

“FRIENDS OF KERRABEE” NEWSLETTER

As parents of the children who ride at the National Equestrian Centre, we have written this letter to describe what happened at the National Equestrian Centre (NEQC), Kerrabee, in the Canberra bushfires two weeks ago. We provide options for fellow NEQC patrons, and others, to support the NEQC horses and their remaining cattle by sponsoring feed for the animals as “Friends of Kerrabee”.

The story unfolds ...

On Saturday 18th January a devastating fire front crossed the Murrumbidgee River, driven by a relentless Westerly wind. Kerrabee on Cotter Road, including the Lowe family farmhouse and the National Equestrian Centre, stood no chance of avoiding the devastation.

Within minutes of crossing the river, the Kerrabee farmhouse and sheds were destroyed by the fire. Bronwen Lowe, Arianne Lowe and three others barely escaped with their lives.

Sensing the impending threat, John and Bronwen Lowe, had gathered the Centre’s 63 horses from the surrounding paddocks into the NEQC arena and had ensured that the other 60 privately agisted horses on Kerrabee had all been brought from paddocks into stabling. The horses remained strangely calm, waiting for the storm of wind and fire to pass, as the Lowes and their staff and agisters fought to save the centre. Every horse, and the arena and stabling, was saved.

But, across the property almost every single tree was burnt. Many, many sheep, cattle and kangaroos perished in the inferno. The earth itself was roasted, leaving little or no trace of life in the soil.

Even for those like John and his son Haydn, who had experienced fires before, this one behaved like no other. The fire consumed the Mount Stromlo pine forest in front of the property, and huge fire-balls of burning vapor rolled down the hill to Kerrabee. Two other fires converged on the property from the West and South, placing Kerrabee in the eye of an extraordinary firestorm.

After the firestorm passed, the full extent of the damage was revealed. Although the NEQC buildings, one farm cottage, and all of the horses were saved, the homestead and heritage wool shed, dating from before the more famous Yarralumla shed, were piles of smoking rubble. Kerrabee’s long term farm hand, Robert, had watched as his 4WD – his only major possession - was also engulfed in flames.

The fire passed on from Kerrabee and towards Weston Creek where it destroyed the Lowe’s house in Chapman, taking the family’s two pet cats, in its relentless assault on the suburbs.

For so many of us, whose children and families ride at Kerrabee, the NEQC is a cherished part of our lives. We all share a deep sense of loss in what has occurred.

Is everything OK?

Driving through the charred remains of the Stromlo pine forests and into Kerrabee we are relieved to see that the centre remains intact. At first all looks reasonably well, despite blackened paddocks and burned fences. There is a large truckload of feed behind the car park. Horses are saddled and there is even a familiar buzz as kids groom their favorite horse just a week after Kerrabee’s day of destruction.

This is truly a credit to the Lowe's courage and tenacity in getting things going again so quickly.

They have been enormously helped by many, many people - some of them total strangers - who have made the sad drive down Cotter Road to add their donations to the hay stockpile, or to volunteer their time to help build emergency fencing or just clean up the wreckage around the farm. The week since the fires has witnessed human nature and community spirit at their very best.

What does this mean for us

Beneath this picture lie some cold hard economic realities about survival, and that long-term problem is the reason for this newsletter.

If Kerrabee is to survive, we need to keep alive the spirit of help already demonstrated in the last few days.

Insurance will not possibly cover this degree of devastation and the exorbitant cost of keeping animals alive on baled hay. Under these conditions, the 63 horses will consume 20 bales a day, which amounts to around \$80 per month per horse.

The current support feed that has been purchased or donated gives Kerrabee approximately 20 days of reserve.

Without additional support many horses will have to go.

While the Lowes are doing all they can to resume some level of business, the normal flow of income from the farm and the NEQC has been shattered. Kerrabee is also home to 15 staff, whose jobs and income will go if Kerrabee does not survive.

Organised support

We, as Kerrabee's friends and parents of children who ride at Kerrabee, have formed a plan to coordinate support for the NEQC horses. Being coordinated will mean that the help people wish to give can go further, and it will be easier for both helpers, and the Lowes, to handle.

Our objective is to enable sponsorship of the NEQC and Kerrabee's horses through the "**Friends of Kerrabee Sponsor a Horse**" program.

A minimum of 12 weeks of 100% hand-feeding of the horses is required. Rains are expected at the end of March. After this time some new pasture should start to develop, lessening the reliance on hand feeding. We have estimated that the cost of feeding each horse through to the end of March is around \$160.

Sponsoring feed for a horse

The following sponsorship options are available for people wanting to help :

Special	Sponsorship donations of more than	\$160.00
2-Month	Sponsorship of one horse for two months	\$160.00
1-Month	Sponsorship of one horse for one month	\$ 80.00
1-Week	Sponsorship of one horse for one week	\$ 20.00

Sponsorship of specific horses can be requested for the desired period.

All horse sponsors will receive acknowledgement of their sponsorship. It is also planned to mount a permanent display in the NEQC at the conclusion of the program to acknowledge sponsor supporters.

A list of horses and their sponsors will be mounted on the Kerrabee website – www.necq.com.au - so everyone can remain up to date with how things are going.

Purchasing polo shirts

“**Help Save a Kerrabee Horse**” polo shirts are being ordered and will be sold at around \$33.00ea. These will be available at the NEQC office once orders have been consolidated. An additional charge of \$4.50 will be applied for postage if required.

Payment Details

A separate National Equestrian Centre Donations bank account has been established at the ANZ Bank.

Cheques can be made payable to “National Equestrian Centre Donations” and forwarded to The National Equestrian Centre, Kerrabee, 919 Cotter Rd, Weston Creek, A.C.T., 2611 or payment can be made directly to the account for those wishing to make direct debits (see back page for details).

What to do

Should you decide to sponsor a horse or purchase a polo shirt, complete the enclosed form (or print from the website) and return it to :

The National Equestrian Centre, Kerrabee, 919 Cotter Rd, Weston Creek, A.C.T., 2611

Why this letter ?

We are all friends of Kerrabee, with something to give to keep this centre alive and care for the horses. Hopefully this newsletter helps you to decide what you can do to help.

Thank you

Friends of Kerrabee

Please direct all enquiries to the National Equestrian Centre office phone (02) 6288-5555 or e-mail to help@necq.com.au

