

**Submission
No 42**

**INQUIRY INTO AGISTMENT OF HORSES AT YARALLA
ESTATE**

Name: Ms Alexandra Gavel

Date received: 31/07/2013

31st July 13

The Director, Select Committee on the Agistment
of Horses at Yaralla Estate Legislative Council.
Parliament House
Macquarie St, Sydney NSW 2000

To The Hon Robert Borsak MLC Committee Chair,

**RE: CURRENT AND FUTURE AGISTMENT OF HORSES ON THE
YARALLA ESTATE**

My name is Alexandra Gavel and up until the 1st June 2013, I agisted a horse at Yaralla. I consider myself, first and foremost, a member of this amazing community. I was born in the inner-west, I have grown up in the inner west, and I still live and work in the inner west.

Anyone that has had the opportunity to keep their horse at Yaralla, both in the past and present, have always considered it a privilege. But we are by no means a 'privileged' group. We are members of this community, ordinary people! I am a school teacher at a local high school. There are teenagers that ride their bikes after school to care for their horses, Uni students, parents, a child care worker, health care workers, air craft pilot's, government workers, life long residents of Concord West and even the local dog groomer.

I was a 10 year old girl, absolutely obsessed with horses. Every Christmas, every birthday, in fact- every day, I pleaded with my parents to buy me a horse. Yet the closest I would ever get was an occasional excursion to a trail riding establishment. Horses were all I ever thought about. As an adult, I actually feel bad for the guilt trips that I put on my parents who were raising three kids, struggling with the expenses of daily living and completely unable to afford the upkeep and care of a horse.

In 1996 a compromise was made and I will never forget the day that I discovered Yaralla Estate. My Dad had heard through a friend about the paddocks at Concord and so he told me we could have a look. Most people here today know the feeling that the 10 year old me was struck by when we drove through the top gates. The disbelief that a place so beautiful existed so close to home, the joy in seeing horses grazing and people riding, and the immediate respect for a very special person who left her property to the people to continue to enjoy as she had.... Thank You Dame Eadith Walker for your gift thus far

We barely made it through the gates when, under direct instruction, we pulled over. The very first horse that I met was Seamus, who still called Yaralla 'home' up until he's eviction. I am sure I petted every horse there that day; Annie, Amber, Buddy, another Buddy, Romeo and Mikail

just to name a few.

But the most special pony that I met that day was Willie, otherwise known as 'Yaralla's Captain Willie'. Willie had been one of the first horses on the property and had begun his time at Concord sharing a paddock with cattle. Willie had taught numerous children how to ride and care for horses including me.

My dreams were starting to come true- The opportunity presented itself to lease Willie on weekends. I am sure my parents only consented to this as it was the perfect way for me to learn just how time consuming and difficult it is to care for a horse... Unfortunately for them, this arrangement made me even more committed to my life goal of owning a horse.

Willie passed away 2 years ago in his paddock at Yaralla at the impressive age of 37...it was a sad day for the Yaralla horse community.

When I finished school the first thing I did was get a job, then a horse. At 17 years old I got my first horse Wiskey, who now lives just under 2 hours away from me. Not only has Wiskey taught me so many lessons in the 11 years that we have been together, he has had the privilege of teaching many local kids and adults how to ride.

I cannot explain to you how perceptive Wiskey is. Whenever I am dealing with a lot and feeling completely lost and overwhelmed, it still amazes me how he is able to clear my mind- often best done with a game of hide and seek. These horses are our best friends, our children in some respects. This community has always respected and valued their place in the Inner West. Many residents know the horses by their names, some have even made up their own names for them. But it seems that SLHD think that a 'horse is a horse' and that they can be replaced... according to our critics we need to 'accept change and move on'.

The wider community agree that Yaralla isn't just about the horses, and that is true for the horse owners as well. Many of us have other ties to the estate that make it so precious. One of the horse owners, a life long resident of Concord has shared this unique place with her family. She spent much of her youth around the estate, has raised her 3 kids there, supported her mother through her dialysis treatment at the main house and shared her father's last moments when he suddenly passed away on the estate.

Yaralla has always held a special place in my heart too as a place that I have shared over the years with my dad, and as of December my connection to the estate has become even stronger as my fiancé proposed to me at the stairs to the main house. I have no doubt that

every person in this community has some special memory of Yaralla that they hold dear.

I feel that it also necessary to highlight what a vital resource the locally owned horses are to the young people in our community. Firstly, there are the young children that visit Yaralla to see horses up close and often experience their first pat. Furthermore, there have been so many local kids and teenagers who have enjoyed the unique experience of learning to ride, leasing and owning horses. As a secondary school teacher, and as a member of the welfare team at my school, I am no stranger to the pressures and changes that confront teenagers. Being involved with horses teaches young people respect, responsibility, discipline and resilience. What a shame to have the future youths of our community miss out on these irreplaceable opportunities.

*

We have finally been given the 'report' that was the basis of our eviction. As a school teacher, let me just state that to call it a 'professional report' is a stretch of the imagination. SLHD have expressed to us that it was written by supposed 'experts' in the field. However, the truth is that it was produced by a project management consultancy with political links to the State Government and SLHD and nowhere in the report are any references made to expert opinions, best practice guidelines or research evidence. The report also discusses the Mounted Police Unit as a preferred tenant, proving that the very purpose of the report was to install the Mounted Police at Yaralla. The decision was already made to evict the current horse owners and the report was commissioned and carried out by SLHD to serve that very purpose. BlueVisions was provided with their briefing... Out with the community and their horses!

Let us make it clear, the purpose of our campaign is not, and never will be, a vendetta against the Mounted Police, nor are we insensitive to the important role this unit fulfills. We respect and commend the Mounted Police for their service to the wider community. However, we fail to see how this nullifies the wishes of Dame Edith Walker to leave the grounds to the people of NSW for the purpose of housing local horses, for Health services and for public space. This is exactly how the grounds have been used for more than 3 decades.

In addition, the Mounted Police, whilst proposing to house horses on the grounds, are a government department none-the-less. A number of attempts have already been made in years gone by to develop the site. Should another attempt be made, we fear that a fellow government department is far less likely to put up as much of a fight to preserve the site as we have and that this invaluable community resource would be

lost forever. It is so important to our community that local people and local horses remain strongly involved in the future of Yaralla.

The fact is that Sydney Local Health District is a trustee of the land, without ownership of it. Their reasons for eviction are unfounded, biased and in some cases unsubstantiated and completely unfair. Whether lawful or not, their actions are not in the interests of the community and at very least contravene the philanthropist intentions of the Walker Estate when the property was bequeath to the people of NSW.

Do we have a vested interest in the property continuing to function as it has? Yes we do. Indeed, it is our argument that the entire community shares this interest... Yaralla should stay as it is and be used as it is for many generations to come.

SLHD have cancelled their dodgy deal with the Mounted Police Unit and will be putting the Yaralla paddocks out to 'open tender', with the Mounted Police still being identified in a recent Risk assessment report commissioned by the SLHD as the unanimous preferred candidates. Not quite a step forward, merely an attempt to undo their most obvious wrong doing that this community held them accountable for.

However, there is still no certainty that the communities concerns will be considered. How can we be sure that the criteria set by SLHD does not favour a certain applicant such as the MPU? How can we know that the Mounted Police Unit won't just happen to be the 'most ideal' and preferred applicant identified by an O'Farrel government/ SLHD panel.

Regardless of the change in process, the agenda remains unchanged. The Mounted Police were the favoured tenant all along and no one in the community should trust that this will be a fair and open process.

Despite all the opposition that we face, we still believe a solution does exist that will benefit the entire community.

SLHD have continually reminded us throughout our campaign that they 'don't do horses', their priority is local health.

Well guess what- NSW mounted police have a priority too- policing. There is absolutely no guarantee that they have the resources to ensure the upkeep of Yaralla. In fact, if the state of their other spelling facilities around the state is evidence of anything, it is that they are NOT ideal tenants for Yaralla.

Solution- our very own Canada Bay Council IS in the business of managing community spaces. The most obvious way to ensure that the

Yaralla paddocks remain a public space is for the Canada Bay Council to manage an interim licence and to apply for the public tender. They can oversee its maintenance and use where the SLHD fell well short of their responsibilities.

There is still a bigger issue at hand. As a community we cannot just overlook the gross negligence that SLHD have demonstrated over the past 17 years. As trustees of the Estate there is simply no excuse for the poor dilapidated condition that they allowed the main estate building fall into, regardless of their very recent attempts to prepare it for it's new purpose.

There is absolutely no excuse for the lack of care, lack of inspections and lack of support for the condition of the paddocks. Some one needs to be held accountable for this Dr. Anderson CE of the SLHD and Chairman of the Board Ron Phillips.

I believe that there is the potential to arrive at a solution that involves all stakeholders, and strongly insist that the locally owned horses be reinstated as soon as possible so that Yaralla can return to the tranquil, picturesque community Estate that we all want to retain and sustain for generations to come.

Yours sincerely,

Alexandra Gavel