WCC poised to close door on racehorse training in wild coast

Description

The Belfast Coastal Reserve area covering Levy's Beach and Spooky's is finally gaining the attention it deserves as a place of wild beauty and indigenous significance. Image: Supplied.

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

UPDATED: All seven of the new Warrnambool City councillors are poised to step up and ban racehorse training on beaches west of Thunder Point.

[I have updated this story to include Cr Max Taylor, who has replied tonight.]

With the recent release of the council's draft Wild Coast Landscape Management plan, they are in the box seat to do it.

And based on answers to questions I sent to all seven councillors last week, they are ready to put this long-running and ugly fight to an end.

If they don't, the WCC might as well set up a vegetarian burger bar outside 25 Liebig St and sell steak sandwiches, such would be the hypocrisy in a management plan that is packed – *at long last* – with ways to protect the wild coast from Levy's Beach to Spooky's Beach from further harm.

For some reason the Warrnambool Racing Club – apparently in defiance of the changed mood of many local trainers – can't seem to let Levy's and Spooky's go.

This is despite the demise of king-pin trainer Darren Weir, sustained community anger, no racehorse

training on the beach for more than four years, a loss of social licence, and the absolute privilege of training at Lady Bay.

Despite all of this, the WRC, according to a recent media report, just keeps picking the scab.

The WRC keeps waving a red rag….it might still come back in and use Spooky's beach….maybe it will, maybe it won't.

For this, we can thank the majority of former councillors who ignored the wishes of the wider community, agreed to the law change, split the place open, and left behind another shit show for the new council to clean up.

Given we now have fresh eyes on this old headache, last week I asked our new councillors two simple questions: the first was whether they supported commercial racehorse training in the wild coast area.

Six of those who responded said no, they did not, or as Mayor Vicki Jellie put it, "absolutely not".

(Cr Taylor responded after the deadline but tonight said he was opposed).

Cr Angie Paspaliaris said she was a WRC member, sponsor, and a race goer, but she, too, was "hesitant" to support racehorse training in the area, given the strong community opposition.

Seven out of seven, even including a "hesitant", is a whopping turnaround.

I also asked the councillors a second question, which was whether they would support an amendment to change the planning rules to once again ban racehorse training in this area.

Four of the six who responded said a firm yes, they would.

Mayor Jellie went further, saying not only did she support changing the planning rules, she was asking WCC staff how it could be done.

Cr Paspaliaris said she would consider it, and Cr Blain said he thought the council saying no to racehorse training would be enough.

[You can read the councillors' answers in full here.]

All of this is a big vote of support not only for the community's wishes, but for the draft management plan.

This draft plan really gets it.

It sets out plans for CCTV cameras to catch hoons, for unofficial tracks to be closed off, for ravaged areas to be revegetated, for the indigenous community to be intimately involved in future decision making and management, for better dog walking controls, and for the wildness of this area to be preserved for future generations who, like us, will wonder how motorbike rallies were ever allowed at Tower Hill.

Yet tucked in the middle of this plan is the steak sandwich – the racehorse training that would allow up to 100 racehorses a day.

The experts who put this management plan together are powerless to change the law, but our new councillors can.

That time is now.

[You can read more about the wild coast plan and have a say until 30 March here.]

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