



THE A.C.T. EQUESTRIAN ASSOCIATION

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Chairman
Select Committee on Estimates 2009-2010
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This ACT Equestrian Association would like to take this opportunity to bring the Select Committee on Estimates' attention to an area of sport and recreation that have received little attention in recent years.

Canberra has a very high number of horses per head of population, especially for a major city. Equestrian activities are a major life style and sporting choice for Canberra citizens. The ACT Equestrian Association represents 16 different sporting bodies covering 16 affiliated groups such as pony clubs, showjumping, trail riding, dressage, horse trials, eventing, endurance riding, polocrosse and vaulting.

It has been estimated that total expenditure on equestrian related activity in the ACT (i.e. equestrian contribution to ACT Gross State Product) is around \$13.85 million pa. Equestrians support saddleries, veterinarians, equine dentists and other equine health practitioners, feed merchants, and riding instructors.

Equestrian sports are particularly popular amongst women, including older women, a fact that should be of interest to those concerned to encourage more women into healthy activity.

All the equestrian clubs in the ACT are non-profit sporting clubs, supported entirely by the work of volunteers.

In general, a great improvement could be achieved in equestrian amenity in Canberra without a great deal of expenditure. Perhaps because this does not attract the publicity of "big ticket" items equestrian sport stays under the radar of both the government and the opposition parties.

Equestrian Sports and Women's Health

The 2006 Australian Government Senate Report *About Time! Women in sport and recreation in Australia* concluded that:

- Women's participation in sport and recreation is according to most studies less than men

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- Women's participation in organised sport in particular is lower than men's, and there are more organised sporting opportunities for men than women
- The involvement of girls in physical activity drops off sharply in the early teenage years, this trend is the biggest divergence between male and female participation and is a serious concern
- While there is a need for greater levels of physical activity amongst all parts of the population, this need appears greater amongst girls and women

The Senate Report also noted that women's focus is more often on social participation and enjoyment rather than competition when involved in sport and physical activity.

Since the lack of fitness in girls has been linked to the state of health in older women, the cost to the community and to women's wellbeing and lifestyle is enormous. It is therefore important that we encourage girls to take up sport at an early age and to stay active as long as possible. Equestrian sports are among the few where men and women compete on an equal footing, even at the Olympics. There are also no age barriers in equestrian sports. There are women riding and competing well into their 70s in Canberra. Investing in equestrian sports is an investment in the future health of women in the ACT.

Equestrian Infrastructure

Most non-competition horse riding in Canberra is done in the city's public open space and reserves. Parks Conservation and Lands needs sufficient funding to maintain existing equestrian infrastructure on multi-use trails in open space in older suburban areas and provide new infrastructure in new suburban developments. Specific examples are the need for a new horse cavaletti crossing in the Dunlop area to lead on to Ginninderra Drive at Kerrigan Street and an improved entry to Isaacs Ridge. Signage needs to be improved in some open space areas and in some cases equestrians want signage to improve safety on roads e.g. there is no warning sign to motorists on Parkwood Rd that there is a horse crossing from the Belconnen Pony Club to the trail leading off from the Transgrid Canberra Substation opposite.

Equestrian are happy to share public open space with other users wherever they can but in many cases underpasses and road crossings are specifically designed to make it dangerous for horse riders. With a little planning this need not be the case.

ACTEA requests that some of the money the government has allocated to upgrading Canberra's public open space be used to improve equestrian infrastructure in that open space.

Government Horse Paddocks

Parks Conservation and Lands has recently completed an audit of government horse paddocks in Canberra and identified the need for some major infrastructure repair and improvement. The maintenance of infrastructure is imperative to the well being of animals in this instance as well as the ability of horse owners to care properly for their animals.

PLC has also identified the Government Horse holding paddocks in categories of short/medium/long term duration as horse holding paddocks with no indication that replacement land will be allocated for paddocks lost in the short and medium term. Most recently Hume has lost

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65ha to the Hume West Industrial development and Parkwood has lost 30ha (30%) to the West Macgregor housing development. Many owners have had their horses displaced, and the land available is now being put under stress as no replacement paddocks have been allocated.

Families are being forced to either part with a long-term family pet or travel extra distances. This lack of affordable agistment is also forcing families away from our suburban pony clubs and equestrian clubs; making the sustainability of these clubs a burden on volunteers.

Since 2006, when government horse paddocks consisted of 973ha, approximately 10% of this area has been lost to urban and industrial development.

Government horse paddocks add value to the open space and amenity of Canberra suburban areas. Open space is one of the characteristics that attracts people to Canberra, and makes it different from living in Sydney and Melbourne. Riding opportunities and equestrian competitions bring visitors to the ACT.

The Government paddocks have many users, apart from horse owners – walkers, joggers, bike riders and bird watchers. The paddocks and trails provide opportunity for recreational, social and health benefits to the population. Paddock space can be planned, and strategically grazed to aid bushfire prevention.

The paddock and trails infrastructure is in place and is worth retaining and improving.

ACTEA requests that an adequate amount of the \$860,000 listed in Budget Table 5.2.1 for Parks Conservation and Lands be allocated to horse paddocks, feed and saddle yard repairs.

ACTEA requests that the ACT government makes a commitment to retaining government horse paddocks and to replacing horse paddocks that are taken for development

The Bicentennial National Trail

The ACT Equestrian Association is very interested in the maintenance of the Bicentennial National Trail, (BNT) a route for walkers, cyclists and horse riders running through the ACT from its north eastern border with NSW, west of Belconnen and south to Kambah, Tharwa and Namadgi. The ACT Planning and Land Authority has undertaken to ensure that the BNT passes safely through the new Molonglo development and funds should be earmarked for them to meet this commitment. The BNT has designated campsites at Hall, Equestrian Park on the Cotter Rd, and at Cuppacumbalong near Tharwa. This latter campsite is completely lacking in any facilities and equestrian groups have been in conversation with officials in relation to possible improvements.

ACTEA requests that \$65,000 be allocated to improving camping facilities on the Bicentennial National Trail at Tharwa.

Weed Control

Weed control on all public lands is a major concern. Our understanding is that most of the land which once was in the control of ACT Forests as a commercial entity is now under the control of Parks Conservation and Lands. Whereas insurance compensation from the fires of 2003 provided funds for weed control for some years those funds are now depleted. While tighter containment of certain weeds e.g. St John's Wort, Paterson's Curse, some thistles and serrated tussock is now mandated these weeds are often neglected on road verges and in nature reserves and lead to infestations on adjoining horse paddock pasture land.

ACTEA requests that the government allocate funds to weed control near equestrian facilities.

I can be contacted directly on 02 62885799 or at cflawrence@homemail.com.au.

Yours Sincerely

Christine Lawrence
President