings and feathers, or gills and scales.

Let's do the maths on what is now going to happen:

Up to 40 racehorses a day, five days a week, all year round, will be allowed to train on 'Hoon Hill', a long sand dune area west of Levy's Beach. This equals up to 200 horses a week.

Up to 120 horses a day can train on Levy's Beach foreshore, five days a week, all year round. This equals up to 600 horses a week.

This means up to 800 horses a month will be running up the dunes and 2400 running along the beach.

In one year, this is the equivalent of up to 9600 horses on the dunes and 28,800 on the beach.

In two years time, when the government plans to assess the impact, there will have been – potentially – a combined total of **76,800 horse movements along Levy's Beach and up the dunes at Hoon Hill.**

Up to 76,800 horse movements in just two years of a 15-year plan.

Will it have an impact on the beach? Hmm, let me think about that for one nano second.

This entire “problem” of what to do about professional racehorse trainers has been created by the sheer power of an industry that has huge clout well beyond our little patch in south-west Victoria.

You only have to see the cosying up that goes on between politicians and the Victorian Racing Club.

Free passes. Memberships. Tickets to the Cup. Heck, some of them even own racehorses themselves, like our local MPs **Dan Tehan** and **James Purcell** who, in an Orwellian twist, receives lavish praise for looking after his own interests and that of his son, Aaron, a professional racehorse trainer.

And if anyone dares to mention that racehorses can be trained in purpose-built facilities, that they don't actually need to be trained on our wild beaches, they are whacked with a thinly-veiled form of blackmail: the trainers will go “elsewhere” (although I am not sure where “elsewhere” is), all the jobs will dry up and the local racing industry will collapse.

What a load of bullshite.

The Warrnambool Racing Club [would not be investing millions](#) into the Warrnambool racecourse if its whole survival depended on continued access to a stretch of coastline.

Let's not forget that these professional racehorse trainers just started showing up at Levy's one day, using the beach without permits or permission, and when one of those horses won a Melbourne Cup in 2015, they began to arrive by the truckload.

But instead of telling these trainers to pack up and leave a coastal reserve, it was decided there was no option but to

bend the rules *around* them. Not only that, carparks and tracks will now be added to give them better access!

The motorcross riders and off-road drivers must be feeling hard done by.

They have been tearing around the dunes at Levy's Beach for years and – quite rightly – have been given notice that they will no longer be tolerated.

So as one form of horsepower moves out, another much stronger horsepower is moving in.



The churned up sand at Lady Bay, Warrnambool. left by racehorses in training. Image Bill Yates.

Don't be fooled for one second by the romantic images of horses wading into the surf to soothe their weary muscles, or swimming gently behind a row boat as they swim out their strains. They can do that now at Lady Bay.

This is not horse riding, this is *racehorse training*, on a massive scale.

This is about conditioning, this is about pace and strength: the hard, powerful stuff, up dunes and down dunes and along long stretches of beach, dodging the walkers and birdwatchers and startled birds, and squashing the starfish and worms and bugs and shellfish and little pids and pods that make up the full and brilliant ecosystem of a wild coastline.

It makes me want to weep, this sort of destruction, all for no other reason than convenience, ease and greed.

And nobody else, nobody, but the powerful racing industry would ever get away with it.

If you would like to stories like this, please consider making a small contribution below.

[Donate](#)

All smiles: Dan Tehan's friends in racing

MP Dan Tehan is a big fan of racing, but more than that, he owns shares in a racehorse with WRC chairman Nick Rule.

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

Tehan remains opposed to marriage equality

Wannon MP Dan Tehan remains opposed to marriage equality.