

**ACT Equestrian Association Inc**  
**Annual General Meeting**  
**11 August 2022**

**President's Report**

This is my fourteenth annual report to affiliates of the ACT Equestrian Association.

In 2021-22 ACTEA had 16 affiliate clubs and associations and 2 associate members across the spread of disciplines from trail riding to dressage and includes all Canberra's Pony Clubs as well as our Adult Riding Clubs and, this year Hall polocrosse Club. ACTEA's strength lies in the ACT Government's perception that we represent a broad range of equestrians so I want to thank affiliates for their continued support and remind them that there is strength in numbers. We have also, as always, worked in close co-operation with the National Trail through its local co-ordinator. When we make submissions to government on any issue it really matters that we can claim to represent a broad cross-section of the equestrian community. ACTEA provides our community with an opportunity to speak with one voice and we should not waste that power. Affiliation is incredibly cheap for what you get, as Sport & Recreation Services constantly remind us, so we encourage clubs that aren't members to join up, participate and benefit.

ACTEA's remit covers 2 broad areas - to act as an advocate for local equestrians in relation to protection, maintenance and enhancement of recreational facilities and to manage the infrastructure at Equestrian Park for the benefit of our community. I am going to report on the first of these. Derek Pether will report on the second as Convenor of the Equestrian Park Management Group.

**Workload**

The President's monthly reports, which appear on our website for you to peruse at your leisure, best reflect the broad range of issues and activities in which ACTEA is involved over any year. They cover everything from ensuring trails stay open, negotiating new or replacement trails and, influencing government policy-making that impacts on future equestrian infrastructure. Generally, a few big issues consume most of our time and energy each the year.

We have had an extremely strange year and at times a frustrating one. Despite Covid, in the 2021-22 financial year ACTEA attended **36** virtual or face-to-face meetings and site visits with politicians, government representatives or contractors. Surprisingly that was only 7 less than the previous year and still a rough average of **one every working week**. The Committee also made **58** representations and submissions, by telephone, email or in writing to government bodies or their consultants, including **10** formal submissions to a public consultation processes – around **5 every working week**. Some of those submissions were very complex and required substantial amounts of work. Although the number of submissions did not go down, the amount of contact we had with government bodies did and I suspect this reflected the difficulty of engaging with people who seemed to spend a lot of time being either unwell or working from home and not answering their phones. It became very frustrating at times.

A lot of our workload each year arises from government contractors contacting ACTEA as they develop plans for new or upgraded infrastructure. Although there are still many things we find out about in the Canberra Times or the RiotAct there is a much higher awareness about equestrian activity than there used to be – and I have to say, the main, greater willingness to make changes in consideration.

The key issues in 2021-22 haven't changed much since last AGM and can be summarised as:

- Trail protection and extension, especially in relation to the National Trail
- Planning for the future of Belconnen Pony Club
- Pressure on Government Horse Holding Paddocks
- Trail issues at Stromlo Forest Park and the Arboretum

There are always minor interruptions the Trail but these days TCCS Permits are requiring applicants for event permits to contact ACTEA well ahead of time, allowing us to seek appropriate safety arrangements and provide information to the equestrian community.

### **Belconnen Pony Club**

After bitter disappointment last year Belconnen Pony Club again has a notional home. Right next door to Pine Ridge Equestrian Centre off Stockdill Drive. It is not as ideally situated as the previous site but it will serve. We are back to square one in a sense as the Suburban Land Agency has to go yet again through the process of making the land available for a community facility like the PC.

### **Pressure on the Government Horse Paddocks**

In the time I have been President, the pressure on government horse paddocks has been a constant background noise but it is getting louder.

Parkwood Paddocks are still under threat but due to decisions made by the Joint Venture the evil day has been pushed back somewhat as the housing development rolls out in an alternative direction. Discussion with both the government and Ginnindery to find a viable amount of land on which to run an agistment facility seem to go around in circles. Fortunately, the same change in strategy that has pushed back the Pony Club move has removed some pressure from the paddocks. We do now have a commitment to develop a plan which will aim to identify suitable land as replacement paddocks. Some of this potential land is just over the border on land already owned by Ginninderry. The complications of managing this land as part of a government horse paddock system are still to be address. We are promised a draft map of options in 2 months!

Snowy Mountain Engineering Company have informed us that they have the contract to do the next stage of planning for the new cemetery at Rose Cottage. As an engineering company they will be taking the landscape plans into the real world looking at options for the staged development of the Cemetery. We should be hearing from them in the near future.

The government has confirmed it is moving the RSPCA from its current site in Weston to 4 hectares at the front of the Duntroon Paddocks. They are at an environmental impact referral stage so, assuming that is successful, we are looking at works starting there in 2025. We have been closely engaged with this process from the start and expect to be to the end, making sure agistees have their concerns properly considered.

We are also keeping an eye on the Western Edge study which started a few years ago and is looking at bits of land between Weston Creek and Chapman and the Molonglo River corridor for potential development areas. There is some way to go with these complex studies. As with the Eastern Edge Study a few years back, it could all come to nothing.

As we are all well aware any paddock losses put pressure on the viability of the entire system. The current paddock management contract ends in 2024 and ACTEA has instigated regular meetings with the relevant government agencies to discuss better planning for the future. We held the first of these in April and were hoping to have another one this month but it looks like being put back until October.

## **Stromlo Forest Park**

The new managers of SFP are keeping us confused. Clearly, they are caught between the huge popularity of the MTB trails and the lack of income to maintain the place. They have been looking at fund raising measures such as the contentious pay parking idea and in the last couple of weeks they have advertised the possibility of sponsorship deals for the whole Park and bits of the Park.

For some time there was a lot of talk about new equestrian trails in West Stromlo around the long proposed 12k road cycling track. That appears to have gone off the boil as has the proposed MTB trail connecting West Stromlo to the Cotter Reserve. A lot of this can probably be put down to Covid soaking up any available funds.

As indicated at the last AGM, Stromlo has moved the National Trail route to the banks of Holdens Creek so it goes from the Cotter Road, past the Bushfire Memorial, over Holdens Creek, past the running track and out the northeast corner to the John Gordon Drive underpass. They have thrown some money at this route to make it safe. The culvert under the running track has been modified, cavaletti have gone in and some fencing to keep out bikes is on its way. They have also planted trees along the running track as a screen. It is rideable now but Jenny Costin is hoping to have an official opening as soon as the ground dries out a bit.

While SFP is still keen to move equestrian trails to the western side of the mountain where there are currently no mountain bike tracks, they seem to have accepted that it is not a practical destination for everyone. Their ideas have now grown to include an equestrian precinct on the eastern side of the mountain between the Mount Stromlo Road and Bluegums. If they can manage this it will make it easier for them to determine that there are no equestrian only trails on the rest of the eastern face. They already have plans for numerous trails through Bluegums. All of these things remain no more than pie in the sky if they do not get additional funding. No previous managers have ever got past the 'wouldn't it be nice' point.

We have made little progress on improving facilities at the equestrian carpark and ride base off Mt Stromlo Road but this would fall into the category of 'needing money'. We understand, however, that the downhill mountain bike trails have at least been moved away from the western carpark.

The Park website has been upgraded and the bookings notifications is more useful. A new full-time person, Maggie Welfare, has been employed to take bookings, map events, give rules about marshalling and contact relevant stakeholders like us. She has been actively trying to make things safer within the constraints placed on her by SFP management. She regularly draws attention to events impacting equestrian trails.

## **Remember the Revised Canberra Nature Park Reserve Management Plan?**

While it has taken some years the undertaking in the new Management Plan for Canberra Nature Park to look at increasing the number of legal equestrian trails in reserves has finally gained

traction. ACTEA was asked to recommend some trails against several criterion which we have done. They have gone off into the maw of Parks to be thrashed out among rangers and managers.

In keeping with the request to bid for a 'small number' of additional trails and also the Parks requirements that they be:

- Connected to existing trails
- Not in reserves from which horses are excluded
- Close to or connected to government horse holding paddocks

1. McQuoids Hill
2. Cooleman Ridge
3. Oakey Hill
4. Urambi Hills
5. Farrer Ridge Reserve and a connection to Wanniasa Hills

## **2022-23**

So, for the year 2022-23, which we are well into, our priorities look little different to last years: keeping the BNT open and safe, gaining access to more trails in the Canberra Nature Park and developing a strategy to protect government horse paddocks

Our Treasurer, Jacqui Knobel will present the all-important financial report and the Derek Pether, the Convenor of the Equestrian Park management Group, will report on the last year at the Park.

## **Thank You**

To end I would like to thank the current ACTEA Committee especially for hanging in there during these Covid affected times. We meet every month for 11 months of the year which is no small commitment for busy people but we have a lot to do. This year we Zoomed far more than I feel comfortable doing so here's to less of that.

This year was hard without a Secretary. A Secretary who can organise Committee Meetings, answer random mail and keep track of affiliates is an essential cog in any Committee. This year, Keryn, who only signed up to do the Minutes has had to juggle some of that. Most of you will have noticed we had no Awards program for the financial year just gone and that is directly a result of not having a warm body to undertake or organise the many tasks involved. Hopefully we can reintroduce the Awards this year. Thankfully, Kimberlee Baldry, who is somewhere in Queensland at the moment, has put her hand up for the job this year and I couldn't be more grateful.

Other than that, we had a stable Committee this year including:

- Vice-President Cathy Banwell
- Treasurer Jacqui Knobel
- Keryn Kefous (Minute Secretary)
- Robyn McCaughan
- Lauren McIntosh

And I thank you for your contribution and hope you are enthused enough to continue to contribute to the Committee.

This is the time, also to recognise the Equestrian Park Management Group, who are the people who make the Park what it is. It is an extremely active group who meet every month and work collectively for all our benefit and by work I really do mean getting on tractors and fixing fences etc. Covid did not seem to make much of an impact on equestrian activity at the Park. If anything, it made it more popular with individual riders. The work of keeping it fit for purpose in the face of such heavy use falls on a few shoulders from the major User Clubs. I would particularly like to acknowledge Kate MacKenzie who continues to do a great unpaid job as Equestrian Park Manager and John Fitzgerald the man on the tractor He is also, usefully, a good mechanic and a lovely man. Derek will talk more about the work of the Park.

I would like to thank them all for their contribution. And also, the club delegates who turn up regularly and irregularly to our meetings. There are others who have given their time to provide feedback, turned up to field trips and meetings with officials, or just offered encouragement. When you, individually, becomes involved in issues of concern to you, you strengthen our profile in front of government, you learn techniques for dealing with bureaucrats and you understand better how government works – all powerful tools for you and your club.

Christine Lawrence