



## Information Sheet - Horseriding Proposals

### Draft Joint Management Plan for Barmah National Park

The Yorta Yorta Traditional Owner Land Management Board has released a Draft Joint Management Plan for Barmah National Park for public comment. The Draft Joint Management Plan proposes restrictions on recreational horseriding in the National Park. This information sheet provides background on the proposed changes. The proposed changes are subject to the outcomes of public consultation on the Draft Plan.

#### What is proposed?

The Draft Joint Management Plan proposes that:

- recreational horseriding will no longer be allowed in the National Park except on Sand Ridge Track from Rice's Bridge to access the Community Use Area during permitted events
- existing tour operator licences and other permits that may be affected by the proposed changes to horseriding access will be reviewed. Tour operator licences that conflict with the Joint Management Plan will not be renewed at the end of their current term.

Refer to Sections 10 and 11 of the Draft Joint Management Plan.

#### Background to the proposals

1. The highest priority of the Joint Management Plan is to restore the health of the Country in the National Park, consistent with the legal requirements of the National Parks Act and the cultural obligations of Yorta Yorta.
2. Horses as non-native animals are not allowed to be brought into Victorian national parks except where areas are specifically designated to allow them, or under a permit, or in a vehicle that is in transit. Horseriding is not allowed or restricted to small areas in most of Victoria's 45 national parks.
3. Horseriding has been allowed in Barmah National Park since the National Park's proclamation in 2010 but this has been in the absence of a national park management plan and as the continuation of a pre-existing activity.
4. Barmah National Park's fragile and internationally significant wetlands and the frequent flooding of other areas of the National Park including roads and tracks, makes the National Park vulnerable to the impacts of horses. Extensive environmental damage to wetlands has been caused by feral horses and other feral animals, and the government is investing substantial effort and resources in an intensive program to remove feral horses from the National Park, and control pigs, goats, rabbits and other invasive animals.
5. There are nearby alternative areas for horseriding which are not subject to the same levels of environmental and cultural heritage protection as Barmah National Park. These include the Murray River Reserve (proposed Murray River Park) including the Barmah Island area close to the western edge of the National Park, the Ulupna Island area of the Murray River Reserve to

the east, and the Community Use Area and Barmah Muster Yards for permitted events. The recent River Red Gum Parks Management Plan (2018) establishes that access for horseriding in these areas of the Murray River Reserve will continue for the 15-year life of that plan.

## **Questions and answers**

*Didn't the Victorian government decide to allow horseriding in national parks as part of the previous River Red Gum Forests Investigation undertaken by VEAC (the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council)?*

The Yorta Yorta Traditional Owner Land Management Board must comply with legislation (eg the National Parks Act) but it is able to propose changes to previous government policies for Barmah National Park. The final Joint Management Plan must be approved by the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change who will take into account the outcomes of public consultation.

*What is the evidence of damage by recreational horseriding?*

The proposals in the Draft Plan are not based on evidence of damage by recreational horseriding. The proposals are a precautionary approach that recognises that horses are non-native animals that have the potential to do damage, especially in the fragile marshes of Barmah which are internationally significant as habitat for waterbirds and fish. Evidence of damage by feral horses and other non-native animals in the marsh areas of the National Park has been documented extensively by Parks Victoria in its Strategic Action Plan for protecting the marshes, released for public comment in April this year.

*How will horseriding tour operator licences be affected?*

Horseriding licensed tour operators will be allowed to continue to operate in the National Park on open roads and tracks for the remainder of the term of their current licence. Under the proposals no new horseriding tour operator licences will be issued and existing horseriding tour operator licences will not be renewed. The Yorta Yorta Traditional Owner Land Management Board will work with Parks Victoria to help tour operators obtain licensed access to the Murray River Reserve and other public land areas if they require it.

*How will horseriding clubs and individual riders be affected?*

Horseriding clubs and individual riders will not be allowed to ride in the National Park but can continue to ride in the Barmah Island area of the Murray River Reserve adjacent to the western end of Barmah National Park, and the Murray River Reserve adjacent to the eastern end of the National Park near Ulupna Island.

*How will the proposals affect the annual Barmah Muster?*

Under the proposals the Barmah Muster - which is held in the Community Use Area outside the National Park – can continue. The proposals allow for horseriding along Sand Ridge Track from Rice's Bridge to access the Community Use Area for permitted events such as the Muster. The permit activities for the Muster will be reviewed as part of a review of all permits affected by changes to allowable activities once the final Joint Management Plan is approved. The nearby Barmah Island area of the Murray River Reserve will continue to be available for horseriding as part of the Muster, and at other times.

**August 2019**