

Tokai District Riding Association

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Attention: TCMF review
c/o Mr Howard Hendricks

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Submission of interest in the Tokai Cecilia Management Framework Review

by the

Tokai District Riding Association (TDRA)

The **Tokai District Riding Association (TDRA)** welcomes the stakeholder and public engagement process facilitated by SANParks in order to consult with interested parties and groups, review and finalize the Tokai Cecilia Management Framework.

The **TDRA** (being an umbrella non-profit organization that represents the interests of the horse riding community participating in and associated with horse riding in the greater Tokai and surrounding areas) is an interested group and has been recognized as such. We hereby submit our position on behalf of our members for your consideration, in order to ensure that our members' interests and needs are protected and horse-riding takes its place alongside the interests and needs of all other interested groups, in the final framework.

In the Tokai Manor Precinct Plan, released in 2012, the vision and key goals are stated as follows:

Vision

To manage and develop the Tokai Precinct as a vibrant 'Gateway' to TMNP where the environmental, cultural and social significance of the place is celebrated as a financially sustainable park for multi-use eco-tourism and recreation activity.

Key Goals:

1. To effectively manage and guide the transformation of the Precinct from its utility and forestry use to a vibrant multi-use 'Gateway' to the Park.
2. To provide for multiple recreational activity, (including horse riding, mountain biking, walking, adventure tourism and picnicking), whilst ensuring minimal conflict between user groups.
3. To ensure the Precinct becomes a place for all, attracting and accommodating a wide range of user groups and income groups to the Precinct.
4. To ensure the significance of the Precinct is 'celebrated', in particular its unique built and landscape heritage, and its unique biodiversity linkages.
5. To ensure the proposals are financially and economically sound and that sustainable income is derived that contributes to long term maintenance and refurbishment costs."

We hope and trust that the comprehensive review process currently underway will result in a management framework that builds on this precinct plan and ensures that the framework is inclusive of the newly identified and existing interested groups, including horse riders, in order to achieve the vision of **"a park for all, forever"**.

Horse riding is a heritage activity in the Tokai area of the Table Mountain National Park. Horses can be traced all the way back to Simon Van Der Stel who initially held the grazing rights to the area around what is now the Tokai Manor House. In 1792 the Tokai Manor House was sold to John Andreas Rauch and thereafter to Andreas Teubes who bankrupted himself building the existing Tokai Manor House which was completed in 1796.

Early in the 1800s the residence was sold to Petrus Michiel Eksteen who was renowned for his parties. It was at one of his New Year's Eve parties that his son, Frederik, rode a horse up the steep front stairs and around the dining room on a drunken dare. When he rode back down the steep stairs his horse tripped and fell and sadly both Frederik and the horse died in the accident. Legend now has it that Frederik and his horse are still seen cantering around the forest and on New Year's Eve the pair may be seen trying to repeat their fatal antics. Without any explanation it is reported that laughter and neighing of horses can be heard from inside the Manor House at night. In the early hours of the morning forestry workers reported hearing a horse galloping along the road straight to the Manor House where the horse and rider then go up the steep front steps.

Our submission of interest can be summarized under the following 5 headings:

1. There is a deep horse riding heritage and an established constituency which depends on horse riding within the Table Mountain National Park for their recreation, health and well-being, and livelihood

As outlined above, horse riding in Tokai is an integral and longstanding part of the history of the area. A community comprising horse riders, grooms and other equine carers and professionals, and a built environment consisting of stables, arenas and other horse riding facilities are established all around the borders of the park. As horses require exercise to maintain their health, any impairment to the access or ability to ride and exercise horses within the designated area of the park will have dire consequences for the broader equine community surrounding the park.

In terms of the research priorities published by SANparks under People and Conservation, “...recent trends in biodiversity conservation has resulted in increased interest.... through the realization that Protected Areas must work together with local Constituencies in order to achieve conservation and sustainable livelihoods”.

2. Horse riding and other recognized recreational activities in the park (such as walking, hiking and trail running) are mutually compatible / beneficial

The experience of many walkers, hikers and families exploring the park is enhanced by the opportunity to interact with horse riders and their horses. Horse riders add to the security in the park for walkers, runners and hikers because they are regular users (due to the need to exercise their horses) and they have a height advantage, enabling them to see over and into the flora. Horse riders also access parts of the park that are not frequented by other users, thereby improving the supervision over these more remote sections. Horse riders have proved their value on numerous occasions by reporting evidence of illegal activities, arsonists, fires and poaching.

3. Horse riders contribute to the maintenance of the Park

Apart from the funds generated by their “top tier” activity permit, horse riders, through the TDRA, fund and undertake continuous maintenance of the tracks used by horse riders and other user groups (as well as SANparks rangers) in Upper Tokai. This also assists the authorized alien clearing, baboon monitoring and wood cutting industry whose vehicles and personnel utilize these tracks. Without the TDRA’s tireless maintenance, these tracks would have become impassable for all users (including the SANParks vehicles).

Horse riders have also undertaken and funded multiple alien clearing initiatives. Not only has this benefited the biodiversity and conservation of the park, but it also provides financial support and skills development for members of the local community who we employ to do this work.

4. Horse riding is a healthy recreational activity in the Park and represents an unique tourism opportunity

Horse riding is one of very few recreational activities that can be enjoyed by all ages and genders. The benefits for physical, emotional and mental health have been well documented, and the contribution horse riding and a relationship with horses make to the wellbeing of people from disadvantaged, rehabilitating and differently-abled communities is a subject of great interest and research.

Furthermore, the opportunity to do horse riding trails in the Park represents an eco-tourism opportunity as local and international tourists increasingly seek out unique experiences.

5. Jobs associated with the care of horses

The ongoing daily care that horses require provides employment for a significant number of people associated with feeding, grooming and exercising horses. In the challenging economic climate and current unemployment levels, it is critical that these jobs are not lost. Unemployment is officially recorded at 32.6% for Q1 2021 but this does not take into account those who have given up trying to find employment. Unemployment is also disproportionately concentrated in the lower income groups. The grooms, equine professionals (farriers, saddle fitters, riding instructors etc.) and equine assistants who tend to horses do not generally have skills which could easily be adapted to other types of employment.

As such it is critical that horse riding opportunities in the Park are enhanced and that more horses and horse riders are attracted to the district, and with them, employment for the diverse group of people associated with the care of horses.

In order to achieve the vision of **“A Park for all, forever”** the Tokai Cecilia Management Framework needs to provide for, protect and manage all activities and user groups in such a way that these activities can be safely and sustainably conducted to the benefit of the Park and its biodiversity, the users of the Park and the communities that reside and work on the borders of the Park. Horses and horse riding are an integral part of this vision.

