



Australian Trail Horse Riders Assn
The Secretary
PO Box 112
Helensburgh NSW 2508

9 March 2006

The Secretary,
Senate Environment, Communications Information Technology and the Arts References
Committee Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

On behalf of the Australian Trail Horse Riders Association (ATHRA) I write to support and encourage the establishment and management of multi-use trails in national parks and the continuation of beach access for horse riders in various marine park.

ATHRA is the peak body representing approximately 100 horse riding clubs - 4000 horse riders nationally.

You are no doubt aware of the significance horse riding plays in the Australian social landscape and it is therefore important to ensure that this socially significant activity is not unjustly threatened – but catered for. Horse riding is our heritage.

There is no environmental justification for prohibiting horse riding per se. ATHRA recognizes that there may be some instances where horse riding would not be appropriate and indeed no recreation may be appropriate. However, a proper assessment of particular areas is, ATHRA contends, the appropriate course. Horse riding does not pose a threat to the objectives and management of national parks, other conservation areas nor marine protected areas.

The environmental arguments pushed by those opposed to horse riding in certain areas, who hold extreme ideologies, have been found to be unsubstantiated by scientifically qualified people. Horse faeces contain recycled vegetable matter and does not pose a health threat on beaches e.g. *E.coli*. Neither can weed infestations along the coastline be attributed to horses.

Suffice to say, there has been research that compares the impact of different forms of recreation which has shown that in some circumstances walkers and bike riders create greater impacts than horse riders. Both these forms of recreation may cause erosion in some circumstances and are also vectors of seeds (along with other animals and birds and the natural elements). Motor vehicles may also have severe impacts.

ATHRA submits it is appropriate to assess each area to determine its suitability for use and the appropriate management regimes. These management regimes should include Adaptive Management principles, which will include monitoring and ameliorative measures, if required.

Horse riding within the Inter Tidal Zone (ITZ) will cause no damage. Riding is undertaken in the ITZ and therefore does not encroach on dunal systems or the underwater environment. The horse riders are generally local residents and as such pay for the community infrastructure in these areas and demand the right to enjoy the beach environment in this “nature-based” activity.

Currently horse riding is not permitted on Marine Park beaches that adjoin Nature Reserves. This is a policy, not a law under the “Wildlife Act” and an exception may be made under special circumstances.

Riding promotes fitness and a sense of wellbeing, including the aged, disabled and youth. Riders have already lost large areas of land to Nature Reserves and National Parks which have diminished riding opportunities enormously, leaving **few safe places to ride**. Obviously the record of the NSW Government in particular with respect to access by the public to National Parks and nature reserves is poor to say the least with Government decreasing the areas the public has access to.

I would also like to put forward some facts on the economic contribution of the horse to the GDP (Gordon, 2001):

- The number of horses in Australia is estimated to be around 1.2 Million.
- The contribution of the Horse Industry to GDP in 1999/00 is estimated at \$6.3 billion.
- As a comparison the livestock industry contributes around \$7 billion to GDP.
- Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry contribute \$18 billion to GDP.

1. **Animal related expenditures — some results**

- Overall spending on just owning horses resulted in an estimated final expenditure of \$3.1 billion (i.e. half of Horse Industry GDP contribution).
 - Husbandry (Vet, Farrier, Dentist etc)
 - Stabling
 - Feed
 - Supplies (Rugs, saddlery clothing, pharmaceuticals etc)
 - Labour
- Of \$3.1 billion – \$2 billion is other than racing & breeding (ie **Recreational Horse Riding**).

2. **Business related expenditures**

- Businesses - \$295 million
 - 60 % (\$177 million) are:
 - ... Riding schools
 - ... Trail riding businesses
 - ... Holiday riding
 - ... Farm stay

3. **Event related expenditures**

- Event Related Expenditure - \$836 million
- Equestrian events and other - \$360 million
 - Transport (horses, participants, spectators)
 - Venue
 - Operating labour
 - Catering
 - Accommodation

- Insurance, advertising, equipment etc.

4. Participation

- 257,500 people participated in Horse riding activities (1999).
 - 70% non-organised activities

5. Conclusions

- Horse industry is a major economic contributor
- Recreational horse riding is the major component.
- Large number of people in non-organised events.

6. Bureau Of Tourism Research

- Average spend \$1,800 per visit
- Nature based tourists \$2,000 to \$3,000
- Horse related tourists found to be biggest spenders.

As shown from above, the equine industry brings in sufficient resources to assist Government in meeting its objectives and management requirements.

In conclusion, ATHRA would encourage a partnership between the Government and our representative, the Australian Horse Alliance, to responsibly create and manage an infrastructure that would be horse friendly, the result of which would include good neighbor principles, community involvement, increased social interaction and niche tourism.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

With thanks,

Debby Avis
Secretary
ATHRA National