

Weir scandal offers WCC a chance to ditch Levy's plan



Melbourne Cup winner and racing king pin Darren Weir is facing multiple charges which should prove a game changer for the racehorse training at Levy's plan. Image: Fox News

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

The Weir-McLean scandal gives the Warrnambool City Council the perfect "out" from the disastrous plan to allow 160 racehorses a day at Levy's Beach.

As it happens, the council will meet tomorrow night (4/2) to give its consent to another part in the approval process.

This time it must give assurances to the Environment Minister, via a letter to the Warrnambool Racing Club, that the horse training is "consistent" with all coastal and marine management plans and policies for the Levy's area.

This could be awkward, because as far as I know, nobody has

yet produced any evidence to say that it is “consistent”. In fact it appears to be the complete opposite.

This fact is just one more inconvenient truth in a whole string of inconvenient truths which the council has had to overlook and tie itself in knots about.

The entire mess has all come about because of political pressure from the Victoria Racing Club, the Warrnambool Racing Club and Racing Minister Martin Pakula to primarily accommodate the once-powerful Mr Weir, but – like Mr Weir’s career – it could end tomorrow.

The council can stop the charades, dust itself off and start healing an increasingly diverse community that was co-existing quite nicely until it was torn apart by totally unnecessary greed.

Here are 10 more reasons why it should do so:

1. Darren Weir has been winning despite not having access to Levy’s beach since late 2016. (He won more than \$31m in 2017-18 alone).
2. Jarrod McLean has been winning despite not having access to Levy’s beach since 2016. (He won the \$2 m Mackinnon Stakes last November.)
3. Their claims that access to Levy’s and the dunes gave them an “edge” look doubtful in light of the allegations they are now facing, including the use of electric shocks as part of training.
4. Weir had 77 horses training in W’bool in 2016. He now has more than 100, despite not having had access to Levy’s beach since 2016.

5. All trainers can still apply for access to run and swim their horses at Lady Bay beach from March right through to December. Swimming is all year round.

6. Former MP and racing supporter James Purcell, whose son is a trainer, said in 2017 that **no beach dunes** should be used for training, anywhere in the reserve.

7. There is no environmental impact study and no “baseline” study of what it looks like now.

8. There is no economic impact statement, showing how the move will increase jobs or the local economy above what racing already provides.

9. Local indigenous people are devastated by the move and senior elders – including 2018 Victorian Senior of the Year Rob Lowe – are fighting to save the reserve.

10. Millions have been spent building a sand track and other facilities at the Warrnambool racecourse.

So much has been written about this ill-advised plan. So many arguments have been raised. And now the racing industry itself is dealing with a scandal of unprecedented proportions.

Surely, surely, tomorrow night offers a chance for this plan to ride off into the sunset and we can then direct our energies into building a sustainable environment *and* a sustainable, ethical, local racing industry – based on truths and substance.

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