

WRC to WCC: Hi Bruce, can you help us out of a bind?



Former W'bool City Council CEO Bruce Anson and former W'bool Racing Club CEO Peter Downs. (Original images via WCC and Racing.com)

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

It's fascinating to see the conversations that go on behind the scenes between the powerful, like an exchange between the former CEO of the Warrnambool City Council, Bruce Anson, and the former CEO of the Warrnambool Racing Club, Peter Downs.

It is a brief exchange – and released only through Freedom of Information of course – but it says so much.

It reveals that Mr Downs met with Mr Anson on Thursday 8 February 2018 with a problem.

The problem was that racehorse training along a section of Port Fairy's East Beach was no longer possible because, wait

for it, those pesky Hooded Plovers had turned up and made it “unworkable” for the racehorses.

But Mr Downs had an idea, which he put to Mr Anson in writing after their catch up: what about giving permission for 50 racehorses to use Lady Bay from Monday 12 February, from dawn until 8am?

Under the council rules, racehorse training at Lady Bay did not normally start until 1 March.

There is a very good reason for this, as Mr Downs acknowledges: “We understand that there are other beach users using this area at this season of the year”.

(That season of the year is called summer and funnily enough there are loads of “beach users” who like to use Warrnambool’s main beach in summer.)

From: Peter Downs [mailto:p.downs@countryracing.com.au]
Sent: Thursday, 8 February 2018 4:00 PM
To: Bruce Anson
Cc: Jamie McGuinness; Scott Whiteman
Subject: Horses on Beach request

Hi Bruce,

Thanks for meeting with Jamie, Scott and I today.

As per the meeting, we are very hopeful you can help us out of a bind in a quick turnaround.

Due to some nesting of hooded plovers on the East Beach in the licensed area, the beach for the sake of horse training has become unusable due to only 250m of beach to use before having to walk for 150m then 200m beach before a turn around and repeat process.

We are requesting WCC allow a restricted number (50) horses a day to access lady bay beach in the regular prescribed area effective Monday 12th February. We understand there are other beach users using this area at this season of the year; however, we would ensure that beach work only takes place from first light to 8am, instead of the regular 10am finish time.

I am hopeful WCC can do a form of circular resolution via email through your councillors to achieve the outcome.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Regards,

Peter Downs
Chief Executive Officer
Section 33(1)
p.downs@countryracing.com.au



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Not only did Mr Downs think having 50 racehorses training on Lady Bay in summer was a great idea, he also hoped the council could make it happen with just four days' turnaround from his meeting with Mr Anson.

How? Well, "a circular resolution via email" to councillors.

Excuse me?

No meeting of councillors? No discussion with the public? Not even a notice in the Saturday newspaper?

Was Mr Downs seriously suggesting the council could change the rules by flicking an email around to councillors for a

“yes” or a “no”?

You would expect Mr Anson, as CEO, to have clutched his belly, laughed out loud and spluttered “Don’t be so bloody ridiculous Peter!”

But no.

Mr Anson got straight on to it, to see if it could be done.

Section 33(1)
From: @warrnambool.vic.gov.au
Sent: 9 Feb 2018 19:00:27 +1100
To: Peter Downs <p.downs@countryracing.com.au>
Cc: **Section 33(1)**
Subject: Horses on beach

Dear Peter

Thank you for the catch-up yesterday and your subsequent request by email to allow a restricted number (50) horses a day to access the Lady Bay beach effective Monday 12th February from first light to 8am. Unfortunately your request cannot be met in this instance due to Schedule 3.3 of Local Law 3.30 which prohibits horses on the Lady Bay beach outside the dates of March 1 to November 30. A change to the Local Law would therefore trigger a process (including consultation with the community) which cannot be met inside your nominated timelines. Sorry I cannot assist in this instance.

BRUCE ANSON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Sent from my iPad

Within 24 hours Mr Anson had replied to Mr Downs, having done something that the council should have done when the WRC also wanted to access Levy’s Beach for racehorse training – he checked the council laws.

Lo and behold, it is illegal under local laws to bend the rules around racehorse training at Lady Bay without consulting the public.

Who would have thought? Fancy not being able to change a local

law via Snapchat or WhatsApp, how inconvenient.

“Sorry I cannot assist in this instance,” Mr Anson wrote in his reply to Mr Downs via his ipad.

In this instance.

Ah, the power of three little words.

Mr Anson is no longer CEO, but the councillors are due to vote again on large-scale racehorse training at Levy’s Beach/Spooky’s Beach which, you may recall, [was also found to be illegal under council laws and saw the Planning Minister step in to make it legal.](#)

A sunset clause on the whole mess lapsed on 30 November last year, so each councillor will once again have to decide where they stand on the issue which continues to divide the community.

The first council meeting of the year is next Monday...and the election is in October.

Stay tuned.

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