

# Equine in Nillumbik

2020 - 2030



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# Executive Summary

*Equine in Nillumbik* (the “Plan”) is a plan that responds to the *Nillumbik Shire Council Plan 2017-2021* that lists the development of an Equine Industry and Activity Plan as a priority action. It outlines the Shire’s strong history in equine, discusses the status of the sector and opportunities to be explored to increase participation, promotes support for equine economic development and identifies the opportunity to address the challenges of land care, pest and emergency management through collaboration.

Horses feature prominently in the history and foundation of Nillumbik. Early settlers used horses for transport in addition to many industries including forestry, gold mining, agriculture and construction of infrastructure such as the railroad. Horse ownership remains a significant part of Nillumbik life today. Horses have transitioned from being part of the local workforce to a sporting and recreational pursuit.

Since this transition, horse riding has grown in popularity to be one of the most popular recreation activities in the Shire.<sup>1</sup>

Nillumbik is home to 12 local trail, adult, pony and all-abilities clubs. Founded in 1953, the Eltham District Horse and Pony Club is one of the oldest pony clubs in Victoria. Almost exclusively a rural pursuit, which differentiates it from most other recreational activities in Nillumbik. Recreational riders share trail infrastructure with other users such as walkers, joggers and bike riders. Horse riding provides a social activity for locals and visitors who ride local trails, attend riding schools and/or participate in clubs.

Some residents have chosen to live in Nillumbik due to the availability of suitable land for keeping horses on their own property, in close proximity to Melbourne, and the accessibility to local trails and clubs.<sup>2</sup>

Sport and Recreation Victoria estimates there are approximately 55,000 participants in equestrian sports in Victoria, of which 79 percent are female. A 2016 study shows that the equestrian sector contributes \$1.143 billion to the Australian economy each year<sup>3</sup>. The equine sector has positive economic and social benefits for Nillumbik with the total economic impact of approximately \$16.9 million per annum.<sup>4</sup>

Equine activities encourage a healthy outdoor lifestyle, a connection with nature and social connectivity. These activities have been recognised as providing health benefits to people with mental and physical disabilities.<sup>5</sup> At present, the majority of riders in Nillumbik are female – women and girls of various ages who are often under-represented in organised sport.

This plan is related to other Council plans, policies and strategies in facilitating well-being, recreation, tourism and economic development (see figure 1).

The development of this Plan included consultation undertaken with the equine and broader community. Outcomes from this consultation facilitated the development of a Strength Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis to determine key focus areas and an equine action plan.

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1 [https://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/council/council-publications/strategies-etc/recreation\\_strategy\\_2011-2019.pdf](https://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/council/council-publications/strategies-etc/recreation_strategy_2011-2019.pdf)

2 Consultation with Nillumbik Horse Action Group, 2019

3 <https://www.equestrian.org.au/news/equestrian-brings-more-1billion-economy>

4 p. iv AECOM Nillumbik Equine Industry & Activity Plan July 2019

5 <https://elcr.org/horsesandhumanhealth/>



The SWOT identified:

- A strong alignment between the rural characteristics of the Shire, such as open spaces and equine as a sporting and recreational pursuit
- Risk associated with riders sharing public roads with motorists
- An opportunity to investigate the sharing of infrastructure between clubs
- Opportunity for Council to work with the sector to deliver land, pest and emergency management information and support for the equine community

The plan seeks to capitalise on opportunities to improve economic, social and environmental outcomes for the community. This will require the equine sector - inclusive of clubs, Nillumbik Horse Action Group (NHAG), recreational riders and business to collaborate with Council and other stakeholders.

Based on the research the Plan identifies five key focus areas for the equine sector in Nillumbik:

- Participation and sustainability
- Maximising existing infrastructure and volunteer efforts
- Supporting equine economic development
- Safe shared trails network
- Land, pest and emergency management.



# Relationship to other Council strategies and plans

The Council Plan *Living in the Landscape 2017-2021* lists the development of an Equine Industry and Activity Plan as a priority action. This Plan has been created to deliver this action by outlining the Shire's strong history in equine, status of the sector and opportunities to be explored to increase economic, social and environmental benefits through collaboration.

This Plan supports other actions of the Council Plan<sup>6</sup> in its vision for Nillumbik to become Australia's most livable Shire with:

- Engaged, connected communities
- Active and creative people
- Safe and healthy environments
- A prosperous economy
- Responsible leadership

Outcomes of actions within this Plan facilitate the aspirations of the Council Plan *Living in the Landscape 2017-2021* and existing Council strategies and plans such as the *Green Wedge Management Plan*, *Nillumbik Economic Development Strategy 2020 -2030*, *Trails Strategy* and *Recreation Strategy*. Working in harmony, these and other strategic initiatives will assist in the community and visitors realising greater benefits.

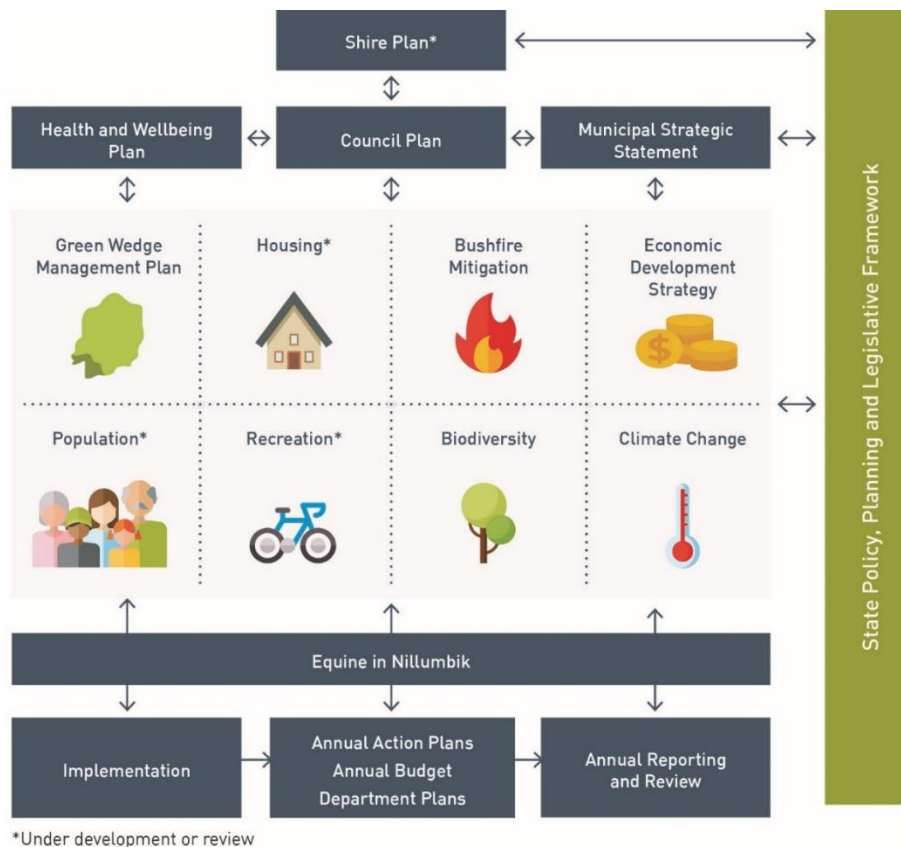


Figure 1. Nillumbik policy, plans and strategy framework

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/Council/Council-publications/Strategies-policies-and-legislation>

# The equine community in Nillumbik

## Background

The methodology used for development of this Plan includes inputs from:

- A public workshop attended by approximately 70 participants
- A trails consultation session with the Nillumbik Horse Action Group (NHAG)
- Analysis of results stemming from an online survey completed by 426 respondents
- Research and analysis conducted by Council with equine industry bodies including Equestrian Australia (EFA), Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI) and Horse Riding Club Association of Victoria (HRCav)

This was supplemented by one-on-one consultation with five local adult riding and pony club managers and the Australian Horse Industry Council.

A public workshop was facilitated to provide an opportunity to outline key findings from the survey results, and to better understand the equine landscape, including the infrastructure existing and required within the Shire including club houses, change facilities, arenas, storage facilities, car parks and show jumps. Safety concerns for horse and rider were also raised in relation to shared trail usage.

The trails consultation explored the demographics of riders who use the trails, the attributes of existing trails, rider safety and the request for trails to be digitally mapped.

The online survey covered various aspects of the equine community including:

- Participation
- Equine businesses including their type and location
- Consumer expenditure on equine products
- Land care, pest and emergency management

The one-on-one consultation with club committees sought information on the operation and activities conducted by clubs including their infrastructure and current challenges.

An economic impact assessment was developed to understand the size and nature of the contribution of the sector to the Shire's economy.

The above methodology facilitated the collection and analysis of data and information which informed the development of a Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis. The SWOT was used to develop focus areas and an Equine action plan.

## Summary of the equine consultation process

A summary of the consultation process<sup>7</sup> is outlined below and focuses on:

- Participation
- Economic contribution of equine to the Shire
- Land, pest, emergency management and safety.

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<sup>7</sup> AECOM on-line survey of Nillumbik business owners, operators and riders 2019, public forum, trails and club consultation 2019



## Participation in equine activities

Primary elements of the equine sector in Nillumbik are the clubs, riding schools, recreational riders, events, visitors, shared recreational trails, agistment, equine specific businesses and breeding. Five equestrian facilities host at least two clubs each. St Andrews also hosts trail riding and Riding for the Disabled. Nillumbik equine clubs are affiliated with State governing bodies including the Pony Club Association of Victoria<sup>8</sup>, Horse Riding Club Association of Victoria and Australian Trail Horse Riders Association.<sup>9</sup> Most facilities are leased from Council with Kangaroo Ground Pony Club being the only club that owns its property.

Participants mostly ride on local trails and roads, club grounds and home arenas. Respondents stated that sharing local roads with motorists is becoming increasingly unsafe for horse and rider. In addition to local participation, 38 percent of survey respondents also train or ride outside of Nillumbik.

Equine clubs rely totally on volunteers for the management and maintenance of their facilities, grounds, through fund raising and events. Club membership fees generally cover the cost of insurance and instructors, however, the upkeep of facilities requires further investment and most clubs are not able to raise the full funds required for maintenance.

The majority of club members are adult females that fall into two age brackets 31-50 years (38 per cent) and 51+ years (42 per cent).

*Figure 2: Location and participation of Nillumbik horse riding clubs and groups*



<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ponyclubvic.org.au>

<sup>9</sup> <https://hrcav.com.au/> and <http://www.athra.com.au/>

Survey respondents noted the key challenges to participation were the quality of existing infrastructure and overall costs. Respondents expressed gaps in infrastructure within the Shire including an indoor arena and new cross county courses. Riders noted that an indoor arena would assist with participation during poor weather and at night in addition to attracting equine professionals to Nillumbik. Additionally, participants noted a need for improvements to club rooms, sheds and car parking. The cost of participation is stated as high due to expenses related to horse maintenance, feed, equipment and transport.

The most common equine activities in Nillumbik are trail riding, dressage, showjumping and eventing/showing. The highest forecast increase in demand for activities are in horsemanship, trail riding, eventing and dressage.

### Economic contribution of equine

Nillumbik's 34 equine businesses are predominantly located in Hurstbridge, Arthurs Creek and Kangaroo Ground, employing at least 74 people in 2017/18. The equine community is supported by a range of goods and services such as health professionals, breeding, farriers, feed, clothing and equipment, transportation and education. Most equine businesses in Nillumbik are classified as Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs). These business' revenues vary significantly with 42 percent earning less than \$20,000 in FY2017-18 and 13 percent earning more than \$100,000.<sup>10</sup>

*Figure 3 Types of equine businesses in Nillumbik*

### Types of businesses



The total economic impact of the equine sector in Nillumbik is approximately \$16.9 million per annum, which is comprised of \$5.1 million in expenditure within the sector. A direct impact of that expenditure being \$8.9 million which supports 24 FTE jobs and an indirect impact of \$8 million from flow-on expenditure.<sup>11</sup> The industries that benefited the most from indirect expenditure include health care services, property and maintenance, building and construction and agriculture including feed and supplements.

Business confidence in the equine sector is positive with 47 percent of survey respondents expecting growth and 40 percent expecting stable revenues.<sup>12</sup> Equine escape expenditure from Nillumbik for 2019 was approximately \$1 million<sup>13</sup> and therefore an opportunity exists for local businesses to grow by providing in-demand goods and services. The most common

<sup>10</sup> AECOM on-line survey of Nillumbik business owners, operators and riders 2019

<sup>11</sup> p. iv AECOM Nillumbik Equine Industry & Activity Plan July 2019

<sup>12</sup> AECOM on-line survey of Nillumbik business owners, operators and riders 2019

<sup>13</sup> AECOM on-line survey of Nillumbik business owners, operators and riders 2019



items locals bought outside Nillumbik include property infrastructure and vet and health services.

## **Land, pest and emergency management**

Two thirds of respondents stated they do not have challenges in managing their property and the majority spend between one and fifteen hours on property maintenance per week. Eighty five per cent of respondents are members of landcare groups, mostly in Arthurs Creek, Yarra Valley and Strathewen. The key challenges of respondents relate to pests and land and emergency management. These include dealing with:

- Weeds
- Pests (rabbits, deer, kangaroos and foxes)
- Blackberry
- Drought
- Bushfire preparedness

There is a strong demand for information and support to learn and improve practices. The most requested topics are:

- Pasture management
- Weed control
- Horse health (equine worming)
- Bushfire and emergency management

Further to the above, respondents also noted a need for assistance with permits, rates and Council processes.

# Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (SWOT) Analysis

The SWOT analysis below provides a snapshot of the current situation of the sector and acts as an input to the development of focus areas for the equine action plan.

## Strengths

- A strong and long history of equine as part of the Shire<sup>14</sup>
- Established equine clubs that are linked to their State bodies<sup>15</sup>
- Equine businesses forecasting stability and growth<sup>16</sup>
- Existing trail and recreation strategies, governed by Council's Recreation and Trails Advisory Committee<sup>17</sup>, that support participation
- Close proximity to city residents looking to escape to the country
- Proximity to Melbourne Polytechnic's education facility that provides courses in equine disciplines and conducts research and development projects for the sector
- High female participation
- Engaged Equine sector and participants

## Weaknesses

- Lack of adequate club car parking during peak times and inclement weather
- Danger associated with a lack of signage regarding horses and riders on public roads and the need for community information to improve safety<sup>18</sup>
- A lack of bushfire planning and communications for the protection of horses
- Lack of linkage of off-road trails throughout the Shire and into neighbouring municipalities
- Lack of horse-friendly visitor accommodation which impacts on attracting equine visitation.

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<sup>14</sup> Consultation with Nillumbik Horse Action Group, 2019

<sup>15</sup> <https://hrcav.com.au/>

<sup>16</sup> AECOM on-line survey of Nillumbik business owners, operators and riders 2019

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/Council/Committees>

<sup>18</sup> AECOM on-line survey of Nillumbik business owners, operators and riders 2019

# Opportunities

- Opportunity for Council to enhance its relationship with the equine sector and support both the recreational and economic contribution the sector makes to Nillumbik.
- The provision of improved service from Council in relation to providing clarity and support for permit applications and land management plans. This can be achieved through implementing the State Government's *Better Approvals Project*<sup>19</sup> and the Council's *Customer First Strategy 2019-2022*.
- To develop an equine infrastructure masterplan to identify ways to maximise the use of existing infrastructure and collaborate with neighbouring municipalities
- Opportunity for the equine sector to investigate and understand infrastructure sharing opportunities
- Work with land managers to access safe, shared trails and continue to progress the Shire's trail network with links to neighbouring municipalities
- Opportunity for Council to support NHAG and other equine groups to work closely with the community to increase their visibility and co-ordination as representatives of the equine sector<sup>20</sup>
- Equine clubs to grow participation to improve club revenues and volunteer workforce
- Council to provide information and educational materials and explore extension of existing land and pest management programs to target the most significant issues. Additionally, Council may seek assistance through State Government grant programs<sup>21</sup>
- Council, in collaboration with the State Government<sup>22</sup> and equine sector to develop a diverse program of land and pest management education workshops
- Council, in collaboration with the equine sector, to create an awareness campaign to increase the visibility and understanding of road safety issues relating to horse riders and motorists sharing public roads<sup>23</sup>
- Council to engage with equine businesses to facilitate specific support initiatives<sup>24</sup>
- Create a signature equine event that showcases the local sector including horsemanship, clubs, businesses and lifestyle
- Leverage partnership with Melbourne Polytechnic to participate in research and development projects, address skills gaps and promote the transition between education and local employment<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> <https://djpr.vic.gov.au/what-we-do/small-business>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.nhag.org.au/about-us>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/funding-programs/roadside-weeds-and-pest-management>

<sup>22</sup> <http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/protecting-victoria/weeds-and-vertebrate-pests>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.athra.com.au/component/k2/item/92-horse-riding-and-road-safety.html>

<sup>24</sup> Nillumbik Economic Development Strategy 2020-2030

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.melbournepolytechnic.edu.au/study/equine-studies/equine-studies>





## Threats

- Risk due to lack of clarity relating to infrastructure built by clubs on Council land. Council will need to work with State bodies and Clubs to understand and support risk mitigation processes.
- Equine escape expenditure of approximately \$1 million per annum. This may impact on the viability of existing businesses<sup>26</sup>
- Weed and pest management are issues for both land owners and the Council

## Focus areas for equine

There are five focus areas for the equine sector in Nillumbik. These are:

- Participation and sustainability
- Maximising existing infrastructure and volunteer efforts
- Supporting equine economic development
- Safe shared trails network
- Land, pest and emergency management.

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<sup>26</sup> AECOM Assessment of equine investment opportunities August 2019

Actions (Appendix A) have been created to respond to challenges and opportunities identified through the SWOT analysis and will address the identified focus areas.

These actions are designed to:

- Grow participation in the equine industry and improve club sustainability
- Explore infrastructure sharing opportunities and future planning
- Support economic development in relation to the equine sector
- Support the community with pest, land management and bushfire information and education opportunities.

# Appendix A: Actions

Timeframe key:

- SHORT 1-2 years
- MEDIUM 2–4 years
- LONG 4 years plus

## Enhance participation and club sustainability

Actions	Timeframe
1. Council to support NHAG to enhance and promote their function and activity to foster a coordinated and stronger relationship within the community and industry.	SHORT
2. Council to support the equine sector to enhance communications across the sector such as the promotion of events, seminars and information to assist horse owners and businesses.	SHORT
3. Council to work with the Equine sector to promote and respond to relevant Commonwealth and State Government grant programs.	SHORT
4. Council to support the equine sector to develop and maintain a comprehensive database of the equine community and supporting communications plan.	SHORT
5. Council to work with the equine clubs to grow male participation and promote the Riders Without Horses and Riding Develops Ability programs.	SHORT
6. Encourage the Equine sector to collaborate to develop a signature event to showcase equine within Nillumbik and educate the broader community about the sport and benefits generated for the Shire.	MEDIUM

## Maximise existing infrastructure and volunteer efforts

Actions	Timeframe
1. Council to work with the equine sector to understand and promote shared infrastructure and resource opportunities between clubs to reduce costs for critical maintenance.	MEDIUM
2. Council in collaboration with the equine sector, to develop an Equine Infrastructure Plan to identify how the current sites can be improved to maximise their potential.	MEDIUM
3. Council to explore opportunities to collaborate with neighbouring municipalities that are planning equine infrastructure.	MEDIUM



4. Council to digitally map tracks and trails.	SHORT
5. Council to facilitate the equine sector to collaborate with shared trail users primarily cyclists and walkers to understand and document synergies and common needs such as regularity of trail use and road sharing safety.	SHORT
6. Council and the equine sector to work with relevant stakeholders and landowners to identify and formalise access to trails for horses, including linkages and connections.	MEDIUM
7. Council will continue to implement the Nillumbik Trails Strategy and Recreation Strategy.	ONGOING
8. Council will conduct its trails audit to ensure trails are fit for purpose.	SHORT
9. Council to develop a Nillumbik Horse Trail Riding Guide highlighting information about riding in Nillumbik, conservation values and safety information.	MEDIUM
10. Council to work with clubs and state bodies to understand and action any risks associated with club built infrastructure on Council land.	SHORT
11. Council to support volunteers engaged in equine activities.	MEDIUM

## Support equine economic development

Strategic actions	Timeframe
1. Council to collaborate with the equine sector to understand reasons for escape expenditure and facilitate initiatives to support local businesses.	SHORT
2. Council to design and implement equine-specific business engagement activities to facilitate business-to-business, business-to-consumer, and business-to-government opportunities.	MEDIUM
3. Equine sector to develop a signature event to promote the presence and contribution of equine to the Shire.	MEDIUM
4. Council to collaborate with the equine sector to understand capability and opportunities for tourism activity through individual businesses and partnerships.	MEDIUM
5. Council to collaborate with sector to prepare a plan to facilitate the promotion of equine tourism opportunities.	MEDIUM
6. Council to collaborate with the equine sector to promote and encourage the development of appropriate horse and rider-friendly accommodation and associated guidelines.	LONG

7. Council to work with the equine sector to develop a plan to promote Nillumbik's equine community and businesses in a regional context.	SHORT
8. The equine sector to understand skill and business gaps and work with Melbourne Polytechnic to address any skills shortages.	SHORT
9. Council to facilitate the equine sector to engage with Melbourne Polytechnic to understand opportunities for local clubs and business sector to understand and close skills gaps and participate in relevant research and development projects.	MEDIUM
10. Council will implement the <i>Nillumbik Customer First Strategy 2019-2022</i> and the State Government's <i>Better Approvals Project</i> . This will improve Council's interface with customers and the efficiency and effectiveness of administering local regulatory processes.	SHORT

## Land, pest, emergency management and safety

Strategic actions	Timeframe
1. Council to develop emergency management information to assist horse owners during fire season.	SHORT
2. The equine sector, in collaboration with Council to create and implement a horse and rider road safety education program.	MEDIUM
3. Council to investigate requirements and costs for improved signage regarding horse and rider safety on roads.	SHORT
4. Council to collaborate with the equine community to develop a responsive and diverse program of land management workshops and continue to promote sustainable practices for equine properties through partnerships and communications.	SHORT
5. Council to investigate extending existing pest management programs to the equine sector around the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weeds</li> <li>• Rabbits</li> <li>• Deer</li> <li>• Kangaroo</li> <li>• Blackberry</li> </ul>	SHORT
6. Council to support the equine sector to promote land management group membership.	SHORT
7. Council to work with land owners on tree and branch clearing which can be a fire hazard and/or hinder other land management activity such as weed management.	SHORT

<p>8. The equine sector and stakeholders to consider how land owners of adjoining properties can work together to create safer places for horses during the threat of bushfire.</p>	<p>SHORT</p>
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# List of figures

*FIGURE 1:* Nillumbik policy, plans and strategy framework

*FIGURE 2:* Location and participation of Nillumbik horse riding clubs and groups

*FIGURE 3:* Types of equine businesses in Nillumbik