

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.

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James Purcell's potential conflict of interest

Opinion: MLC James Purcell's potential conflict of interest.
(Image: Enjoy Racing)

Five-star pedigree behind pantry door



Alice and Andy Hall, together with their children Daisy and George, have set down their roots in Killarney to run The Pantry Door at Basalt.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] P
[/dropcap]stry chef **Andy Hall** has the sort of five-star resume to be a cliched, arrogant chef that we have come to know via “reality” television, but instead he has gone 360 degrees in the other direction.

Despite having previously working in not one, but two, Michelin-starred restaurants in the UK (The Vineyard at Stockcross and Le Manoir Aux Quat’Saisons) and stints at Vue De Monde, in Melbourne, and the Royal Mail Hotel, in Dunkeld, Andy’s feet are planted firmly on the ground.

For starters, he lives and works at Killarney, between Port Fairy and Warrnambool.

For seconds, he now runs a small, country style cafe/restaurant – **The Pantry Door at Basalt** – with his wife,

Alice.

And for main, he has two small children, **Daisy** and **George**, that dictate his priorities and give him every reason not to return to the “madness” of five-star hospitality.

“I no longer wanted to be doing the 17-hour days that you have to do when working at that high level,” Andy says.

“I was happy to do those hard yards before I was settled, but things are very different now.”



The Pantry Door lives up to its name by offering a range of gourmet, home-made products to take home.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] L
[/dropcap]ife began to change for Andy, who is originally from the UK, when he was invited by his friend, chef **Cameron Goad** (who was in charge before **Dan Hunter**) to join him at the Royal Mail Hotel which, at that time, still had the feel of an upmarket country pub.

Prior to taking up the Royal Mail position in 2006, Andy had already begun to back away from the intensity of the restaurant life by working in Port Douglas as a snorkelling instructor. He decided, however, to take up the offer from his friend.

Alice, from Hamilton, was working in the office.

“I was actually a nurse, but taking some time out and working at the Royal Mail – and that’s how I met Andy,” Alice explains, before having to duck out to meet the gardener who has turned up to discuss their vege patch.



The restaurant has a touch of class while still making people feel at home in the beautiful weatherboard building.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] T
[/dropcap]he pair married in 2009 and explored different adventures, including 12 months overseas, before Alice’s connections to south-west Victoria (which include her family’s

old beach shack at Port Fairy, where she spent many summers) eventually saw them invited to take over the restaurant at the Basalt winery.

“(Chef) **Chris Grace** had set up the original restaurant at Basalt and he was ready to move on, so (owner) **Shane Clancey**, asked us if we would like to take over the lease and do our own thing with it,” Andy explains.

The opportunity was too good to refuse and the pair opened their business in December 2012, the same week their first child, Daisy, was born.

Almost 18 months on, the **Pantry Door at Basalt** has established itself as a popular place for breakfast and lunch, but also, as its name suggests, a pantry that sells Andy’s home-made preserves, sauces, dressings and a range of other delicacies.

The couple has also recently introduced cooking classes, including those specifically for men, and is building its reputation as a gallery space for local artists.

“It was madness at times – when we were starting out – but we didn’t want to get to 80 and wish that we had taken the chance to run our own place,” Alice says.



Fresh apple tarts made from home-grown apples. Andy's background is as a speciality pastry chef. Yum.

[box type="bio"] **The Pantry Door at Basalt, 1131 Princes Highway, Killarney, is open for breakfast and lunch Wed-Sun. P: (03) 5568 7442. You can also find them on Facebook.** [/box]



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Conservation and creativity in the same basket



Cherree Densley in her Killarney studio – a re-commandeered bedroom – where she creates baskets using the timeless techniques of many cultures.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] B
[/dropcap]ushwalking with **Cherree Densley** would be an eye-opening experience, as not only does she know the names of hundreds of native plants, she can also see the potential for

each to be the inspiration for a stunning work of art.

Since retiring from her 30-year career as a secondary school teacher about 10 years ago, Cherree has devoted a large portion of her life to plants and, through them, tapped into her twin loves of conservation and creativity.

On the outside, the garden of her **Killarney** home is a two-acre sanctuary of low-water succulents, bulbs, native plants and perennials while inside, the remnants and off-cuts of native plants and grasses are transformed into beautiful baskets and fibre sculptures.

Cherree recently reclaimed her son's old bedroom to create a simple, sun-filled studio in which she spreads out the seed pods, grasses, leaves, prunings and various fibres that she has collected in her travels, or from her own land, and that would normally be composted or left to rot on the ground.

From this raw harvest, she creates the designs that she has sketched in her journals as part of daily ritual that keeps her disciplined and captures inspirational ideas before they float away.

[quote]

I find it is a lovely thing to be able to make something useful or beautiful from things that might normally be thrown away," Cherree explains. [/quote]

"You can take this discarded material and turn it into something entirely new: you can make an object that is not just creative, but which also has a purpose."



The exquisite range of baskets reflect the raw materials from which they are made.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] C herree's range of baskets and fibre sculptures is astonishing and shows influences from her fascination with how baskets have been used in various cultures for thousands of years.

Some of her work reflects the baskets and eel traps made by Indigenous Australians, others have a distinct African style, while others are uniquely her own.

"I collect books on basket-making and was reading just the other day how an African community used tightly woven baskets to store their beer," she says.

"With almost any culture, you only have to scratch the surface

and there is a history of basket-making there.”



“I find it is a lovely thing to be able to make something useful or beautiful from things that might normally be thrown away.”

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] C
[/dropcap]herree also makes much larger sculptural works using fibres and found objects and is currently preparing for a second exhibition with her sister, painter **Di Holland**, who lives near Edenhope. The pair held their first SisterShow in 2012 at the Warrnambool Art Gallery.

The **SisterShow2** exhibition will be held at **CEMA, Portland**, from March 24-April 29 and will again see Di's meticulous wildlife paintings paired with Cherree's sculptural works. The 2012 show included, for example, a large painting of a platypus by Di that was exhibited alongside a metre-long platypus nesting burrow woven by Cherree.

This time, the challenge includes enhancing Di's painting of a

Southern Right whale, but Cherree is already well underway with a piece that reflects the whale's 'song lines'. The sisters plan to exhibit 25 large paintings and 30 sculptural works in total.



This delicate basket made of New Zealand flax was part of an exhibition held at Whalebone Gallery, Port Fairy.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] P
[dropcap]erhaps not surprisingly, the sisters come from a line of grandparents and great grandparents who loved gardens and crafts – textiles, leatherwork, basketry, mosaics, floristry, spinning and dyeing wool – and both grew up in bushland near Heywood.

Cherree used her superannuation to return to those roots by buying a rare slice of 200 acres of native bushland near Portland that is protected with a covenant to ensure its preservation into the future. Since buying the property, Cherree has recorded 299 individual plant species growing on the property.

“I am really struggling to reach the 300, but I think I may

have found a native mint that will take me over the line,” she says, laughing.



To market, to market: some of Cherree's work at the recent Port Fairy farmers markets.

[box] Cherree Densley's work is often for sale through the Port Fairy markets and F Project pop-up markets at The Artery, 224 Timor St, Warrnambool. Cherree also offers basket making classes at her home for individuals or up to groups of eight. You can contact her on 55 68 7226 or via cherree@hotmail.net.au for more details.[/box]



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