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EQUESTRIAN VICTORIA HIT BY SEX, STALKING SCANDAL

Alice Coster@aliceheraldsun

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It's not all pretty ponies and tweed jackets at Equestrian Vic, with one Olympic hopeful facing rape charges and two female riders accused of stalking the alleged victim.

It's not all pretty ponies and tweed jackets at Equestrian Victoria. Prince Harry and Megan Macbeth have already got the royal family under the whip without their representative in Victoria causing them further embarrassment.

It seems Governor Linda Dessau has backed the wrong horse as the newly announced vice-regal patron of Equestrian Victoria and what might have seemed like a good idea has the Gov on a heavy track.

The Queen owns a world-class stable of thoroughbreds and her daughter Princess Anne and granddaughter Zara Tindall rode in the Olympics.

Princess Anne was the first royal to ride in the Olympics and her daughter won a silver medal at the London Olympics.

Zara Phillips, daughter of Princess Anne, riding horse Toytown at the World Equestrian Games in 2006. (see pic)

Even Prince Phillip, pushing 100, cracked the whip over horses in the posh pursuit of carriage racing. He said he was too old for polo, which still sees Prince Charles engaging in a chukka or two in his seventies.

So, two weeks ago Equestrian Victoria got itself in a lather of excitement when Governor Dessau bestowed vice-regal patronage on their organisation.

What the Governor might not have realised was that some of its elite membership was embroiled in serious criminal charges, which have left many of its other members stamping their feet.

What has been described in court as a "soap opera" might be better termed a "horse opera" were it not so serious.

An Olympic hopeful is about to face trial on rape charges and two female riders have been charged with stalking the male rider's alleged victim.

The horse sports might seem like the exclusive preserve of upper-crusters in their Hunter gumboots and tweeds sipping from their early-morning coffee flasks and taking a nip or two of the hard stuff at elegant events at Werribee and down at Boneo Park on the Mornington Peninsula.

But the blinkers are off over a scandal that has split the membership and the treatment of the alleged rape victim, who some say has been cruelly ostracised from the sport.

There are claims the alleged victim was banned from attending equestrian events so as not to make the alleged rapist "uncomfortable."

She was also subjected to vicious name-calling and posts on social media by members of the association and her horse float vandalised.

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A Facebook page labelled, Stop Bullying In Equestrian Sport, has more than 7000 members with young girls sharing painful stories of being taunted and made to feel unsafe at equestrian events.

For instance, no one likes a supposedly "fat" girl!

"Everyone knows you have to be thin to make a horse look good when in the saddle," said one insider.

The Olympic hopeful strongly denies the allegations.

The international equestrian governing body, the Federation Equestre Internationale, suspended the alleged rapist after Equestrian Victoria initially refused to act amid mounting pressure from Centre Alliance senator Rex Patrick who raised the issue in Senate estimates.

But none of this appears to have caused Government House to balk at the hurdles.

Buckingham Palace was alerted this week about the growing scandal.

Maggie Dawkins, the wife of former Federal Treasurer John Dawkins and an activist for sex-abuse victims, has complained to the Palace about vice-regal patronage being conferred on Equestrian Victoria.

She has told the Palace she considers the scandal could damage the royal family's reputation.

Certainly not what Her Maj needs in the current climate!

"Her Excellency is marketed as being a role model for young women and girls yet it appears the Governor has turned a blind eye, or perhaps the Government House staff did not carry out adequate due diligence checks," Dawkins has said in a letter.

"Equestrian Victoria has been notified of multiple incidents of intimidation and harassment, including the alleged rape victim's horse float being vandalised and on one occasion her brake lights smashed. She fears for her own safety and that of her horses," the letter reads.

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"I am sure Her Majesty the Queen would not appreciate becoming embroiled in this ill-conceived decision by her representative Linda Dessau.

"There is potential for reputational damage not only to the Victorian Governor, but also the Queen.

The Governor supposedly confers vice-regal patronage to an organisation which enjoys "a good standing in the community" among other guidelines."

Buckingham Palace has yet to respond, but Government House issued the following statement after questions were put to them by Page 13.

"The Governor of Victoria is Patron of over 150 organisations in Victoria, continuing a longstanding tradition of the conferral of Vice-Regal Patronage on organisations involved in voluntary service, industry, education, the arts, sport and caring for those in need.

“The Governor is not involved in the day to day conduct of the organisations of which she is Patron and conferral of Patronage does not indicate endorsement of any particular aspect of the administration or governance of an organisation.

“The Governor became Patron of Equestrian Victoria in February 2021. Subsequently, the Office of the Governor was made aware of allegations of mishandling by Equestrian Victoria of a matter presently before the courts. The Office of the Governor awaits the outcome of those court proceedings.”

But has the horse already bolted?

Dawkins says what she describes as “the callous inaction of Equestrian Victoria” calls for the Governor to rescind her patronage.