

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### Commercial horse training in Belfast Coast Reserve

#### Environment

**Question: Where can commercial horse training now take place?**

Answer: *See fact sheet*

**Q - What will be the total reduction of horses from current levels?**

A - The number of horses permitted to train on beaches within the Belfast Coastal Reserve will be reduced to a maximum of 65 across the reserve.

Before the introduction of the licence, the numbers of horses being trained in the area had increased from about 180 to 250 in two years, with a significant increase in the number of those horses using the beaches.

**Q - How does this proposal support the environmental values of the Belfast Coastal Reserve?**

A - The Belfast Coastal Reserve is approximately 750 hectares in size, of which approximately five hectares will be accessible by commercial horse trainers under the special conditions. In other words, commercial training will be prohibited at 99% of Belfast Coastal Reserve.

In addition, the Coastal Management Plan will provide a longer term management framework that not only considers commercial horse training but all other activities within the reserve to reduce the impact of people, vehicles and dogs as well as horses.

The community will have the opportunity to provide input in to this plan next year before it is finalised in 2018.

**Q - How does this action ensure that the Government is meeting its responsibilities to protect the Hooded Plover under the EPBC Act and FFG Act?**

A - This action helps the Victorian Government to ensure that the local horse training industry's use of the coastal reserve is sustainable and in accordance with relevant legislation.

Until now, horse training on Belfast Coast Reserve beaches has been unregulated. The special conditions that will apply to the horse training licence have been established based on minimising the potential impacts on the Hooded Plover and assisting the industry to comply with the Commonwealth *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and Victorian *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (FFG Act) and *Wildlife Act 1975* (Wildlife Act).

For example, the most important areas for Hooded Plover nesting, which are based on many years of data, will be no-go areas for horse training all year round. This condition is consistent with the responsibility under the EPBC Act, under which it is offence to cause significant impact to the species without approval, and with the Wildlife act, under which it is an offence to molest or disturb protected wildlife, and to damage, disturb or destroy wildlife habitat.

In relation to the FFG Act, the main response to the listing of species as threatened under this Act is the preparation and implementation of an Action Statement. Managing disturbance by horses is consistent with the FFG Action Statement for the Hooded Plover prepared in the 1990s. It addresses one of the key threats and ensures that the most important areas for Hooded Plover breeding are

fully protected. In the longer term, the Management Plan will ensure that use of the reserve balances the conservation of Hooded Plovers and migratory birds with the range of uses, not just commercial horse training.

**Q - The Belfast Coastal Reserve is also internationally recognised as a nesting site for migrating shorebirds of international significance. How does this plan have due regard for the role that the reserve plays in this regard?**

A - Migratory birds that are listed under international agreements are considered matters of national environment significance under the EPBC Act, and it is an offence to cause significant impact to these species without approval.

As is the case with the Hooded Plover, the special conditions that will apply to the commercial horse training licence have been established with reference to the responsibilities under the EPBC Act to protect known sites for migrating shorebirds of international significance. These conditions include excluding access to areas with known sites.

Commercial horse training has until now been unregulated so this licence and the special conditions have greatly strengthened the Government's ability to ensure the industry is complying with responsibilities under the EPBC Act.

It is worth noting that other activities can also disturb these birds. The Coastal Management Plan will provide an opportunity to canvass options to reduce the impact of people, vehicles and dogs as well as horses.

**Q - When will this licence system officially come into effect?**

A - Following the required legislative processes, a licence is expected to be issued to the Warrnambool Racing Club in December, valid for a period of two years and including a review after 12 months.

**Q - How are the new licence conditions going to be policed?**

A - The relevant land manager will be responsible for monitoring the compliance of horse trainers with the licence conditions. Parks Victoria has already increased its monitoring of the land they manage within the Belfast Coastal Reserves.

The Warrnambool Racing Club will also be responsible for ensuring horse trainers comply with the conditions of the licence.

**Q - What consultation has been involved in reaching this decision?**

A - The announcement follows extensive consultation between Victorian Government agencies and the Shire of Moyne, City of Warrnambool, traditional owners, Warrnambool Racing Club, South West Owners Trainers and Riders Association as well as community and environmental groups such as Belfast Coastal Reserve Action Group.

The Government has aimed to reach a fair outcome that reflects the feedback from this consultation with key stakeholders.

**Q - What will the Coastal Management Plan achieve over and above the new licence arrangement?**

A - The development of the coastal management plan will include a comprehensive program of community consultation throughout next year, and is expected to be finalised by mid-2018.

While the licensing regime will address the pressing short-term issues, the aim of the coastal management plan is to establish a sustainable, long-term framework for managing the area.

**Q - How will hooded plover sites be protected?**

A - Some beaches that have existing Hooded Plover sites will not be available for horse training. For those beaches that will be available for horse training and do have Hooded Plovers, the nesting sites are roped off, signs have been erected and there is increased compliance activity being provided by Parks Victoria. Under the conditions of the licence, horses are to avoid all marked Hooded Plover nesting sites and to reduce speed to a walk within 50 metres of nest sites and walk only by the water's edge when passing nest sites.

In addition, beach user groups have been briefed about the requirements to protect Hooded Plovers.

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**Q - How will cultural heritage be protected?**

A - The Warrnambool Race Club is developing a Cultural Heritage Management Plan for Levy's Beach. Other beaches with sites of significance will be precluded from horse training.

## **Horse Training**

**Q – *What does thoroughbred racing and training contribute to the Western District and Wimmera communities?***

**A –** Country racing is part of the social fabric of regional Victorian communities. Thoroughbred racing in the Western District and Wimmera communities delivers an annual economic benefit of over \$97 million and generates more than 950 full-time equivalent jobs and over 4,500 part-time and volunteer positions.

**Q – *How significant is the thoroughbred racing industry in Warrnambool?***

**A –** Warrnambool is a vital regional centre for racing and horse training in South West Victoria. There are 50 trainers and over 300 horses based at the Warrnambool Racing Club.

The Warrnambool Racing Club conducts 20 meetings per year, including Australia's largest and most successful annual regional racing carnival over three days in May.

**Q – *Why is the Government interested in the issue of horse training on beaches?***

**A –** The Government is committed to a viable country racing industry and to work with our communities when issues of concern arise.

Horse trainers have used the beaches and sand dunes between Warrnambool and Port Fairy (Belfast Coastal Reserve) for many years for resistance training and rehabilitation. However, an escalation of

commercial horse training on these beaches has led to concerns about public safety and impacts on cultural heritage and the environment, particularly hooded plovers.

The Government is aiming to resolve this issue in a way that balances and satisfies the needs of the community, environment and the thoroughbred racing industry.