

With disgraced Weir gone, the game is up



Former trainer Darren Weir on board former champion Puissance De Lune at Lady Bay during Melbourne Cup preparations in 2013. Image: News Ltd/DailyTelegraph.

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

Now that the hammer has fallen on disgraced trainer Darren Weir, the arse has fallen out of the argument to allow 800 racehorses a week to train on a wild beach in the Belfast Coastal Reserve – because this was always about Weir.

Regardless of how the Warrnambool Racing Club, Warrnambool City Council or State Government try to spin it, ramming up the training numbers at Levy's Beach to industrial levels was all about appeasing Weir.

Racing Minister Martin Pakula said as much in his very public face slap to the council last October:

“Council really needs to decide whether it wants a commercial

horse training industry in the City of Warrnambool or it does not...If it doesn't, it should just say so, because trainers like Darren Weir – and others – have plenty of options.”
Warrnambool Standard, Oct 30, 2018

Mr Pakula has never actually detailed these other “options”, because there is no other beach in Australia where racehorses can run up and down the dunes en masse. There is a simple reason for this – dunes damage easily.

But who cares about that minor detail, the ~~blackmail~~ message was clear: No Weir, no Warrnambool racing industry.



A Weir horse training illegally on so-called “Hoon Hill” at Levy’s Beach in 2013, before the permit system was introduced. Original image Nicole Garmston, Herald Sun.

Parks Victoria originally thought **65 racehorses a day across**

the whole 22km stretch of the Belfast Coastal Reserve might be a reasonable number.

This was [the number it came up with in 2016](#), before the Belfast Coastal Management Reserve Plan was developed in 2018.

It turns out Parks Victoria was hopelessly naive.

As of last year, Warrnambool had about 250-300 racehorses in training: of those, Weir trained about 100 and counting.

A total of 65 horses training across the whole reserve was never going to cut it for Weir's mega-stable.

It wasn't even close.

So when the Belfast Coastal Reserve Management Plan hit the decks last July, the daily number had suddenly *more than doubled* – **to 160** – and all of the racehorses (apart from some 'historic' trainers near Killarney) would be poured into Levy's Beach, just 10 minutes from Weir's Warrnambool stables.

The stretch of wild beach with its threatened Hooded Plover population and fragile dune system had become the sacrificial lamb to Weir's ambitions.



Weir horses training illegally on so-called “Hoon Hill” at Levy’s Beach in 2013, before the permit system was introduced. Original image Nicole Garmston, Herald Sun.

Weir the Invincible. Mr Magic. Mr Superstar who won \$33 million in prize money in just 12 months.

And now we know behind all of the “magic” was something terrible and cruel.

There was no secret tonic in the dunes.

They found three tasers in Weir’s bedroom.

Weir’s demise has exposed the rotten core to a career that no doubt began with hard work and heart, but which veered

dangerously off course.

Because the tasers – and the criminal charges that may be yet to come – [follow a string of convictions against Weir](#) under the rules of racing, especially around the illegal use of anti-inflammatories and pumping horses pre-race with bi-carb soda in a practice known as “tubing”.

But such was Weir’s dazzling success, everybody looked the other way, even when his rapid rise seemed to pass the realms of the explainable.

“No Weir, no Warrnambool racing industry”: that was the only message.

And now there is no Weir.



The end result of a major racehorse training workout at Lady Bay, Warrnambool, where up to 96 horses a day were permitted to run.

So what does this mean for our dunes and our wild beach?

Is it business as usual, keep moving, nothing to see here?

Surely not.

Surely the game is up. Surely now, as Cr Michael Neoh hinted last week, Levy's is not needed and allowing local trainers to continue to access the ever-shrinking beach at Lady Bay is more than enough?

We no longer need the carpark graders to move into Levy's and Spookies, do we?

We no longer need to keep explaining that 800 horses a week running along a stretch of beach (including 200 up and down a dune) in a coastal reserve will destroy it, do we?

The Warrnambool Racing Club and Racing Victoria are no longer going to rely on a great lie – rather than environmentally stringent plans – to sustain our local racing industry, are they?

If the answers to these last three questions are yes, yes and yes, then our local racing industry really is doomed and it has nothing to do with Weir this time, but our own collective stupidity at letting it happen.

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