

## **Equestrian Sport & the Environment – Working Together.**

Tim Flannery's "Australian of the Year" award for his contribution to the environmental and climate debate is a certain sign that our government is beginning to take environmental issues more seriously. As one of the world's leading writer-scientists and thinkers and an internationally-acclaimed explorer and environmentalist, Tim has shown that human activity is drastically altering Earth's climate and that these changes will have a devastating effect of life on this planet.

So, how does the environmental and climate debate affect equestrian sport?

### **Global warming**

In the midst of the current 'worst ever' drought, horse owners are faced with escalating feed costs and having to sell off stock, while drought affected horses may suffer from sand and dirt ingestion and parasitic or infectious diseases due to a lower immunity level from reduced nutrition.

And, of course, there is the all-important water consideration – not only for direct consumption including the preparation and care of riding surfaces for training and competition but also for the irrigation of harvestable crops used for production of horse feed. Precise management of our water resources is required to ensure that – even when we're not in drought – feed prices, particularly of lucerne products, do not continue to rise.

Many of us have been touched by bushfires over the last few years – it is a frightening experience moving horses in the face of emergency. Bushfires also adds to pasture degradation and increases the likelihood of erosion and further reduction of a healthy horse environment.

### **Increasing urbanisation**

As the 'urban sprawl' continues around our capital cities and up and down the coast, land values rise, rates rise and the space we used to have for our horses gets squeezed until it is no longer viable to agist close to home. While there are areas close to the capital city centres that do have horse facilities – the costs are prohibitive to many of us.

We all know that horses and cars don't mix, and build up of traffic in these increasingly urbanised areas (without suitable public transport infrastructure) makes riding out an increasingly dangerous proposition. Similarly many of our once loved quiet riding trails are subject to motorbike use, which can be a terrifying experience for horses that are not "bomb proof".

### **The conservation movement**

Community focus on environmental issues has seen increasing pressure to ban horse riding from certain recreation areas (including National Parks, Nature Reserves and Wilderness areas) due to the 'damage' they inflict on the environment when moving through. In some states access to these areas by horses is currently prohibited. As the conservation movement increases more areas may be taken away from the recreational riding enthusiast.

### **Natural resources**

Moving horses by road requires powerful vehicles. Unfortunately, they use a lot of fuel. The rising price of fuel over the last 18 months has made many potential competitors think twice about travelling to compete with their horses.

Increasing costs, fewer areas for riding and an increased focus on the effects of our riding on the environment are just some of the things to consider for the equestrian community. We have to find ways that will reverse or at least lessen the effects of the environment on our sport. Let's work together and find solutions.

(Breakout Box) If you have any ideas of how we can lessen the effects of environmental changes on horse sports – or ways in which we can lessen our impact on the environment with horses – please send an email to [info@efanational.com](mailto:info@efanational.com) or write to EFA National Office, PO Box 673, SYDNEY MARKETS, NSW, 2129.