

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR
EQUESTRIAN SPORT AND RECREATION FACILITIES IN THE
ACT

VOLUME 1

STRATEGIC PLAN

ACT Equestrian Association Inc.
May 2002

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PREFACE

This strategic plan for facilities represents an important milestone in the development of equestrian sport and recreation in the ACT. The planning process was initiated by the ACT Equestrian Association Inc. (ACTEA) at the start of 2001. It was progressed as a result of a grant from the ACT Bureau of Sport Recreation which enabled the engagement of a consultant, Dr David Hogg of David Hogg Pty Ltd, to undertake the tasks of assembling the extensive range of background information and opinions, guiding the ACTEA through the process of determining its priorities for the foreseeable future, and expressing these priorities in the form of the strategic plan.

This planning process has involved extensive consultation with Canberra's equestrians, ACT Government personnel involved in the planning and management of equestrian facilities, and those involved in providing commercial services related to equestrian sport and recreation. The process has been overseen by a Steering Committee consisting of Beth Stone, Kay Dahlberg, Jenny Cundy and myself. On behalf of the Steering Committee and the ACTEA Committee, I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the planning process.

The ACTEA looks forward to the continuing support of clubs and individuals in the successful implementation of the strategy over coming years, and to the future benefits that it will bring for all ACT equestrians.
Lynne McWilliam President, ACT Equestrian Association Inc. May 2002

Any correspondence relating to this strategic plan should be forwarded to the Secretary, ACT Equestrian Association Inc., PO Box 4, Curtin, ACT 2605.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Plan

This strategic plan has been prepared to provide guidance for the ACT Equestrian Association Inc. (ACTEA) and the ACT Government in the development of sport and recreation facilities for equestrians in the ACT over about the next ten years. It presents the collective views of the ACTEA which is an umbrella organisation representing the diverse range of clubs involved with equestrian sport and recreation in the ACT. The purpose of the plan is to establish a broad framework within which the ACTEA and its member clubs can plan the future development of their facilities in a logical manner and seek ACT Government support for such development. It is intended also to assist the ACT Government in appreciating how it can contribute effectively to the development of equestrian sport and recreation facilities, as well as indicating how actions by the Government may impinge adversely or beneficially on such facilities.

1.2 The Planning Process

The strategic plan has been prepared and adopted by the ACTEA with assistance of a grant from the ACT Bureau of Sport and Recreation (BSR). This grant enabled the engagement of a consultant, David Hogg Pty Ltd, to assist in developing the study approach, compiling background information, identifying the key issues and documenting the plan and background discussion papers. The planning process was overseen by a Steering Committee of the ACTEA. The decisions underlying the plan, however, reflect the consensus views of the ACTEA as a whole. The plan was adopted by a meeting of the ACTEA held on 9 May 2002.

The development of the plan was based around three questions:

Where are we now?

Where do we want to be in ten years time?

How are we going to get there?

The planning exercise was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 addressed the first two questions and Phase 2 addressed the third.

Specifically, the purpose of Phase 1 was to collect relevant information on the existing situation with respect to equestrian activities and facilities in the ACT, and to determine the views of the various member clubs as to

what facilities they would like to see in the ACT in the foreseeable future. It also included consultations with ACT Government representatives, commercial operators and others with an interest in equestrian sport and recreation to ascertain viewpoints from outside the ACTEA. The initial consultation process involved approximately 22 meetings and 60 telephone conversations, plus the receipt of many written submissions to the ACTEA or the consultant.

The main output of Phase 1 was a comprehensive discussion paper which presented the information collected and posed a series of key questions which formed the basis for developing the strategy presented in this plan. The discussion paper was made available to all member clubs and to other individual equestrians who requested it. The discussion paper, with some minor revision of factual material and correction of typographical errors, is included as Volume 2 of this report.

The issues raised in the discussion paper were addressed at two meetings convened by the ACTEA to which all local equestrians were invited. The first of these meetings, held on 17 April 2002, addressed future competition and showing facilities. The second, held on 2 May 2002, addressed horse holding facilities and trails. Based on discussion at these meetings, the following strategic plan was prepared and was adopted by the ACTEA at a meeting held on 9 May 2002.

1.3 Scope and Limitations of the Plan

The strategic plan represents the collective views of the ACTEA for those equestrian facilities in which its clubs and their members have an interest. For those facilities in which the ACTEA or its members have some direct control in relation to development (e.g. Equestrian Park), it sets out a strategy for undertaking such development. For other facilities which are developed and managed by the ACT Government, private enterprise or other organisations (e.g. EPIC, horse trail, Government and commercial horse holding paddocks), it sets out a strategy for seeking to influence such development for the benefit of its members. In this case, however, the ultimate development decisions rest with the relevant operator. There are several commercial equestrian facilities in the ACT, some of which are associates of the ACTEA, which at times provide services to clubs or to individual horse owners. Because of the limited influence that the ACTEA has over these facilities, these are generally excluded from the plan in specific terms, although the value of such facilities to equestrian sport and recreation is acknowledged. It is expected that each of these facilities would plan its own development and, in doing so, is encouraged to take account of the strategic plan.

As discussed further in Chapter 2, facilities represent only part of the broad picture of equestrian sport and recreation. There are many other aspects which are also important to equestrian sport development, including teaching and coaching, event organisation, breeding, support services, insurance, promotion, volunteer management and funding. These aspects also need to be addressed at both strategic and operational levels by the ACTEA and its member clubs.

The strategic plan for equestrian facilities is seen ultimately as forming one component of a more comprehensive strategic plan which addresses all of the above aspects of equestrian sport and recreation in the ACT. It should be noted that the plan does not include the professional racing (gallops and harness) or working horse (Police, studs) sectors of the horse industry. It is also limited geographically to the area within the ACT, although in practical terms the ACT border is very much an artificial one, with strong equestrian interaction in many ways between the ACT and the area immediately surrounding it.

1.4 Application of the Plan

It is envisaged that the strategic plan will be used in the following ways:

- To set priorities for development of facilities undertaken by or on behalf of the ACTEA (e.g. in relation to Equestrian Park).
- To assist the ACTEA in ranking submissions from its member clubs for ACT Government funding, particularly through the Bureau of Sport and Recreation.
- To assist the ACT Government in reviewing applications for funding by the ACTEA and its member clubs.
- To establish principles and policies to support ACTEA representatives in their dealings with the ACT Government with respect to trails, horse paddocks and other communal facilities.
- To assist the ACT Government in assessing how planning and management decisions and policies are likely to impact on equestrian sport and recreation, both now and in the future.
- To assist commercial operators in understanding the needs and priorities of the local equestrian community and enable them to plan their own development on this basis.
- To promote consideration of the potential role of commercial facilities among the local equestrian community and the ACT Government.
- To identify the possible need for the ACTEA to address other aspects of development which, while not directly related to

facilities, are important in providing a viable context for the successful development and management of facilities.

2. EQUESTRIAN SPORT AND RECREATION IN THE ACT – AN OVERVIEW

The strategic plan relates primarily to equestrian facilities in the ACT, the term 'facilities' being interpreted broadly to include horse holding facilities, competition and show facilities and trails. It is unrealistic, however, to consider these in isolation from the numerous other factors which form a part of equestrian sport. These factors include participants, organisations, activities, services and funding. The interactions between all of these is indicated in Figure 2.1.

The situation with respect to equestrian sport and recreation in the ACT is discussed in detail in Chapter 2 and Appendices A to E of Volume 2.

Some key points are as follows:

- Equestrian participants in the ACT fall into two broad categories, those who belong to clubs or associations and depend largely on these organisations to pursue their activities, and those who are involved independently, sometimes through the services of commercial organisations such as riding schools.
- Participants vary widely in terms of their experience, ability and commitment to equestrian sport.
- The current structure of the ACTEA represents predominantly those riders who belong to equestrian clubs and associations.
- The range of clubs within the ACTEA is diverse. It includes:
 - international disciplines (dressage, showjumping, eventing, endurance, vaulting)
 - other specialist competitions (reining, Western performance, polocrosse, hacking)
 - pony clubs
 - adult riding clubs
 - breed societies
 - trail riding
 - riding for people with disabilities (Pegasus).

Some equestrian activities (e.g. campdrafting, tentpegging, rodeo) are not established within the ACT, but are based in surrounding towns (e.g. Bungendore).

There are informal groups associated with many of the government horse paddocks, but these are not affiliated with the ACTEA.

Many equestrians are members of more than one club or association. Some of the clubs and associations which operate in Canberra draw their membership from throughout a wider area of New South Wales. These factors, coupled with the fact that many local equestrians do not belong to clubs, makes it difficult to estimate the total number of equestrians in Canberra.

Based on figures supplied by landowners and managers for horse agistment and stabling, there appear to be between 1800 and 2000 horses kept within or close to the ACT which are used for sport and recreation, or are kept for their sentimental value. This figure does not include racing, breeding or other work horses.

Equestrian competitions in the ACT are organised predominantly through the clubs that are affiliated with the ACTEA, although some competitions are conducted by commercial operators. The equestrian events at the Canberra Show are organised through the Royal National Capital Agricultural Society.

Recreational trail riding is also organised both through clubs and by commercial operators, although much of this activity is undertaken by individuals, many of whom are not club members.

The main facilities for equestrian competition in the ACT are as follows:

- Equestrian Park, Yarralumla, which is managed under licence by the ACTEA.
- Hall Showground precinct, which includes polocrosse grounds located on an adjacent rural lease.
- Canberra Riding Club grounds, which are managed by the club itself and are available for hire to other clubs.
- Exhibition Park in Canberra (EPIC), which is an ACT Government facility but is managed on a commercial basis for a wide range of uses including equestrian competitions and shows. Some non-equestrian activities (e.g. motor sport events) conflict seriously with the use of EPIC for equestrian sport.

All of the pony clubs have their own facilities which are primarily for their own use, but some are used to a limited extent by other clubs under special arrangements.

Some of the commercial establishments, as well as Pegasus, have competition facilities which are available for hire by clubs when they are not required for their own purposes. These include several indoor arenas.

Approximately 550 horses are kept in ACT Government horse paddocks with nearly three times this number kept in private stables or agistment. Some of the government horse paddocks are on land which is used temporarily for this purpose, pending future higher order use, such as residential or institutional development or roads.

There is an extensive but incomplete network of trails for equestrian use within the ACT. Most of these trails are shared with other users such as walkers, joggers and, to a more limited extent, cyclists. Several former trails are no longer available for use because of urban development, upgrading of roads or management policies.

The services available to equestrian sport and recreation in the ACT include teaching and coaching through riding schools and specialist instructors, breeding and training of horses, and support services such as farriers, veterinary surgeons, saddlery shops, feed suppliers etc. The funding of equestrian facilities comes partly from equestrians themselves and partly from the ACT Government. The ACT Government provides capital and operational funding for major competition facilities (e.g. at EPIC) as well as for trails and government horse paddocks. Government funding for capital works is provided also through grants to the ACTEA and its clubs.

Commercial facilities (competition and horse keeping) all operate on a commercially funded basis, and both capital and operating costs must ultimately be recovered from their clients in order for them to remain financially viable.

Equestrian activities in the ACT contributed an estimated \$13.85 million towards the ACT economy in the most recent year. This figure represents total outlays by ACT residents and visitors to the ACT in relation to horse maintenance, equestrian events and equestrian-related business activity. In terms of employment, it is estimated that as many as 158 full-time equivalent positions could have resulted from equestrian-related expenditures in the most recent year.

The additional value of voluntary labour associated with equestrian activities has been estimated to be \$14.9 million in the most recent year. The dominant element of this is associated with horse maintenance by private owners.

The existing situation and future issues in relation to horse holding facilities, competition and showing facilities and trails are discussed further at the start of Chapters 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

3. HORSE HOLDING FACILITIES

3.1 Horse Holding Issues

Horse holding in the ACT operates under a dual system of ACT Government horse paddocks, which are managed under a commercial contract, and commercial horse holding facilities. The government paddocks offer basic facilities for holding horses in a paddock situation, with the owners being responsible for their care and maintenance. The commercial facilities offer a range of service levels, extending from paddock agistment, as in the government paddocks, to stabling with full daily care. This spectrum of horse holding services caters for the varying needs and budgets of Canberra's horse owners.

The planning of Canberra to date has been favourable from the viewpoint of facilitating opportunities for horse holding. The total area of government horse paddocks has increased from 361 ha in 1978 and 600 ha in 1982 to the current figure of 1116 ha. In at least some paddocks, however, horse holding is regarded by the ACT Government as a temporary use, pending requirement of the land for higher order uses. As discussed further in Section 3.2 of Volume 2, several existing horse paddocks are identified for potential development at some stage in the future.

A similar situation can arise also with respect to commercial horse holding properties, both in the ACT and across the border in New South Wales. Land use pressures in some parts of the ACT could result in some rural leases currently used for horse holding being withdrawn in the future. The use of land in nearby New South Wales for horse holding is likely to be influenced by economic factors associated with development patterns, and could increase or decline according to location.

It is clearly in the long term interests of Canberra's equestrians to ensure that an adequate amount and choice of horse holding facilities is maintained close to Canberra, even if the location of these facilities changes from time to time. This is the most fundamental issue with respect to the strategic planning of horse holding facilities.

It is important also in both the short and long term for facilities to be managed to an adequate standard from the viewpoint of horse welfare, horse owner satisfaction and environmental sustainability. It is desirable for the ACTEA to be able to represent the interests of any horse owners who are concerned about such matters, if it feels that the concerns are warranted. This requires the ACTEA to have both an effective liaison mechanism with the owners or managers of horse holding facilities, and a

structure which clearly identifies it as being able to represent all affected horse owners.

Based on past experience, such concerns appear more likely to arise with government horse paddocks than with commercial facilities. In the latter case, there tends to be a closer relationship between the horse owner and the operator of the facility. Furthermore, dissatisfied horse owners can take their custom elsewhere and unsustainable management would have undesirable economic effects for the operator by lowering the value of the property. These are strong incentives to adopt a responsible approach to operating these facilities.

The government horse paddocks on the other hand are managed on a short-term (three-year) contract basis which does not offer the manager a long-term incentive to invest management resources in the paddocks. The management difficulties are compounded by having seventeen separate paddock complexes spread throughout the Canberra area with no resident managers. This contrasts with the commercial situation where horses are kept within a single site, commonly with the manager residing on the property.

A further limitation on the management of the government horse paddocks is that there is a cap on the fees which the manager can charge horse owners. This can limit the level of management effort if the management operation is to be commercially viable, and can potentially place commercial operators at a competitive disadvantage.

The last point is of concern to some commercial operators and is important if the future of horse holding in the ACT is to be addressed holistically. Effective liaison between the commercial operators and the ACTEA is desirable for such concerns to be appreciated more widely within the equestrian community. The existing associate membership provisions of the ACTEA offer such an opportunity, but have been taken up by only a small number of commercial operators.

3.2 Horse Holding Objectives

The following objectives are proposed for horse holding facilities:

To ensure that an adequate range and capacity of horse holding facilities is maintained within or close to the ACT to meet the requirements of Canberra horse owners for the foreseeable future.

To ensure that horse holding facilities are appropriately managed to satisfy the welfare of horses, the needs of the owners and the sustainability of the environment.

3.3 Horse Holding Strategy

The ACTEA is not in a position to take direct action to achieve the above objective for horse holding facilities. Rather, its future strategy should be based on successful partnerships with the ACT Government, the managers of government horse paddocks and the owners and managers of

commercial horse holding facilities within and immediately outside the ACT.

The main elements of the ACTEA strategy for horse holding facilities are as follows:

In order to achieve wider representation of all horse owners keeping horses in ACT Government horse paddocks, the ACTEA will amend its operation to make horse paddock groups individually or collectively eligible for membership, and will encourage membership by those groups.

In order to achieve more effective dialogue with the operators of commercial horse holding facilities, the ACTEA will encourage those operators to become Associate Members.

The ACTEA will seek more effective dialogue with both the managers of the government horse paddocks and representatives of the ACT Government who have responsibilities in overseeing horse paddock management. Such dialogue is desirable for ensuring that any concerns that individual horse owners wish to raise or proposals which they seek to put forward are presented with respect to the wider equestrian context, and reflect an understanding of the perspective of the horse paddock managers and the ACT Government.

The ACTEA will seek more effective dialogue with the ACT Government in relation to planning and development proposals which may affect existing government horse paddocks or commercial horse holding facilities or which may provide the opportunity for establishing new horse paddocks.

4. COMPETITION AND SHOWING FACILITIES

4.1 Competition and Showing Issues

The ACT contains several facilities which are used for competitions or shows. These include:

- Equestrian Park precinct at Yarralumla, which is managed under licence by the ACTEA;
- Hall Showground precinct including adjacent polocrosse fields;
- Canberra Riding Club;
- several other pony clubs;
- EPIC;
- Pegasus; and
- several commercial facilities.
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As discussed in Chapter 3 of Volume 2, these facilities vary widely in terms of the type, quality and area of the riding surface, the availability of stables, yards, camping areas, car and truck parking and other associated

facilities, the opportunities for spectators and the opportunities for use by equestrian clubs.

None of the facilities has all of the characteristics desirable for staging high profile international or national events, or even major state events in many disciplines. They are generally adequate for club or privately organised competitions or training.

The specific needs of the various equestrian disciplines vary widely, not only in a technical sense but also in the social expectations of participants. For polocrosse and endurance riding, for example, an informal camping arrangement forms part of the event atmosphere for most participants, while competitors in some other disciplines expect higher accommodation standards for both themselves and their horses. The quality of the arena surface is critical in different ways for dressage, showjumping and reining, while breed societies are prepared to conduct shows using an arena surface of a lower standard, provided that supporting facilities such as stables are conveniently located nearby. An important consideration for many clubs is the cost of hiring the facility, or maintaining it, if this is their own responsibility. This is a moderating factor with respect to the aspirations of some equestrians for future facilities, and is a pragmatic consideration affecting current usage. It is evident that no one existing facility can meet the technical, social and financial requirements of all of the ACT equestrian bodies. The strategy therefore needs to address how the existing range of facilities can best serve ACTEA needs and the extent to which these facilities may justify being expanded or augmented in the future. In this context, it is desirable to consider not only those facilities which receive regular use from a range of clubs, but also other facilities, such as pony clubs or commercial facilities which may be underutilised, but are an important potential resource for the local equestrian movement.

Volume 2 (Table 4.5) lists seventeen questions which identify the key issues relating to the provision of competition and showing facilities. The most fundamental of these is whether the general direction for the provision of future facilities should be based on providing a new, high quality facility as opposed to upgrading existing facilities. It became apparent at an early stage in this study that the latter direction was generally preferred.

The question which then follows from this is where the priorities for upgrading should be directed in relation to the facilities listed at the start of this section. From an ACTEA viewpoint, this choice is limited somewhat by the fact that it has no direct control over the development of most of the facilities. It can, however, influence ACT Government grant

funding to clubs which maintain their own facilities, and may also seek to influence government expenditure on other facilities (e.g. EPIC, Hall Showground). It can support indirectly the viability of club and commercial facilities by encouraging other member clubs to use them. The facility of most direct concern to the ACTEA is Equestrian Park, which has been subject to a master planning exercise undertaken by Michael Creber in parallel with Phase 2 of the present study. While the details of this master plan are beyond the scope of the strategic plan, there is scope within the strategic plan for identifying the principles on which the master plan should be implemented.

Having established the priorities between the various facilities, it is then necessary for the ACTEA to determine how it sees the general direction for future development of each facility in which it wishes to maintain an interest. In some cases, it may not wish to influence the development at all, leaving such decisions to the operator. In particular, while the ACTEA recognises the important role of commercial facilities in the overall development of equestrian sport and recreation, and encourages their participation in the ACTEA as Associates, it does not seek to directly influence their development through this strategic plan.

Another key issue in relation to competition and showing facilities is their ongoing management. From an ACTEA perspective, this is currently most relevant to Equestrian Park, and is an important issue irrespective of the extent of future development. It is relevant also for the ACTEA to consider whether it is in the interests of equestrian sport for it to seek greater involvement in the management of any other facilities, assuming that it has the resources to do so. This includes training arenas associated with government horse paddocks.

The provision of training arenas at government horse paddocks may be seen as desirable in terms of encouraging 'grass roots' participation, but the financial and human resource implications of providing such facilities needs to be viewed in the wider context. To date, funding of such facilities has generally been from sources separate from ACT Government (BSR) funding to the ACTEA, and the paddock groups have had no formal affiliation with the ACTEA. If a more structured approach towards provision of these facilities at horse paddocks is to be adopted through the ACTEA, it may be necessary to formalise the paddock groups and their affiliation with the ACTEA. Alternatively, they may continue to operate informally and independently through the horse paddock management. Either way, there may be insurance implications with respect to the provision, management and use of these facilities which will need to be addressed.

A factor influencing the development of certain facilities is the extent to which they might serve as a 'home ground' for certain clubs. In this sense,

a home ground is the venue where those clubs would conduct regular local events and training sessions, store equipment and possibly have an office or social facilities. Home ground status does not necessarily imply exclusive use, and there is the possibility that several clubs may share a large facility.

Equestrian Park has become established as the home ground for showjumping, eventing and endurance riding, as well as being associated with the Canberra Lakes Pony Club. It has also been adopted by the Jerrabomberra Riding Club, which is considering giving up the lease for its existing grounds at Symonston. Hall Showground is the home ground for the Hall Pony Club and the Hall Polocrosse Club, and is the main base for carriage driving. All other pony clubs have their own grounds, with Tuggeranong Pony Club having a close affiliation with Tuggeranong Adult Riding Club. The National Equestrian Centre (Kerrabee) is the Canberra base for vaulting.

The one major competition club which has not had a regular home ground to date is the ACT Dressage Association (ACTDA). Because of the strength of dressage, which is numerically the strongest club in Canberra (see Volume 2, Appendix B), its preference for a home ground could be a significant factor in the future strategy for development of facilities. It is understood that the ACTDA sees Equestrian Park as its preferred home ground location, subject to upgrading of facilities to meet the needs of dressage.

The breed societies do not generally identify themselves with home grounds but, if they did, this may also have implications for the development of the relevant facility.

The strategic goals for development of competition facilities are unlikely to be achieved unless there is also a strategy for funding their achievement. Funding is required not only for capital works to improve the facilities, but also for their ongoing management. While it is not unreasonable to expect some funding from the ACT Government, this is likely to be dependent on the ability of the ACTEA to generate its own funds, for example, through increased membership or increased payments for use of Equestrian Park for competitions and instructional activities. If the latter involves more competitions, this means increased voluntary effort by organising clubs. If it involves larger competitions, this may mean a need for better coaching resources to attract riders to the competitive side of equestrian activities.

The conduct of organised competitions, coaching and other activities is currently being curtailed by excessive public liability insurance premiums, an issue which extends well beyond the ACTEA. If a scheme can be developed which could bring premiums back to an affordable

level, this could reverse the situation and create a more viable financial climate overall in which to improve equestrian facilities.

The level of ACT Government funding for the development and management of equestrian facilities can be influenced by many factors including the number of people that the ACTEA represents, its capacity to generate funding from other sources (both internal and external), the professionalism of its management in the context of BSR expectations, and opportunities for negotiating special in-kind arrangements to reduce the financial burden on the ACTEA or its clubs.

The improvement of competition and showing facilities which are owned and managed by the ACTEA or its clubs thus raises a wide range of associated issues which are fundamental to the operation of the ACTEA. Facilities therefore need to be considered within a holistic framework for the strategic planning of equestrian sport. While it is not within the scope of the present strategic plan to deal fully with many of these wider issues, they are addressed in general terms where appropriate.

4.2 Competition and Showing Objectives

The following objectives are proposed for competition and showing facilities:

- To ensure that a range of competition and showing facilities is available within the ACT to meet the regular needs of all ACTEA equestrian clubs for regular competitions and training at affordable prices.
- To ensure that a regular home ground is available for all clubs that have a need for one.
- To ensure that selected facilities are designed and maintained to an adequate standard to enable them to be used as required for occasional international, national or state level events.
- To develop and manage any ACTEA competition facilities on a basis which is financially, socially and environmentally sustainable.
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4.3 Competition and Showing Strategy

The following strategy has been developed from the perspective of the ACTEA having a key co-ordinating role in the planning of competition and showing facilities, but also recognises that decisions relating to many of these facilities rest with member clubs or commercial operators, and lie beyond its direct control. The ACTEA nevertheless provides an important connection between the owners and the users of these facilities.

Some elements of the strategy extend beyond the immediate area of facilities, and relate to wider issues within the responsibilities of the ACTEA.

The main elements of the ACTEA strategy for competition and showing facilities are as follows:

- The provision of competition and showing facilities for the foreseeable future will be based on the upgrading of existing facilities rather than the provision of a new facility.
- The first priority for the upgrading of competition facilities will be at Equestrian Park because of the interest and investment that the ACTEA and several of its clubs already have in this area, and the opportunity for expanding its role to further serve the interests of the Canberra equestrian community as a whole.
- The second priority will be to support actions by the ACT Government to upgrade equestrian facilities at EPIC, in recognition of the important role of EPIC for several of the breed societies, and its potential future role for occasional high profile competitions.
- The Hall Showground precinct, Canberra Riding Club and other pony clubs will all be of lower priority, but will nevertheless be supported by the ACTEA for future upgrading on a case-by-case basis.

The development of Equestrian Park will be in accordance with the master plan prepared by Michael Creber, with a view to increasing the range of uses, particularly dressage. The development will be incremental in accordance with the availability of funding and other resources. The details of staging will be subject to regular review by the ACTEA, in consultation with the ACT Government.

The ACTEA will support focusing any development of the Hall Showground precinct on the needs of existing users. It supports upgrading facilities at the Hall Pony Club and the expansion and formalisation of the polocrosse playing field complex. It acknowledges the desire of Hall residents to maintain low-key equestrian facilities within an open space buffer around the village, and does not see a need for major buildings such as stable complexes.

The ACTEA will support maintaining Canberra Riding Club as a pony club and a venue for hire by other clubs. While it supports upgrading of facilities on the site, it acknowledges that development and management of the site is primarily the responsibility of Canberra Riding Club itself. Any greater level of involvement by the ACTEA will be subject to a request from Canberra Riding Club in the first instance, and will be considered in the context of available resources and other priorities.

The ACTEA will seek to participate in the current master plan review for EPIC with a view to:

- (a) seeking to develop a more satisfactory arrangement for sharing the main arena with other uses;
- (b) investigating the provision of an indoor arena suitable for reining and other compatible activities, which may include non-equestrian uses; and
- (c) maintaining a high capacity stable complex and camping facilities.

The ACTEA will seek to establish the management of Equestrian Park on a long-term professional basis, having regard to the proposals in the Equestrian Park Master Plan.

The ACTEA will support the role of relevant clubs (in particular the Hall Pony Club and the Hall Polocrosse Club) in the management of the Hall Showground precinct, but will not seek an active role for itself in this respect.

The ACTEA will support the development of existing pony clubs in general by facilitating partnership arrangements with other clubs with stronger adult membership, insofar as this is achievable within the constraints imposed by lease conditions of pony club sites and the rules of the Pony Club Association of New South Wales. It will support the growth of existing pony clubs to improve their viability in preference to the establishment of new clubs.

The ACTEA will support the development and maintenance of limited training facilities associated with government horse paddocks, provided that funding of these facilities does not conflict with BSR capital funding for other higher priority projects. To facilitate the basis for this support, it will encourage the formal affiliation of paddock groups with the ACTEA.

The ACTEA will support the improvement of Equestrian Park for dressage activities in accordance with the Equestrian Park Master Plan, and will support its use as a home ground for the ACT Dressage Association.

Should any other clubs, including breed societies, which do not currently have a home ground see a need for one, the ACTEA will support them in principle, provided that there is no conflict with other aspects of the strategic plan. The ACTEA recognises that the choice of home ground is primarily a decision for each club.

The ACTEA will endeavour to fund the development and management of Equestrian Park through a combination of increased internal funding and seeking ACT Government grants and commercial sponsorship. The ongoing implementation of the Equestrian Park Master Plan will specifically address funding requirements in detail and will review these on a regular (at least annual) basis.

Opportunities for increasing internal funding which will be investigated will include the following:

- (a) Setting of hiring fees etc. for Equestrian Park at a level which reflects the realistic cost of maintaining the area at an appropriate standard for equestrian competitions.
- (b) Encouragement to clubs and other organisers to utilise Equestrian Park for competitions, training and instruction to the fullest extent compatible with its sustainable use.
- (c) Addressing any issues (e.g. insurance) which are currently an impediment to some potential users.
- (d) Promoting equestrian sport generally among horse owners who are currently not members of affiliated clubs, for example, through horse paddock groups and riding schools.
- (e) Seeking to improve coaching and instruction opportunities for both adults and children to encourage their interest in competitions. Such opportunities may be provided through clubs, commercial facilities or independent instructors.

The ACTEA will seek additional ACT Government funding towards both the capital development costs of Equestrian Park and club facilities, and the ongoing operation of the ACTEA. It is recognised that an increase in operational funding may entail some upgrading of ACTEA management. In addition, it will investigate opportunities for in-kind arrangements with the ACT Government to reduce the financial burden on the ACTEA and its clubs.

The ACTEA will explore the opportunities for sponsorship for Equestrian Park and for events conducted there, which could assist in the development and management of this facility.

5. TRAILS

5.1 Trails Issues

The existing system of equestrian trails in the Canberra area was developed largely in the 1970s and 1980s. This trail system was conceived initially as providing safe riding routes on the urban edge to

serve the government horse paddocks and other agistment areas, and to link the horse holding areas with competition venues, thus enabling owners to ride their horses to local competitions. These are still relevant functions for the equestrian trail system, although the original trail concept has been distorted by having the Bicentennial National Trail (BNT) superimposed on it (see Volume 2, Section 5.1 for further discussion).

The fundamental purpose of equestrian trails is to provide places where horses can be ridden in pleasant surroundings without conflict with other uses. This does not necessarily require formally designated trails and there are places such as pine forests where horses can be ridden generally throughout the area. It is necessary, however, for such areas to be accessible in the sense of not being barred by locked gates.

The erection of fences and gates without regard to the need for equestrian access is one way in which riding opportunities have been reduced in recent years. Similar problems can arise as a result of new development cutting across equestrian trails or routes, or through the narrowing of road verges so that they are no longer safe for riding, as a result of road upgrading, erection of signs and other structures, and landscape planting.

The existing trail network is focused mainly on the area close to Canberra, but there are some recreational riders who are interested in having safe routes which take them further afield to areas such as Kowen, Pierces Creek and Uriarra Forests or via alternative routes to Namadgi National Park. Another group with more extensive trail needs are the endurance riders who use longer trails for competition and training. An area of major concern to some horse riders is the extent of restrictions which have been placed on riding within Canberra Nature Park areas because of perceived environmental impacts. In some cases the reasons for excluding horses from certain trails are apparent and are accepted, but there are other cases where the justification is not clear to horse riders. Coupled with the lack of clear permanent signage on some of these trails, this can lead to some horses being ridden on trails which are intended to be closed, which can increase the conflict between horse riders and land managers.

Virtually all areas used for recreational horse riding are multi-purpose areas. Even where trails have been dedicated and fenced for horse riding, these are used also by walkers and joggers and sometimes by cyclists. This is not a significant problem for horse riders provided that the trail

areas are sufficiently wide and other users behave responsibly in the vicinity of horses.

From an equestrian viewpoint, it is not necessary or even desirable for trails to be fenced if they are otherwise well defined and signposted. Such a requirement can add significantly to the cost of trails, and may stem from a lack of trust by land managers that horse riders will keep to approved trails. More effective uses of funding for trail development would be in providing clearer signage as to which trails may or may not be used and in improving localised problem areas (e.g. areas of poor drainage) where concern about riding impacts has led to the total closure of trails which in other respects meet ACT Government guidelines for environmentally acceptable equestrian use.

It is likely that the concerns by all parties with respect to equestrian trails could be resolved through closer dialogue between the ACTEA and the ACT Government. A difficulty in this respect, however, has been the large number of ACT Government authorities which have some interest in the planning and management of the trails, and the apparent lack of any one of these being clearly responsible for the overall co-ordination of horse trail issues. As most initiatives by the ACTEA in relation to trails are likely to require action by the ACT Government, it is important to have clear lines of communication between the ACTEA and the responsible government authority, as well as between the relevant authorities themselves.

It is likely that awareness of equestrian trails among both the ACT Government and potential users would be enhanced by the availability of better information. In particular, there is a need for an up-to-date map of equestrian trails and other riding routes, similar in concept to the one produced for cycling. This could be complemented by the development of a website which shows recent changes to the trail system.

5.2 Trail Objectives

The following objectives are proposed for equestrian trails:

To ensure that an adequate network of equestrian trails is provided within the ACT which:

- (a) maintains a safe and attractive route for the Bicentennial National Trail through the ACT;
- (b) links the various government and commercial horse holding facilities and the competition and training facilities within the Canberra area;
- (c) provides safe and interesting riding opportunities along designated trails or other routes for as many horse holding facilities as possible;

(d) provides safe routes for horse riders to make trips from Canberra to those surrounding forest and bushland areas where horse riding is permitted; and

(e) provides access for endurance riding competitions and training.

To ensure that all equestrian trail users (horse riders and others) behave responsibly with respect to the safety of other users and the environmentally sustainable use of the trail.

To maintain a high level of current knowledge of the equestrian trail system among potential users, the ACT Government and other interested persons.

5.3 Trails Strategy

The following strategy is based on the fact that the development and management of equestrian trails in the ACT is essentially a government responsibility which is shared among several areas of the ACT Government. The role of the ACTEA includes making the government aware of the needs of equestrians, as well as making equestrians aware of government concerns. As with horse holding facilities, the strategy is based on successful partnerships with the relevant ACT Government agencies. It is also necessary for the agencies themselves to collaborate closely with respect to the above objectives.

The main elements of the ACTEA strategy for equestrian trails are as follows:

The ACTEA will seek to establish with the ACT Government a whole of government approach for equestrian trails which addresses the strategy for provision and upgrading of trails and other riding routes in accordance with ACTEA priorities. This approach should also address the possible impacts of future developments or other forms of trail closure on the existing trail network, and actions required to ameliorate these impacts. The ACTEA should have a clear primary point of contact with the ACT Government with respect to the trails strategy.

Within the framework of the strategy, the ACTEA will seek more effective separate dialogue with each government agency that has a significant role in the planning or management of equestrian trails or areas which may be used for general recreational riding. These agencies include Planning and Land Management, ACT Forests, Canberra Nature Park, Namadgi National Park, Canberra Urban Parks and Places and ACT Roads. The ACTEA will offer advice to land managers with respect to equestrian requirements for maintaining trails in a safe and serviceable condition.

The ACTEA will encourage the completion and maintenance of a continuous equestrian trail within or around the urban area of Canberra as

its highest priority. This includes a continuous Bicentennial National Trail through the ACT.

As a second priority, the ACTEA will encourage the provision of general riding on public land in reasonable proximity to government or commercial horse holding facilities, with riding within these areas being restricted to designated trails only in situations where this can be clearly justified on environmental or safety grounds.

The ACTEA will endeavour to resolve conflicts over access to trails which are perceived to be environmentally sensitive by:

- (a) promoting the concept of remedial works in localised sensitive situations on trails which are otherwise suitable for equestrian use;
- (b) supporting clear signage of trails with respect to access to equestrians with a view to avoiding inadvertent use of closed trails; and
- (c) taking further steps to educate the local equestrian community, including riders who are not members of ACTEA clubs, with respect to responsible riding from an environmental perspective.

The ACTEA will promote within the ACT Government the requirements for maintaining safe access for horse riding along roads, and the consideration of equestrian needs in the planning and design of relevant roadworks.

The ACTEA will investigate with the ACT Government a means of producing a revised map of equestrian trails and other riding routes and of providing regular updates of information relating to equestrian trails.

6. IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The strategic plan does not have a timeframe. Its rate of implementation will be influenced primarily by two factors, funding and human resources. These two factors are linked to some extent.

The issue of funding is most relevant to the development of Equestrian Park. As discussed in Chapter 4, the strategy includes measures for increasing ACTEA income to assist in funding the development and management of this facility. One source of this funding is through clubs staging more and larger events. This has obvious implications for the workload of volunteer club members.

As discussed in Section 4.1, there are several other factors which are likely to influence indirectly the implementation of the strategy for improving competition facilities. These include:

- membership recruitment for clubs;
- coaching of potential competitors;
- insurance for competition organisers and coaches;
- raising the profile of equestrian support in the media; and
- upgrading of management standards within the ACTEA.

In addition to assisting indirectly in facilities development, addressing these factors effectively could also open the way for increased financial support from both the ACT Government and sponsors.

The strategic plan places increased emphasis on developing close working relationships with ACT Government authorities and owners or managers of various commercial facilities. The development of these relationships is likely to place increased demands on some ACTEA volunteers. While some types of external funding may not necessarily support facilities development directly, it may help to reduce the workload of these volunteers and enable their efforts to be focused more effectively on facilities issues.

The strategic plan for facilities thus forms an important component in the wider picture of the development of equestrian sport and recreation in the ACT, and its implementation will relate to many other aspects of this development.