

**Berry Equestrian Centre
Submission
to the
NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure

regarding the proposed
Foxground and Berry Bypass Project**

**17 December 2012
Berry Riding Club
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Secretary
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Submission to the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure

This submission concerns the impact of the proposed Foxground and Berry Bypass on the Berry Equestrian Centre which is located in North Street, Berry.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Berry Equestrian Centre (BEC) is part of the Shoalhaven City Council's Berry Sporting Complex and is a dedicated high quality equestrian facility servicing the Berry and wider Illawarra, Shoalhaven and South Coast riding community. It provides the means to carry on equestrian activities in a proximate and convenient location within the township of Berry and is a major contributor to the tourist attraction of the area.

The Berry Riding Club Inc (BRC) as the principal user of BEC recognises and supports RMS in improving traffic flow and safety on the Princes Highway in the Foxground – Berry area, however BRC has serious concerns that the proposed reduction of area, and realignment of the current BEC site in North Street, Berry and proximity to a high speed highway and other facilities will have a detrimental impact on the ability of BRC and BEC to service the community, increase the risks to riders, horses and the public, and accordingly is contrary to the public interest.

Moreover, BRC believes that the current Environmental Assessment (EA) does not adequately assess the impact of the project on the BEC site, nor does it provide enough information to allow an informed assessment of the project impacts, particularly in respect to noise and startling of horses during competition and training. Based on the limited information on the impacts contained in the EA, the BRC now doubts that the current BEC site would be able to be modified to maintain the current level of service and safety to the BRC.

Therefore, this submission requests that RMS prepare an Options Paper for the BEC site which examines a more suitable site for BEC within close proximity to Berry. The BRC commits to working with the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, RMS and Council on finding an alternate site for the BEC.

The Berry Equestrian Centre

Horse ownership and equestrian training and competition are a lifestyle activity synonymous with the South Coast. As with many sports, the Illawarra, Shoalhaven and South Coast is a nursery for professional talent and international representatives.

The Berry Equestrian Centre has been a dedicated equestrian area for nearly 20 years and currently caters for the regular activities of the following equestrian Clubs

- The Berry Riding Club Inc is the principal user of the grounds and caters for riders ranging in age of between 4 years and 70 years. It has approximately 200 members;
- Woodhill Mountain Pony Club catering for riders 5 years to 18 years. It has a membership of approximately 25 young riders.

BEC also caters for visiting Clubs and recently hosted a training weekend for the Bowral camp-drafting group. It is also the grounds used by the Shoalhaven Show Jumping Club.

The Berry Riding Club Inc

BRC has been operating for the past 6 years and has averaged 200 active members per year with membership growing. It conducts in excess of 40 events per year based on the Olympic disciplines and provides riders with the opportunities to undertake training, coaching and competition at their particular level of ability. There is no other multi-discipline equestrian club like Berry Riding Club that exists between Sydney and Moruya (nor on the Southern Highlands) – consequently it has a widespread of membership with some members travelling significant distances to attend events.

The Club motto is "Riding Fun for Everyone". It maintains a website with a listing of past activities together with a calendar of future major events. Refer to www.berryridingclub.com

Using regulated equipment BRC regularly conducts training days with highly qualified coaches, for example: Chris Chugg - Australian Show Jumping Champion; Peter Gillis – previous member of the NSW Institute of Sport Equestrian team; approved Equestrian Australian Show Jumping Judges training clinics with Jan Golding, an International accredited judge; Colleen Brook – Australian Show Jumping representative; and various A Level Dressage Judges.

Regular dressage and show jumping competitions are held.

BRC is also very community spirited and has assisted with the following activities.

- Loaning of dressage and show jumping gear to Berry Public School for the past 5 years to hold an Inter-school Equestrian Championship which has to date raised \$24,000 for the school;
- Conducting an annual Pink Ribbon Horse Festival for the past 4 years, with \$9000 donated to the National Breast Cancer Foundation;
- Loaning of gear to the local Pony Club to conduct events - profit to Pony Club from functions \$6000.

Current Proposal for BEC

As a result of loss of BEC land, RMS has proposed to acquire adjacent land as part of a compensatory package. Whilst the BRC appreciates such offers by RMS, it is now concerned that regardless of the package offered by RMS, the BEC facility will be degraded by the proposal and may not result in the site being acceptable for the current level of competition currently undertaken there.

There are three main aspects of the proposal that concern the BRC as discussed below:

1. Reduced Land Size and Orientation

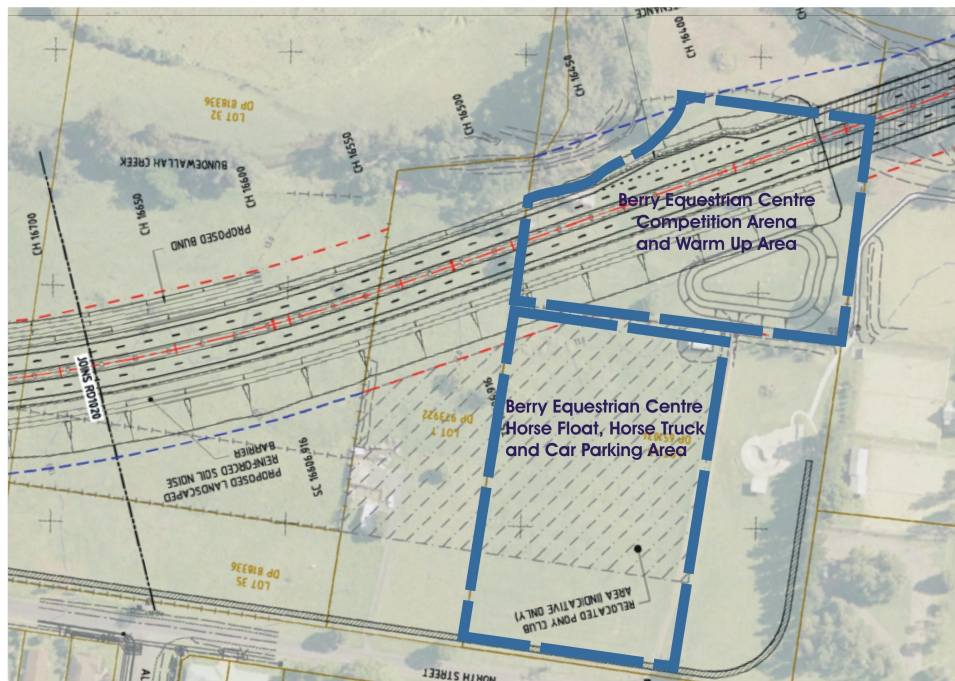
The design and loss of land of the proposed relocation of BEC to a reduced part of the existing site will detrimentally affect the riders, spectators and community as a whole.

It is in the public interest that BEC continue to provide dedicated grounds that cater to no less than the present capacity and service the community. The proposal with the reduced area and realignment of activities will restrict and likely prevent the ability of user groups to conduct equestrian events of even the current size and would certainly constrain the ability to hold any larger events or grow the club. For instance, although the Berry Public School Inter-school Equestrian Championship is organised from Berry, due to its size it has to be held at grounds some 45 minutes away which requires considerable effort transporting all of the dressage, sporting and show jumping equipment required for such an event. It is held over a 3 day long weekend and attracts nearly 200 competitors who travel from as far as the Northern beaches of Sydney, Bega in the South and Canberra in the West.

The size and condition of the grounds required to adequately conduct the events that are presently held at BEC are:

- The competition grounds are required to be rectangular /square in shape of a minimum size of 140 metres x 140 metres with a level, well drained, good riding surface in order to cater for at least 4 dressage arenas or 2 show jumping arena's;
- The parking area is required to be of a minimum area equivalent to 90 metres x 160 metres and allow for easy entry, manoeuvrability, parking and exit of horse floats and trucks. A generous amount of space between vehicles is a must. Each parking space is equivalent to an absolute minimum of 4 to 6 normal vehicle spaces due to the need for unloading/loading and tie up areas for horses. When vehicles with horses tied up next to them are located too close to one another, the risk of injury to people and other horses is increased substantially. Horses are a flight animal and are often easily spooked and break from their tie. A horse running loose in between vehicles that are closely stacked together in a parking area can pose quite a danger.

Shown below is the current layout of BEC bordered in blue, overlaid on the drawings of the proposed Bypass route. The hatched area shows the proposed relocated, realignment of the competition and parking area which is estimated to be approximately half the area currently available.



2. Safety

There is concern for the safety of horses, riders and the general public due to the near location of the proposed riding area to the four lane expressway, the skateway, the public cycleway/walkway and to North Street. These are incompatible land uses for the following reasons:

Horses are a flight animal, and can be spooked by noise and moving objects with disastrous effects. There will be anticipated significantly increased noise and visibility of cars and trucks travelling at 100km/hour on the bypass with horses competing nearby, often with young and inexperienced riders. Accordingly, horses, riders and spectators may be subject to an increased level of potential to injury should a horse be spooked by external activities occurring quite close to the riding arena. These are not uncommon events and BRC can provide extensive examples of horses being spooked and causing serious injury. Currently the competition arena is located in a very quiet area away from other distractions.

The EA does not consider the impact of noise or traffic on horses in competition or training and BRC is unable to determine the exact extent of these impacts. However, the BRC is aware that for sites such as the Sydney International Equestrian Centre, there are 5 metre noise barriers along the M7 even though the competition areas are around 200m from the boundary and are located at significantly reduced topographic levels compared to the road. BRC accepts that it is unlikely to be desirable to install 5 metre noise barriers along a long section of the Bypass to protect against noise and the tops of passing trucks.

3. Incompatible Adjoining Land Uses

As well as the proposal for the Bypass, there are proposals for additional community facilities such as cycleways. Whilst BRC supports the provision of these facilities, they are not necessarily compatible with activities undertaken at the BEC.

Access to the grounds is likely to be across a public shared cycleway/pathway. The safety of children riding skateboards, bicycles etc on adjacent land are at risk as horse trucks and floats cross the pathway access. Horse floats and trucks also require an indented driveway of at least 15 metres to allow vehicles to park safely off the roadway whilst gates to the grounds are opened and closed. Vehicles come and go continuously throughout the days when competitions are held as people know when their riding times are and arrive to suit that time. They then leave after they have competed. Competition days are usually on weekends, when the cycleway/pathway usage is also likely to be at its greatest.

As well as the provision of Council facilities, the non profit sporting clubs that utilise the Equestrian Centre have put significant effort and funds raised from their activities into improvements at the Centre. This includes:

- Improving the grounds through levelling and backfilling with hundreds of tonnes of sand in order to make a good all weather riding surface;
- Construction of an administration/shelter shed for officials, canteen and spectator viewing area;
- Construction of a machinery shed for storage of dressage and show jumping trailers and equipment;
- Location of container and construction of a storage annex for pony club gear and secondary show jumping equipment;

- Installation of safety fencing to protect riders and horses from falling into the adjoining creek and gully;
- Installation of gates to adjoining paddocks to be used as a warm up area.

In addition there are a number of plans to improve the BEC which are now on hold because of the proposal.

Pros and Cons of Maintaining the Current BEC Site

The Current Site

There are a number of benefits of the current location for the Berry Equestrian Centre. These include without limitation:

- The competition arena is located away from other distractions such as the skateway, roads and other public facilities;
- There is easy access to the site for people coming from either North, South, East or West of Berry;
- Horse float parking and manoeuvrability of vehicles is easily accomplished with allowance for adequate spacing between vehicles at most events;
- Storage of dressage, show jumping and pony club equipment is securely held on the current site;
- It is located next to the Berry Sporting Complex so whilst it is a reasonable distance to walk there is access to toilets and other amenities;
- It is in close proximity to the Berry township which is of benefit to visiting participants both prior to and after events;
- Overnight yarding of horses is currently available at the Berry Showground which is only minutes away;
- The Club Committee members live within 5 minutes as numerous trips are required to unlock access gates and transport ancillary canteen equipment etc to events;
- Prior to the proposal to impact the BEC there was the ability to expand the site and improve the facilities.

Moving to a New Site

Selection of a new location in close proximity to Berry could offer significant advantages to both RMS and users of the BEC. These could be summarised as:

- Location away from noise and other distractions;
- Design the BEC with a view to future expansion;
- Improve the safety for all users and spectators;
- Improve parking;
- Improve the facilities of the BEC and the asset to the community;
- Reduces the need for noise barriers and bunds.

Furthermore, the BRC is aware that RMS has other nearby land that may be suitable for such a site and would largely overcome many of the issues raised in this submission.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The Berry Riding Club Inc (BRC) as the principal user of the Berry Equestrian Centre (BEC) acknowledges and supports improvements to the Princes Highway.

However the project proposed by RMS has the ability to significantly impact on the viability and safety of the BRC and the BEC. As one of the most affected entities as a result of the proposal, the BRC requests that the Director General of the Department of Planning and Infrastructure condition any approval for the Berry Bypass to include:

- An Options Paper be prepared with input from BRC that examines not only modifications to the current BEC site, but also examines and proposes an alternate site to which the BEC could be relocated.
- RMS commit to ensuring that equestrian facilities will be relocated / re-established to a level acceptable to the BRC.
- Furthermore the BRC request that should the parties disagree on relocation or the provision of new / relocated equestrian facilities, that the Director General of the Department and Planning and Infrastructure facilitate a resolution.

The BRC believes that if managed properly, not only will road user safety be significantly improved, but there is also the opportunity to improve the equestrian facilities in Berry and provide the opportunity to construct an Equestrian Centre of Excellence for the community of the Illawarra, Shoalhaven and the South Coast.

We look forward to working together to make this vision a reality.