**Overview**

The Belfast Coastal Reserve Management Plan strikes a balance between protecting the environmental values of the reserve, while maintaining opportunities for use and recreation. The plan outlines the establishment of two zones within the reserve to ensure conservation of its unique values, while also providing for recreation and enjoyment.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**1. Where is the Conservation Zone and what activities are permitted?**

The Conservation Zone covers a central area of the reserve and will protect highly significant environmental and cultural values, while allowing for visitor activities that are focused on nature appreciation. Horse-riding, dog-walking and high-disturbance activities are prohibited within this area.

Location: The dunes in the central part of the reserve from east of Pelicans through to the west of Hoon Hill, extending five metres seaward from the base of those dunes (refer to Maps 2 to 4).

**Where is the Conservation and Recreation Zone and what activities are permitted?**

The Conservation and Recreation Zone is locatedat each end of the reserve and along the foreshore of the entire reserve. Permitted recreational activities include walking dogs on lead, recreational horse riding, and in some areas, commercial horse training with permit conditions.

Location: The entire foreshore of the reserve up to five meters from the base of the dunes, and the far western area of the reserve (the western extent of the reserve to the dunes at Pelicans), continuing again in the far eastern area of the reserve (east of Hoon Hill to the eastern extent of the reserve) (refer to Maps 2 to 4).

**What will happen if people ignore these zones?**

Compliance around the activities permitted in these zones will be monitored.

The plan includes an option to increase protections and prohibit certain activities if there are concerns about non-compliance.

**How does the management plan differ from the draft plan?**

In response to feedback received during the consultation period, a number of changes have been made to the plan to balance the values of the reserve with the many views about the reserve and how it is used and managed.

These include:

* the area where commercial horse training is permitted has been reduced to Levys Beach and Hoon Hill. Horse training will no longer be permitted at Golfies.
* the area of the Conservation and Recreation Zone has been increased to allow for greater recreation opportunities. Recreational horse riding and dog walking (on lead only) is now permitted throughout the entire length of the foreshore (from the water’s edge to five metres from the base of the dunes). A Special Management Area Overlay has been introduced to identify environmentally and culturally significant areas within the Conservation and Recreation Zone.
* windsurfing and kitesurfing are permitted in the Belfast Lough.

Changes to the draft plan were based on feedback received during the consultation period. All feedback received was carefully considered and the final management plan proposes various ways to limit conflicts between environmental and cultural values, and to balance recreational use and enjoyment of the reserve.

**Where can I walk my dog in the reserve?**

Dog walking is popular around the Belfast Coastal Reserve, but there are concerns that uncontrolled dogs are a threat to beach-nesting birds. As such, dogs are permitted on-leash in the Conservation and Recreation Zone including the entire length of the foreshore (from the water’s edge to five metres from the base of the dunes). Dogs are prohibited in the Conservation Zone other than on designated tracks.

Unleashed dogs are a known threat to shorebirds, including the Hooded Plover. These new leashing regulations will bring the Belfast Coastal Reserve in line with other beaches in Victoria that provide habitat for threatened species. By controlling the threats from unleashed dogs, we can increase breeding success of the Hooded Plover.

**How will shorebirds and other environmental and cultural values be protected from commercial horse training?**

To ensure that important plants, animals and habitat systems are protected, the plan’s Conservation Zone prohibits horses, dogs, vehicles, hunting and other activities that could threaten environmental values.

In particular, Parks Victoria will work with BirdLife Australia to support volunteers to monitor and help protect Hooded Plover habitat and breeding sites within the reserve; collect and analyse data about management effectiveness; and to help educate groups that use the reserve about shorebirds.

Horse training licence conditions will be used to regulate numbers of horses and possible conflicts with beach-nesting birds. Current permit conditions include the requirements that:

* horses be slowed to a walking pace within 50 metres of marked or known Hooded Plover sites.
* when passing any known Hooded Plover nest sites, horses are walked only by the water’s edge, maintaining the maximum separation distance allowed by the beach width.

**What will be the extent of commercial horse training allowed?**

DELWP will issue a licence to the Warrnambool Racing Club to allow commercial horse training at Levys Beach and Hoon Hill from first light to 11am, Monday to Friday, all year. This will be the only place in the reserve where commercial horse training will be permitted.

The licence will allow a maximum of 120 horses per day on the foreshore at Levys Beach and 40 horses per day in the dune at Hoon Hill. Horse training licence conditions will be used to regulate horse numbers and possible conflicts with beach-nesting birds.

**When will the new Warrnambool Racing Club licence be finalised?**

Talks are continuing between Parks Victoria, DELWP and Warrnambool City Council to finalise the conditions of the Warrnambool Racing Club licence to train at Levys Beach and Hoon Hill.

Clear enforcement provisions to ensure compliance with licence conditions will be included in the new licence. In the meantime, the current licence to the Warrnambool Racing Club has been extended and is due to expire mid-September 2018.

**How will the licence conditions be monitored?**

Parks Victoria, with support from DELWP, will closely monitor compliance with licence conditions. There will be a clear protocol for enforcement measures outlining avenues for escalation of non-compliance and a range of sanctions that will be applied if non-compliance occurs. Parks Victoria, Warrnambool City Council and Moyne Shire Council will work together on a joint approach for enforcement to ensure a robust process is in place and that there is consistency to compliance.

Failure to comply with licence conditions can result in fines, eviction from the beach, licence cancellation and prosecution. Warrnambool Racing Club will also be accountable for ensuring trainers minimise their impact on the area’s environmental and cultural heritage values and meet all licence conditions.

The new licence will also require the Warrnambool Racing Club to provide a supervisor at Levys Beach and Hoon Hill to ensure trainers abide by licence conditions. Additionally, Parks Victoria is increasing the number of rangers in the reserve, and together with partner agencies, will conduct regular patrols of the reserve to deter breaches and respond to non-compliance.Parks Victoria will work closely with the Warrnambool Racing Club to ensure that trainers are aware of the licence conditions, respect the values within the reserve, and behave accordingly.

**What will be the extent of historical horse training allowed?**

A small number of local trainers have historically used Killarney Beach and the beach at Rutledge’s Cutting. These trainers will be given the opportunity to apply for a licence to continue to train horses in the same locations and manner as they have done in the past. Licence conditions will minimise the potential impact on the reserve’s environmental, cultural and social values. Applications will be thoroughly assessed by Parks Victoria, DELWP and Moyne Shire (Killarney).

To ensure fair and equitable access, trainers that are licenced to use Killarney or Rutledge’s Cutting will not be licenced to use Levys Beach or Hoon Hill.

Historical trainers are local horse trainers who have a history of using Belfast Coastal Reserve over several years prior to 2008 with only a small number of horses.

**What will be the extent of recreational horse riding allowed?**

Recreational horse riding is popular around the Belfast Coastal Reserve, but there are concerns that horses are a threat to beach-nesting birds.

Recreational horse riding is permitted in the Conservation and Recreation Zone including the entire length of the foreshore (from the water’s edge to five metres from the base of the dunes). Horse riding is prohibited in the Conservation Zone. Horses can use designated access tracks to move through the dunes in the Conservation Zone to access the Conservation and Recreation Zone along the foreshore.

*For more information, download the Belfast Coastal Management Plan from this website, or email queries to parkplan@parks.vic.gov.au*