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Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Queensland Parliamentary Service
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter of 25 November 2004 forwarding a copy of a petition received by the House on 24 November 2004 regarding horse riding in South East Queensland

I recently announced increased protection for 195 000 hectares of former forestry land.

Our State has some of the most bio-diverse forests in Australia yet the nation's lowest level of forest protection. Our booming economy and population growth is placing ever greater pressures on our natural assets – pressures for development, recreation and protection.

The Government is determined to address these pressures in a balanced way. It has recently announced a number of initiatives, including the SEQ Regional Plan, with objectives to better sustain economic growth, our Queensland lifestyle and our world-class environment.

Ongoing implementation of the 1999 SEQ Forests Agreement (SEQFA) is entirely consistent with these objectives. After significant consultation with all stakeholders, it is providing:

- transition for the timber industry with 'one last cut' over the next 20 years from old-growth forest areas while alternative supplies from plantations are developed;
- provision of opportunities for recreational activities, including horse-riding; and
- greater protection of forest species and the forest-based tourism industry.

Recreational opportunity has been provided for a wide range of uses, including horse-riding, walking, hiking, cycling, trail-biking, four-wheel driving, orienteering and abseiling.

The Beattie Government recognises the recreational, cultural and economic value of horse riding and has provided more than \$8 544 719 to support recreational horse riding across the State, including \$5 939 388 for purpose built facilities for a range of riding disciplines.

The Beattie Government's support is also more than financial. It has consulted on and incorporated rider input into the recent SEQFA announcement, including retention of riding areas in 62 State forests, creation of a special land tenure in 16 *National Park (Recovery)* areas and conversion of 17 State forests to conservation park tenure which allow riding in perpetuity. These elements were a result of positive negotiation and consultation with riders.

Consequently, riding continues unaffected in large areas of SEQ which remain State forest, including Gilbert, Esk, Wivenhoe, Wamuran, Kilcoy, Woodford, Glass House, Beerwah, Kenilworth, Jimna, Yabba, Imbil, Elgin, Tewantin, Gympie and many others. As areas cease logging over the next 20 years, their final tenure will be decided, but no decision will be made without rider consultation.

Riding will also continue on existing and new areas tenured as conservation park. These areas include Nerang, Daisy Hill, Bunyaville, Samford, Clear Mountain, Brisbane Forest Park, Beerburum, Woodford, Peachester, Landsborough, Parklands, Tuchekeoi, Cherbourg, Gympie, Rosedale and Calliope.

It is recognised new national parks are not available to horse riders. However, national parks represent approximately only 4% of Queensland. New SEQFA national parks are the third most bio-diverse forests in Australia and deserve the highest possible protection. National park status provides this protection. For decades, neither horses nor other non-native animals have been specifically allowed in national parks, a position maintained by Governments of all political persuasions.

Our forebears established this policy and good reasons remain for it to continue. There is evidence the abundance of many forest species is in decline – in fact, so many SEQ forest species are in decline they are a third of the State's listed rare, vulnerable or endangered species. While threats faced by these animals are imperfectly understood, this is insufficient reason to delay or weaken protection.

Rather, it is imperative we strengthen protection and restore natural conditions to the extent practicable. Consequently, the Beattie Government has stepped up park ranger numbers by 142 or 30% to better manage park, fire and pest risks. We will also spend around \$10 million on fire and pest management in 2004-05, including an extra \$6 million over three years to fulfil the *2004 Enhanced Pest and Fire Management* election commitment.

The challenge is to balance the importance of riding with the importance of ecological protection. Consequently, the Beattie Government has announced a new partnership with riding representatives to identify alternative riding trails as soon as possible, preferably within twelve months. It also has allocated \$650 000 to establish alternative off-reserve trail rides.

While riders and Government work together to identify new trails, transitional arrangements have been developed to allow riding in a number of areas for up to nine years under *National Park (Recovery)* tenure. These areas include Austinville, Springbrook, Nerang, Tamborine, Brisbane Forest Park, Mount Mee, Lockyer, White Mountain, Woodford, Landsborough, Bellthorpe, Conondale, Mapleton, North Arm, Tewantin, Kin Kin, Traveston, Wrattens and Dawes.

I hope this information is helpful to you.

Yours sincerely

Desley Boyle MP
Minister for Environment
Minister for Local Government and Planning
Minister for Women