A close-up, profile view of a horse's head, focusing on its eye and mane. The horse has a dark coat and a flowing reddish-brown mane. Its eye is a striking, iridescent color, appearing as a mix of yellow, green, and blue. The background is a soft, out-of-focus gradient of light and dark tones.

THOROUGHBRED WELFARE INITIATIVE

The most important participant

A Framework for Thoroughbred Welfare

Thoroughbred Aftercare Welfare Working Group

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Thoroughbred Welfare Initiative is grateful to all those who contributed data to the compilation of this report. The data provided has been drawn from a number of sources. While reasonable measures have been taken to ensure its accuracy, we cannot accept responsibility for inaccuracies and omissions.

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Foreword

In January 2020 a number of groups from racing and breeding came together to take action on thoroughbred welfare. Our view, as a collective, was that a national review was needed to ensure the industry had a framework in place to secure the welfare of thoroughbreds from birth to the end of life.

To this end, under the umbrella of the Thoroughbred Welfare Initiative, we established an independent panel, the Thoroughbred Aftercare Welfare Working Group (TAWWG) to conduct this inquiry on behalf of the industry.

Each panel member brought professional skills and deep experience, as well as strong commitment to improving thoroughbred welfare, to this task. Their remit was to approach the process with an independence of thought and provide recommendations without fear or favour. I thank them for their commitment to the excellent work they have now completed.

This project could not have been carried out without the input of the people and organisations that took time to contribute to the process, whether by making a submission or meeting with the panel.

I must also strongly thank those organisations that made significant financial contributions to fund this project, including AgriFutures, Tabcorp, Sportsbet, the Australian Trainers' Association, the Australian Jockeys' Association, the Victoria Racing Club, the Brisbane Turf Club, and the body of which I am president, Thoroughbred Breeders Australia.

I believe this is an essential report that demands our industry take action to ensure its most important participants, its thoroughbred horses, enjoy a purposeful life and have a humane death.



Basil Nolan

President, Thoroughbred Breeders Australia

Introduction

It is my great pleasure to present this report of the Thoroughbred Aftercare Welfare Working Group, and my privilege to have chaired the group since it first convened in March 2020.

This report represents the shared wisdom of hundreds of people across Australia and the world. Some are welfare specialists, equitation scientists and industry leaders, who brought their technical expertise into a shared conversation over these months. Others are people who live and breathe the thoroughbred industry as breeders, riders, owners or trainers, while many more are individuals and organisations with passionate views about horses, racing and animal welfare.

Their perspectives are extremely diverse, but they have one crucial thing in common: a love of thoroughbred horses and a sincere commitment that they should have a good life, with their welfare needs reliably and consistently met from birth to the end of their life. That principle is the motivation for this report and the intention behind all its recommendations.

The TAWWG received more than 180 genuinely individual and considered submissions. The group was impressed with the quality and reflectiveness of the submissions.

We held consultation meetings with more than 50 organisations and people. This was not always easy; during the Covid-19 travel restrictions we could not meet in person and our consultations were held via videoconference – working through technology issues and unreliable mobile connections – an important reminder that ours is primarily a regional and rural industry, and reforms must recognise the realities of country Australia. On the positive side, we were able to meet with many more people than we otherwise might have, including people from across the world who shared their international experiences and expertise. I thank everyone who generously shared their knowledge and insights with the working group.

The report has been prepared independently by the working group members. The work was commissioned through the Thoroughbred Welfare Initiative (TWI), an industry project led by Thoroughbred Breeders Australia (TBA). I thank the members of the TWI steering group, who have been interested and supportive while fully embracing the independence of our team.

All of the findings and recommendations in this report are built on the submissions, consultations and information presented to the TAWWG. They are specifically directed at addressing the aftercare challenges facing the thoroughbred breeding and racing industries, and provide well considered, practical ways to deliver improved whole-of-life welfare outcomes for all thoroughbred horses.

I also thank my fellow working group members, Dr Bidda Jones, Dr Ken Jacobs and Mr Jack Lake, for their expertise, energy and good-humoured commitment to producing an exceptional report that can, and should, be used to make a real difference in the lives of thoroughbred horses.

Unlike many inquiries, this process has not been commissioned by a minister, and it cannot rely on government processes to effect the changes it recommends. I believe, though, that it carries a more powerful authority: the grassroots voices of people from all over Australia who understand and care passionately about thoroughbred horses.

This report represents the TAWWG's reflections on those voices, and presents a pathway forward on welfare, which is the most important challenge we face – not only to ensure the industry continues to have the support of the wider community, but also from a moral perspective: we love our horses, and we want and need to protect them.

Now we need all sectors of the thoroughbred industry to work together and build on the progress they have already made on welfare by endorsing these recommendations and collaborating with other stakeholders to implement them.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Denis Napthine". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Denis" and the last name "Napthine" clearly distinguishable.

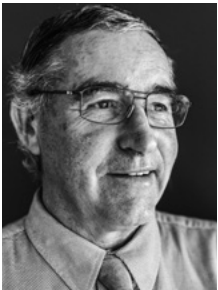
The Hon Dr Denis Napthine BVSc MVS MBA AO
Chair, Thoroughbred Aftercare Welfare Working Group

The Panel



The Hon Dr Denis Napthine BVSc MVS MBA AO (Chair)

A former Victorian premier, Denis also served as minister for racing and has a deep understanding of the thoroughbred industry. Before entering politics he was a veterinarian and worked for the state government where he prosecuted a number of animal welfare cases.



Dr Ken Jacobs BVSc MVSc MACVSc

Ken is an equine veterinarian and has been in practice for over 40 years. He is a former director of the Australian Veterinary Association and past president of Equine Veterinarians Australia. He is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. He helped establish the equine component of the veterinary science course at Charles Sturt University.



Dr Bidda Jones AM BSc (Hons) GDipPub PhD GAICD

Bidda is the Chief Science and Strategy Officer for RSPCA Australia and an Honorary Associate with the Sydney School of Veterinary Science. She is a strong advocate for improving animal welfare policies and has shared her insight on numerous national committees.



Jack Lake BA, BEc

Jack was a senior advisor on agricultural policy in the Hawke, Keating and Rudd Governments. He now advises companies in the pastoral and poultry industries on policy development and implementation and government relations. He is a keen follower of racing and has enjoyed success as a part-owner of horses such as VRC Derby winner Preferment and Australian Oaks winner Unforgotten.

The panel was supported by an industry working group comprising Tom Reilly, chief executive of Thoroughbred Breeders Australia; leading trainer Chris Waller; managing director of Godolphin Australia, Vin Cox; prominent owner and breeder Neil Werrett; chief executive of the Australian Trainers' Association, Andrew Nicholl and the chief executive of the Australian Jockeys' Association, Martin Talty.

Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Abattoir	A slaughter establishment for horses that produces meat for human consumption.
Agist	Take in and feed for payment.
Altrenogest	A progestin widely used in veterinary medicine to suppress or synchronise estrus in horses.
Anabolic steroid	A synthetic steroid hormone that resembles testosterone in promoting the growth of muscle.
Approved Arrangement	The Export Control (Meat and Meat Product) Orders 2005 require slaughter establishments that prepare meat and meat products for export to have an Approved Arrangement for their practices and processes, which allows their products to be certified for export.
Australian Stud Book (ASB)	The Australian Stud Book is operated to ensure the integrity of thoroughbred breeding in Australia. The registration, ownership and naming of all thoroughbreds are recorded in the ASB in accordance with the Australian Rules of Racing.
Barbiturates	Sedatives derived from barbituric acid.
Biosecurity	Procedures or measures designed to protect the population against harmful biological or biochemical substances.
Breeder	The owner of a broodmare.
Captive bolt pistol	Device used for stunning animals prior to slaughter.
Corrective Action Request	A written recommendation from the federal Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment to an export-registered slaughter establishment to address a non-compliance.
Equitation	The art and practice of horsemanship and horse riding.
Equitation science	The use of quantitative measures to develop understanding about the welfare of horses during training and competition, including the evaluation of training techniques.
Knackery	A slaughter establishment for horses that produces meat for animal consumption.
Off-the-track (OTT) Program	A formal program for the promotion and coordination of the retraining and rehomeing of retired racing horses.
On-Plant veterinarian	Veterinarian employed by the federal Department of Agriculture to work at export abattoirs to enable certification of Australian meat and meat products for overseas markets.
Owner	A person, syndicate, company or other organisational structure, registered as having an actual interest, beneficial interest or share in a racing horse.
Penetrating captive bolt	The penetrating captive bolt is fired from the captive bolt pistol, to cause concussion and unconsciousness prior to slaughter.
Phenobarbital	A sedative barbiturate drug.
Principal racing authorities (PRAs)	The state and territory-based PRAs govern thoroughbred racing in Australia.
Racing Australia (RA)	Racing Australia is the peak body for Australian racing, established to promote and encourage the thoroughbred industry.
Rehomeing	The transfer of ownership of a retired racing or breeding horse for the purposes of a second career, not related to racing, or for pleasure riding/companionship.
Retired racing horse	A horse, formerly registered for racing, that has been officially retired or deregistered under the rules of racing.
Retrainers	Specialists in re-education of retired racehorses for equestrian purposes.
Rules of racing	Refers to the national and/or local (state-based) rules of racing that govern thoroughbred racing.
Slaughter establishment	A generic reference to either an abattoir or knackery.
Stewards	Stewards oversee all aspects of thoroughbred racing and wagering to ensure adherence to regulations and guidelines and investigate potential breaches.
Stunning	Use of a captive bolt pistol with penetrating captive bolt to render an animal unconscious immediately prior to slaughter.
Yearling	A horse that is a year old or in its second year.

Terms of Reference

The Thoroughbred Aftercare Welfare Working Group will examine current arrangements and seek to make recommendations to ensure that lifetime health and welfare of the horse is of prime consideration for horses leaving the racing and breeding industry.

Specifically the panel will:

1. Collate and examine current data, and consult all relevant and interested parties and agencies, to gain an accurate assessment of the number of thoroughbred horses retired from the racing and breeding industry annually and the fate of these horses.
2. Collate, study, benchmark and assess the many and various programs currently in use by the thoroughbred racing and breeding industry to provide 'rehoming' opportunities. This will include examination of global best practice and programs used successfully by other animal industries and horse breeds.
3. Review the level of thoroughbred horse breeding needed to meet the needs of the racing industry but to prevent excessive breeding.
4. Review federal, state and territory regulatory arrangements relevant to the ongoing welfare of horses, and particularly both racing and non-racing thoroughbreds, including the challenges and benefits of introducing a national traceability system for all horses.
5. Identify opportunities for industry-led quality assurance schemes including the development of national standards for equine health, welfare, housing, handling, transportation and husbandry practices.
6. Identify opportunities for structural improvement to existing arrangements for data collection and reporting, interjurisdictional coordination and national communications processes to ensure accurate industry information with regard to thoroughbred horses across Australia.
7. Identify opportunities for appropriate further research and development to enhance the long-term welfare of thoroughbred horses across Australia.
8. Make recommendations to enhance the welfare of all thoroughbred horses and therefore enhance the reputation of the thoroughbred industry as an industry that genuinely cares about the welfare of all thoroughbred horses.
9. Give consideration to the regulatory framework and the effectiveness of current oversight and supervisory procedures and practices for facilities that process horses for human and animal consumption. This will include assessment of current levels of relevant education and training of management and workers in these facilities with respect to horse behaviour, management and welfare.

Executive Summary

The Australian thoroughbred industry is significant in many ways: economically, socially, as a source of enjoyment for many, and as part of this nation's cultural identity and history.

At the centre of this industry is its most important participant – the thoroughbred.

Without the contribution of its horses, everything from the major racing carnivals that attract international attention, the 80,000 jobs the industry supports nationwide, through to the hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes raised each year, do not exist.

It is therefore incumbent on the industry to take all reasonable steps to ensure the welfare of its horses, including those that have retired from the racetrack and the breeding barn. Indeed, the very future of the Australian thoroughbred industry is at risk if lifelong horse welfare is not addressed.

The Thoroughbred Aftercare Welfare Working Group (TAWWG) was established by a collective of industry participants after an investigation by the ABC's *7.30* that showed thoroughbreds being mistreated at processing facilities.

To those participants – who include Australia's breeders, trainers, jockeys and many thoroughbred owners, the very people who care for these horses while in the industry – that program highlighted the lack of an effective national system to protect the welfare of all thoroughbreds throughout their lives.

Furthermore, the fragmented reaction from the thoroughbred industry to the program demonstrated there was no effective national response to the challenges raised.

The TAWWG has heard from many participants across the country who said that equine welfare – the task of ensuring thoroughbreds are well treated from birth to death – is the most important challenge the industry faces.

Ensuring positive welfare outcomes for thoroughbreds is also crucial to the industry receiving the support of the broader Australian community.

A significant project researching public attitudes to the thoroughbred industry was commissioned to support the TAWWG's work, and it demonstrated more people were unsupportive of racing and breeding than supportive.

However, this research identified that a key driver to changing those attitudes would be demonstrating that horses are well cared for, not only while in racing and breeding, but also when they retire.

This provides a significant challenge as it means the industry is being assessed on the treatment of horses that are no longer in its care. Furthermore, many thoroughbreds will spend the vast majority of their lives outside the industry.

The work of the TAWWG has been to create, through its recommendations, a national framework that ensures the welfare of all thoroughbreds, providing them with a good life and a humane death.

The core features required to deliver an effective welfare framework that emerged from stakeholder consultations were universal application and enforceability.

Such a plan must also be underpinned by science, reflect contemporary standards, and meet the needs of the industry.

This report sets out 46 recommendations. The whole report and its recommendations should be read together. There is no simple fix to improving thoroughbred welfare, no single action that will, in itself,

put the industry on the right course; instead, there are many steps that, when taken together, will make a significant impact.

Some of the TAWWG's recommendations sit within the remit of governments for action, while others are for the thoroughbred industry to take up. Where possible, we have looked to build upon or expand existing structures or practices.

Improving thoroughbred welfare will also take a consolidated and collaborative effort. More rules or heavier penalties will not, on their own, achieve success. An effective strategy must be “bottom up” as well as “top down”, with all participants in the industry being engaged and building a culture of improving welfare.

The TAWWG has identified a number of weaknesses in the current welfare regime for thoroughbreds, such as a lack of national standards for the care of horses, no clear national definition of what constitutes good welfare, no national welfare standards for thoroughbred horses, and a state-based administrative structure that means different welfare funding levels, programs and rules across the seven principal racing authorities.

Welfare standards

The TAWWG believes an effective welfare regime can be developed through three tiers of standards.

The foundation for such a regime is the development of legally enforceable minimum welfare standards that cover all horses at all ages, in all contexts and in all jurisdictions.

These national standards would ensure thoroughbreds have at least a minimum level of protection throughout their lives and would be especially useful to safeguard the care of those horses that have left the industry. They would be developed nationally and adopted and then enforced by state and territory governments.

In the TAWWG's consultations, there was strong support for the establishment of minimum welfare standards across all areas of the thoroughbred industry and, indeed, the broader horse community.

The second element to this welfare regime is the creation of specific thoroughbred welfare standards for industry participants.

While the panel acknowledges the care of horses while in the industry is generally good, the current Australian Rules of Racing relating to welfare provide for people to be prosecuted for poor welfare outcomes, rather than mandating they provide a high standard of care.

The TAWWG believes the industry needs to develop science-based standards for the care of all thoroughbreds, specific to their needs at different stages of life. These should be based on the Five Domains model of assessing welfare.

Developing these standards, in collaboration with participants, veterinarians and equine scientists, would allow the industry to clearly demonstrate to the community the high level of care that is demanded of all in the industry.

These standards should be enforced to ensure compliance and continued participation in the industry. For example, breeders registering horses in the Australian Stud Book would be dependent on meeting them.

The third element to an effective regime is the establishment of quality assurance schemes to drive improvements across the industry. Whereas enforceable standards set a level of care that must be met, quality assurance schemes encourage best practice and the achievement of a level of care above that mandated.

A key element to such schemes is that those participating do so voluntarily but are then audited to ensure they are compliant. The TAWWG believes these schemes could be developed for different sectors of the thoroughbred industry, including breeders, foundation trainers and those providing retraining or rehoming services.

Traceability

Another key element to an effective welfare regime is traceability: the ability for each horse to be individually identified, its location known, and its owner registered.

All registered thoroughbred horses in Australia are permanently individually identified with a microchip and a freeze brand. Their ownership and location are recorded while they are within the breeding and racing industry, but when they leave these industries, there is no ongoing record of essential details needed for effective traceability.

While traceability alone does not guarantee positive welfare outcomes, it is almost impossible to have an effective welfare regime without proper traceability.

The merits of creating a national register for all horses is being examined by a cross-governmental working group.

Such a database, that would require all horses to be registered, is the only way the thoroughbred industry can know what happens to its horses. Without this data, it will not be able to ensure these thoroughbreds are well cared for. Nor can it provide the community with robust data on the outcomes of horses that transition out of the industry.

The TAWWG's strong recommendation is that federal and state governments develop a national database that allows for each horse to be individually identified, along with its owners and location.

While governments carry out further work on a national register, it is imperative the thoroughbred industry do more to track its horses in retirement.

A sustainable plan

For a sector as significant as thoroughbred racing and breeding, the TAWWG believes it is a weakness that there is no national strategic plan that considers the future size of the industry and the sustainable production of thoroughbreds to meet that need.

A properly developed plan would lay out a vision for the industry, its objectives and goals and the actions, timelines and measurements required to realise that vision.

A comprehensive national plan would consider the number of thoroughbreds required to ensure adequate field sizes in races, but also guarantee adequate opportunities for those horses post-racing.

The annual Australian thoroughbred foal crop has been about 13,000 in recent years, which is a decrease of around 30% from the late 1990s. Furthermore, a greater proportion of these foals is being registered to race and is competing on the racetrack.

Despite this trend, several submissions stated there was overproduction, that more thoroughbreds than needed were being produced. Others, including Racing NSW, argued the opposite. The TAWWG found there was insufficient evidence to say whether there is overproduction.

Any plan should also consider the use of race programming to provide more opportunities for the many older, sound racehorses retiring prematurely, and to encourage the breeding of more durable horses.

TAWWG's analysis of the available data estimated around 8,500 thoroughbreds a year were exiting racing and breeding. Finding suitable homes for this number of horses annually presents a significant challenge.

Therefore this sustainable breeding plan should not only consider how many thoroughbred foals are needed each year to meet the needs of the racing industry, it should also fully and properly consider the industry's responsibility to provide adequate and appropriate post-racing (including breeding) opportunities for the horses it produces

Rehoming

The transition of thoroughbreds from racing and breeding to other activities is a key juncture in a horse's life. Most are rehomed and often this is done through an informal network of people who take horses on to give them another purpose.

The importance of these networks is highlighted by Racing Australia's retirement data, which shows only 2% of retiring racehorses enter a retraining or rehoming scheme overseen by a state racing authority.

The TAWWG believes considerably more resources are needed to create opportunities for horses leaving the industry and to stimulate demand for these animals.

Evidence presented to the panel highlighted the importance of finding horses suitable vocations in which they had a purpose and were therefore valued by their new owner.

It is evident that if a horse is well handled in early life, and exposed to other equine disciplines in foundation and ongoing training, it is easier to transition to a new career.

TAWWG was told that handling practices were shifting from teaching a horse to submit, to a quiet cooperative approach. To encourage and support this transition, there is an opportunity to upskill and improve standards of those providing early handling and foundation training.

The TAWWG also examined schemes in other countries to promote the use of thoroughbreds, encourage retrainers, and support and develop communities among owners of retired racehorses. A number of these could be adopted for use in Australia.

One weakness in the current system to provide and support retraining and rehoming is the different approaches and funding of state racing authorities.

The TAWWG strongly believes all thoroughbreds deserve an opportunity at a second career, and this chance should not depend on where they are in the country. The panel heard evidence that smaller jurisdictions faced particular challenges with significantly fewer resources to help with the retraining and rehoming of retired racehorses that had generally come from the larger states.

There is a need for a national plan to consolidate and build on these state-based efforts.

A national safety net

Even with the industry making significantly more effort to help horses transition into suitable second careers, there will always be some that are at risk of poor welfare, being unwanted or poorly cared for.

The TAWWG carefully considered how the industry could develop a mechanism to support these horses and give them the chance to find a new home or purpose. This is an important part of any welfare framework.

TAWWG's recommendation is the establishment of a national safety net, including a hotline, to provide all thoroughbred horses with such an opportunity. Thoroughbreds at genuine risk could be referred to this scheme. A similar scheme has successfully transitioned hundreds of former racehorses in the UK in recent years.

This program would enable the industry to help horses that might otherwise suffer mistreatment. It would also send a powerful message to the broader community: the thoroughbred industry is committed to welfare and to providing every vulnerable horse with an opportunity at a second career.

End of life

Any effective framework for thoroughbred welfare must consider how horses die.

The TAWWG found the absence of an agreed end-of-life, decision-making framework, that would help guide owners when making decisions, to be a weakness that needs addressing.

The TAWWG's view, supported by an overwhelming number of submissions, accepts the principle that if circumstances arise where a horse can no longer be appropriately cared for, ensuring a humane death is preferable to its being left alive and suffering from neglect.

Once a properly considered decision has been made that it is in the best interest of the horse for it to be killed, the most appropriate method is for a rapid painless death in a suitable, preferably familiar, environment.

The TAWWG also considered the use of abattoirs and knackeries. A weakness with both is the lack of species-specific standards for killing horses.

The TAWWG found the use of the Meramist abattoir in Queensland (the only abattoir licensed to process horses in Australia) problematic. Many horses are transported long distances to the site in conditions unsuitable for thoroughbreds and the facility is not designed for horses.

The TAWWG recommends that while there is a lack of species-specific standards enforced for horses, principal racing authorities should institute rules to prevent participants sending horses to Meramist.

Knackeries come under the jurisdiction of states and territories and vary across the country. The TAWWG found knackeries could play a useful role if they had experienced operators who could kill a horse humanely and facilitate the disposal of the carcass. TAWWG notes, however, that Racing NSW remains committed to its rule that prohibits industry participants sending horses for slaughter.

To support welfare at end of life, an audited quality assurance scheme should be developed for knackeries killing thoroughbreds. This would allow participating facilities to demonstrate they were treating horses in a humane and dignified way at the end of life.

A national approach

The TAWWG believes that the welfare challenges facing the industry are both complex and evolving. Ensuring the welfare of thoroughbreds is a national issue. Horses are highly mobile animals: they may be born in one state, race in two more, before being rehomed in a fourth.

But the industry's governance structure means its response to the welfare challenge is essentially decided at state level, which is an impediment to achieving the best welfare outcomes.

Among the many programs developed and implemented at state and territory level are rehoming and retraining programs, initiatives to stimulate demand for retired racehorses, and safeguards to support vulnerable horses.

A key observation of many participants, regulators and those outside racing and breeding was the lack of a national and collaborative approach to welfare.

It was also clear that Racing Australia could not fulfil this role. Its constitution does not support this, nor does it have the remit from its shareholders and members, the state racing authorities, to carry out such a role.

Protecting the welfare of thoroughbreds through the development and enforcement of national welfare standards will be far more effective than a series of independent, regionally based regulations.

Furthermore, horses are entitled to an acceptable standard of care wherever they are located.

Finally, the Australian community will judge the performance of the thoroughbred racing and breeding industries by their weakest link.

It is the TAWWG's strongly held view that there is an urgent need to establish a single, national organisation dedicated to the development, and implementation, of a national welfare strategy. The panel suggests such a body be called Thoroughbred Welfare Australia (TWA).

This organisation would have a leadership role in shaping welfare policy, working with racing regulators and thoroughbred industry participants, state and federal governments, to build a state-of-the-art national welfare regime and fund key functions that produce better outcomes for thoroughbreds across the country.

TWA's sole objective would be to improve the welfare of thoroughbreds.

To be successful, it would need to build on – and interact effectively with – existing PRA welfare commitments. The role of the TWA is not to replace, duplicate or in any way undermine the welfare efforts going on at state and territory level, but to augment and support this work.

The new organisation would also provide a national thoroughbred welfare information service to ensure the public debate about thoroughbred welfare is properly informed.

Among the key functions of TWA would be to

- establish a national thoroughbred safety net for all thoroughbred horses in Australia at risk of poor welfare outcomes
- work with Racing Australia and the thoroughbred industry to urge federal, state and territory governments to develop and implement a national horse traceability register as soon as possible
- work to create significantly more, and increasingly diverse, opportunities for retired racehorses and breeding stock
- build consensus around the development and implementation of Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for horses
- work with Racing Australia and the PRAs to develop specific welfare standards for Australian thoroughbred horses
- work with key sectors of the breeding, racing and rehoming industries to develop and implement quality assurance schemes
- develop welfare training modules for all staff in the racing and breeding industries to underpin the rollout of both the thoroughbred welfare standards and quality assurance schemes
- establish a national thoroughbred welfare information service to:
 - provide community access to scientifically sound and independent advice on thoroughbred welfare
 - provide transparency around the industry's compliance with equine welfare standards
 - inform the community about industry welfare programs.

The TAWWG recommends the industry should establish an efficient funding mechanism for TWA.

This could include a small levy on breeders, trainers, owners, jockeys, and contributions from Racing Australia, sponsors and charitable donations. Another potential revenue source is from bookmakers, with suggestions that this could come from a very small percentage of turnover on thoroughbred racing or a contribution based on the number of account holders that bet on the sport.

The TWA board should be skills based with directors appointed as individuals, rather than representatives of other organisations.

A framework for thoroughbred welfare

All 46 recommendations in this report are important and, if implemented, would improve the welfare of thoroughbreds.

However, the proposed actions listed below are vital to creating a national framework that will ensure the welfare of every thoroughbred horse is protected from birth until death.

These actions should be taken as the signature reforms of this report.

Responsibility	The thoroughbred Industry should accept responsibility and take all reasonable steps to ensure its horses have a good life, including after racing, and a humane death.
National Standards	Governments should develop, with the support of industry, national welfare standards for all horses. While other species such as cattle and sheep have enforceable standards, these do not exist for horses. This would mandate minimum care for horses at all stages of life, including for thoroughbreds after they exit racing and breeding.
Industry Standards	The Industry should develop enforceable national welfare standards for all thoroughbred horses while in racing and breeding. These standards would be appropriate to all stages of life (i.e. breeding, pre-training, racing etc). These would make clear to all participants the minimum care they are required to provide to remain in the industry.
Traceability	Governments should create a national traceability register for all horses, which identifies each horse individually, as well as location and owner. Without such a register it is almost impossible to have an effective welfare regime. It is also important for the thoroughbred industry to know where its horses are in retirement.
Transition	The thoroughbred industry should make further investment in programs to transition horses out of racing and breeding. Moving thoroughbreds into good homes or a purposeful second career is important for welfare. While there are lots of good programs assisting this transition, the industry needs to ensure it is doing all it can to stimulate demand for thoroughbreds.
Safety Net	The industry should establish a national thoroughbred safety net to support horses at risk of a poor welfare outcome after leaving racing and breeding. Such a safety net would allow the industry to help those horses that it no longer has any jurisdiction over.
National Body	The industry should create a national welfare body - with a proposed name of Thoroughbred Welfare Australia - to drive improved outcomes for thoroughbreds at all stages of their life. This would help ensure good welfare across every state and territory.

Recommendations

1. The thoroughbred industry, which breeds horses for the purpose of racing, has a social and moral responsibility to take all reasonable steps to ensure thoroughbreds have a good life, including after racing or breeding, and a humane death.
2. The thoroughbred industry should coordinate the development of Thoroughbred Welfare Australia (TWA), whose mission would be to focus on the whole-of-life welfare of thoroughbreds. The industry should convene key groups, including Racing Australia, PRAs, Thoroughbred Breeders Australia, RSPCA Australia and the Australian Veterinary Association, to nominate a steering committee responsible for establishing TWA, developing its constitution and appointing an independent skills-based board.
3. The steering committee should be an expert rather than a representative group to ensure that the single objective of establishing TWA is to create an organisation wholly focused on thoroughbred welfare. Its constitution and leadership should support delivery of positive life-long welfare outcomes.
4. The science-based, world's best practice model of animal welfare, Five Domains, should be used as the foundation for all welfare considerations for thoroughbred horses, and all sectors of the thoroughbred racing and breeding industries should commit to its application.
5. The Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for horses should adopt the Five Domains model as the foundation for welfare assessment and be science-based, auditable and enforceable.
6. Thoroughbred Welfare Australia (TWA), working with other stakeholders, should advocate to state, territory and Commonwealth agriculture ministers to expedite the development and regulation of Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for all horses. This may require an alternative process, such as engaging an independent panel, to allow the standards and guidelines to be developed in parallel with current national animal welfare priorities.
7. The thoroughbred racing and breeding industries should fully support and engage to expedite the review and implementation of the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Land Transport of Livestock in relation to horses, to ensure the particular needs of thoroughbred horses are fully considered in this process.
8. Each principal racing authority (PRA) should develop a memorandum of understanding with animal welfare enforcement agencies in its jurisdiction to ensure consistency of enforcement, access and resourcing of animal welfare standards for thoroughbreds during and after their racing or breeding careers.
9. TWA should work with the breeding and racing industries, Racing Australia and the principal racing authorities (PRAs) to urgently develop and implement national thoroughbred welfare standards, based on the Five Domains model and covering the care and welfare needs of thoroughbreds across all stages of their lives.
10. Racing Australia and the principal racing authorities (PRAs) should work with TWA to develop and implement an effective and transparent compliance and enforcement regime, with significant penalties for non-compliance, to ensure the national thoroughbred welfare standards are fully and appropriately enforced.
11. Racing Australia, through the Australian Stud Book (ASB), should require all owners and breeders to meet the national thoroughbred welfare standards and be subject to its rigorous compliance regime.

- 12.** TWA should work with the breeding industry to develop and implement a welfare quality assurance (QA) scheme for breeders
- 13.** Any person with a criminal conviction for an animal cruelty offence should be presumed unsuitable to be a racing or breeding industry participant. Such individuals should be barred from becoming a licensed participant, a registered owner, or having their horses registered in the Australian Stud Book (ASB).
- 14.** A national horse register and traceability system should be established with utmost priority. The system must allow for all horses to be individually identified and traced to their current owner.
- 15.** The thoroughbred industry should actively lobby state and federal governments on the urgent need for a national horse traceability register.
- 16.** The federal, state and territory governments should commit to funding the establishment of a national horse register and traceability system.
- 17.** Racing Australia should encourage the national traceability of thoroughbreds for life by developing the capacity to update ownership and other details at any stage of career and life and providing incentives for owners to do so.
- 18.** Racing Australia should adopt and implement a policy of open and transparent publication and access to data relating to thoroughbred racing and breeding.
- 19.** Racing Australia should review its data collection system to ensure it:
 - a) delivers a comprehensive statistical profile of all horses in the thoroughbred racing and breeding industries from birth to retirement
 - b) captures all the data required by different industry sectors
 - c) promotes compliance with reporting requirements across the industry
 - d) informs all industry participants about the purpose and benefits of the data they provide
 - e) provides for the validation of data to ensure it is robust
 - f) underpins a transparent and accountable welfare regime
 - g) encourages and incentivises participation by industry.
- 20.** Racing Australia should use its data capabilities to:
 - a) inform policy development across the Australian thoroughbred racing and breeding industries
 - b) benchmark the welfare performance of the industry
 - c) inform the development of a community thoroughbred welfare information campaign.
- 21.** TWA in conjunction with Racing Australia should publish annually a report that provides industry information on the number of racehorses, broodmares, stallions and unraced thoroughbreds that have left the racing and breeding industry that year, and their destination.
- 22.** Racing Australia, together with TWA, should seek opportunities to work with the broader horse and equestrian sectors to share registration and traceability information, especially for thoroughbred horses that have left the racing and breeding industries.
- 23.** Racing Australia should expedite the introduction of existing and emerging technologies such as database linkage, real time geolocation and mobile phone apps. These should be used wherever possible to improve user experience and extend functionality of traceability systems.
- 24.** As a priority, Racing Australia should work with industry stakeholders to develop a well-researched,

medium- to long-term sustainable national thoroughbred breeding and racing plan. This should aim to align the size of the foal crop with the current and future requirements of the racing industry, and of the export and non-racing thoroughbred markets, while providing appropriately for the aftercare needs of all horses the industry produces.

- 25.** Racing Australia should create a separate category in the Australian Stud Book (ASB) for thoroughbred horses that are not bred for racing purposes and would not be eligible to race.
- 26.** Principal racing authorities (PRAs) should consider adjusting their racing programs, particularly in country areas and at community picnic races, to provide more opportunities for older horses.
- 27.** Racing Australia should work with industry stakeholders to commission scientific studies to determine how the thoroughbred breeding industry can better understand and use genetics and the heritability of desired attributes such as speed, staying ability, soundness and racing longevity to improve the quality of thoroughbred horses.
- 28.** TWA should work with the industry to develop a national framework for the assessment, retraining and rehoming of thoroughbreds exiting the racing and breeding industries.
- 29.** TWA, working with Racing Australia, the principal racing authorities (PRAs) and the broader industry, should develop and implement a comprehensive coordinated national plan to significantly increase the number and diversity of opportunities for all thoroughbred horses leaving the breeding and racing industries.
- 30.** TWA should implement programs to improve the sharing of knowledge and experiences across Australia and internationally, with respect to retraining and rehoming of thoroughbreds. This should include the development of best practice guidelines for the retraining of retired thoroughbreds.
- 31.** All retired racehorses should have an appropriate period of rest and recuperation, followed by an appropriate health and welfare assessment, before entering a retraining and rehoming program.
- 32.** TWA should develop an advisory service to provide information on pathways to successfully transition horses out of the thoroughbred racing or breeding industry.
- 33.** TWA, working with relevant stakeholders, should develop and implement welfare quality assurance (QA) schemes for key thoroughbred industry participants, including trainers, foundation trainers and retrainers.
- 34.** TWA should develop and implement a national safety net that develops and oversees a thoroughbred welfare hotline to advise on welfare options for at-risk horses. It would include a service to assess at-risk thoroughbreds and provide advice on options including rehoming, retraining and on-site humane killing. The national safety net would report annually on all its activities.
- 35.** TWA, in consultation with the thoroughbred industry, the Australian Veterinary Association and RSPCA, should develop a national decision-making framework to provide guidance on end-of-life decisions for thoroughbreds, that protects the welfare of horses, is consistent with the ethical obligations of veterinarians and includes relevant activity and time-based thresholds.
- 36.** TWA, in consultation with the thoroughbred industry, the Australian Veterinary Association and RSPCA, should develop national protocols with respect to the humane killing of thoroughbred horses based on the following principles:
 - a) From an animal welfare perspective, the least stressful and most humane option is for a horse to be humanely killed in familiar surroundings by a registered veterinarian.

- b) Where attendance by a veterinarian is not feasible, shooting with an appropriate calibre firearm, carried out according to best practice by a trained and competent operator, is also a humane option.
 - c) Where on-farm humane killing is not an option, appropriate transport to a nearby knackery where shooting is carried out according to best practice by a trained and competent operator can also be acceptable.
- 37.** The industry should develop and support measures to improve national access to on-farm humane killing where a decision has been made to end a horse's life, including by providing access to veterinarians and other persons trained in the above protocols to conduct humane killing.
- 38.** TWA should develop an industry accreditation program to recognise trained and competent firearm operators that meets best practice standards for on-farm humane killing.
- 39.** The racing and breeding industries should engage with state and territory governments to expedite the development and implementation of the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Livestock at Processing Establishments and ensure these standards include species-specific requirements for the handling, management and humane killing of horses.
- 40.** Racing Australia should implement national rules to prevent thoroughbred horses being sold or transported for the purpose of slaughter at an abattoir. These should remain in place unless and until mandatory national species-specific standards are developed and implemented that guarantee thoroughbred welfare during transport to and at abattoirs.
- 41.** State and territory regulators should act to increase the level of oversight and auditing of animal welfare at knackeries where horses are killed. This should include requirements for animal welfare training of auditors and knackery staff, increased audit frequency and direct auditing of the handling and killing of horses.
- 42.** TWA should develop a quality assurance framework for knackeries that handle live thoroughbreds to ensure these horses are managed in accordance with best practice welfare standards, particularly at their end of life.
- 43.** TWA, Racing Australia, the principal racing authorities (PRAs), and the breeding and racing industries should work with AgriFutures to develop and implement a nationally agreed thoroughbred horse welfare research program.
- 44.** TWA should work with Racing Australia, the principal racing authorities (PRAs) and the breeding and racing industries to facilitate and encourage all workers involved in handling thoroughbred horses to undertake appropriate skills training and education. This should include workers involved in early foal management, yearling preparation, foundation training and training for the racetrack.
- 45.** TWA should work with Skills Australia, the national body that sets the curriculum/course content for VET courses, to ensure that all national VET courses for students undertaking equine studies – such as Certificate III in equine studies, Certificate III in horse breeding, Certificate III in performance horse – include in their curriculum up-to-date modules or course content on horse welfare.
- 46.** TWA should establish a publicly available national thoroughbred welfare information portal that is regularly updated with key data to ensure the public is fully informed with accurate information on the welfare of thoroughbred horses in Australia.

CHAPTER ONE

Racing in Australia

Introduction

The Australian thoroughbred racing and breeding industry provides a significant contribution to Australian society: economically, socially, as a source of enjoyment for many, and as part of this nation's cultural identity and history.

At the centre of the industry is its most important asset – thoroughbreds. They are the stars of the show, and ensuring their welfare has to be the industry's priority.

Thoroughbreds are bred primarily for their use in racing as a sport. They must have speed and stamina; as such they have high risk for self-inflicted injury and injuries from high-speed activity both when in the paddock and racing. Many thoroughbreds have a high commercial value and may be sold many times in their life.

Industry participants have told the TAWWG that the care of the horses must be of the highest standard and it is evident that, for the most part, this is achieved when a thoroughbred is racing and breeding. But the public wants to know that a high level of care continues after they have left racing.

Unless the industry codifies the higher level of care it demands for its animals and has an effective compliance regime to ensure it is provided, it is unlikely the public will accept assurances in the future.

It is the thoroughbred industry's responsibility to ensure thoroughbreds are cared for appropriately from birth to end of life. That is the central responsibility of the industry – to look after the horses it breeds. This is not being done adequately now. Unless that changes, the economic, emotional and social benefits of horse racing will evaporate. The TAWWG recognises that more needs to be done to fulfil that responsibility.

Thoroughbred racing

Racing is an economic powerhouse, with the industry's direct and indirect contribution to wealth calculated at around \$9 billion annually.

It is also a major employer. More than 78,000 full-time jobs depend on the thoroughbred industry, and many of those are in regional and rural Australia.

And while big contests such as the Melbourne Cup may be its highest profile events, thousands of race meetings are held each year across the country – from major cities to outback meetings such as Birdsville – that help sustain local economies, drive tourism, support jobs, and create a unique community that pulls together people from all walks of life.

The *Racing Australia Fact Book* for 2019-20 highlights both the size of the industry and its national coverage.

In the 2019-20 season, 387 race clubs across the country staged 2,485 meetings in which 179,242 runners contested 18,609 races. Those horses were trained by 3,042 trainers and ridden by 844 jockeys.²

Participation is not limited to those involved in the care of thoroughbreds. There are more than 100,000

individual owners, meaning about one in every 247 Australians owns a share in a racehorse. Such investment is unparalleled in any other racing nation.

It is therefore unsurprising that the racing industry enjoys a well-earned reputation for world's best practice in staging major sporting events such as the four-day Melbourne Cup carnival, the Sydney Championships, Queensland Winter Racing Carnival and the Perth Racing Summer Carnival.

This enormous economic benefit to communities and regions can continue only if the welfare of thoroughbreds is foremost in the racing industry's long-term strategy and governance.

Financially, the industry is in a strong position, especially compared to jurisdictions overseas, with prize money for the 2019-20 season at \$808 million.

The vast majority of this funding comes from a proportion of wagering turnover, and thoroughbred racing is central to Australia's enthusiasm for the punt. In the financial year 2019-2020, Australians bet more than \$21.088 billion on thoroughbred racing.

This wagering also generates significant tax revenue to fund public services. This financial strength can be protected only if the welfare of thoroughbreds is assured.

Of course, the thoroughbred industry begins long before the racecourse. Australia has the second biggest foal crop in the world after the US with 12,625 thoroughbreds born in 2020. The bloodstock business is also significant: some 4,000 yearlings were sold at public auction in 2020, for a total purchase price of \$426,883,298 and a median value of \$55,000.

However, this success in Australian breeding barns and on the track creates a significant challenge for the thoroughbred industry with thousands of relatively young horses leaving racing every year. These horses need and deserve new opportunities, a good life and, when the time comes, a humane end of life.

Meeting society's expectations

After considering 180 written submissions and participating in more than 50 meetings with key stakeholders, it is clear to the TAWWG that the administrative structure that has delivered economic success is failing the industry when it comes to meeting community expectations about thoroughbred welfare. The industry can and must do better on this.

It is also clear to the TAWWG, through stakeholder engagement and social research, that community concerns about animal welfare, and the treatment of animals in sport, have changed significantly in recent years. This means there is far greater scrutiny on the care of thoroughbreds when racing and, importantly, after their racing career.

These concerns were highlighted by the findings of a significant social research study commissioned to inform the deliberations of the panel. (See Appendix 1)

More than 1,000 Australians were surveyed about the thoroughbred industry. The results showed more respondents were unsupportive than supportive of racing and breeding, and almost a third were ambivalent or unsure.

However, the same research also showed that support for the industry would soar if welfare concerns were addressed.

Some 29% of those who were unsupportive said they would change their position if they were convinced animal welfare issues were managed effectively.

Another 18% stated they would support the industry if there was a strong, well-funded and independent regulator.

The Establishment of the TAWWG

On 17 October 2019, the ABC program 7:30 screened *The Final Race*, a report on former racehorses being transported to an abattoir and knackerries where they experienced horrifying abuse before slaughter.³

The industry responded with near-universal horror and condemnation to the mistreatment of these horses, and the images sparked outrage in the broader community.

It was evident to all that the thoroughbred industry's public standing had been badly damaged. It was also clear to the vast majority that changes needed to happen to ensure such scenes did not occur again.

An inquiry commissioned by the Queensland government (Martin report) concluded: "The racing industry in Australia, in general, has fundamentally failed to intervene at industry level, to effectively protect retired racehorses," adding, "the industry's failure appears to be the product of chronic inattention rather than deliberate disregard."⁴

In February 2020 the Thoroughbred Aftercare Welfare Working Group (TAWWG) was established. It was funded by participant groups that saw the need for a national independent review of industry practices and a conversation on how to improve the opportunities for, and welfare of, thoroughbreds leaving the racing and breeding industries.

This report was commissioned by participants in the industry, recognising that it must publicly and transparently address the welfare of horses that leave breeding or racing.

At the time of the TAWWG's announcement, steering group member Martin Talty, the chief executive of the Australian Jockeys Association, said: "Horse welfare is paramount to everything we do and it is important that we have a panel independent of the industry to help us. I am confident they will provide recommendations that we can all get behind."

Trainer Chris Waller, also a steering group member, said the initiative was "an opportunity to start building a national approach to welfare in racing and all industry players should grab it."

These results demonstrate that the public believes the industry is not doing enough to ensure the welfare of its horses. They also highlight the opportunity to secure broad community support for racing and breeding if the public believes the welfare concerns are being addressed appropriately.

But it is not only the public that believes improving and ensuring thoroughbred welfare is vital.

A national approach

The TAWWG received many submissions from key industry stakeholders: breeders, trainers, owners, veterinarians, racing administrators, race clubs and peak bodies.

Overwhelmingly, they felt welfare was a critical issue Australia-wide and one that called for a consistent, national approach.

Many of the contributors stated the current system of regulation, through separate state and territory racing authorities, may work effectively for racing but contained a structural weakness that led to different approaches and outcomes in welfare standards.

For many, welfare was the biggest challenge the industry has to deal with, and one that will shape its future.

Henry Field, a leader in the breeding industry, told the TAWWG: “The issue of welfare is key to the survival of the thoroughbred industry, so it’s vital we get it right ... The goalposts have definitely shifted in recent years, in terms of what is and isn’t acceptable to society at large, so we as an industry need to adapt and ensure we ask ourselves some tough questions to enable us to live up to those changing expectations.”

Olly Tait, principal of Twin Hills Stud and formerly chief operating officer of the global Darley breeding operation, said: “The appropriate aftercare of thoroughbreds is critical to the ongoing viability of the thoroughbred industry and the sport of horse racing ... the thoroughbred industry should be expected to do everything in its power to promote the welfare of horses registered as thoroughbreds.”

The submission of Duncan Grimley from Glastonbury Farm was typical of many from industry participants: “The ABC 7.30 report didn’t have a major impact on me personally because I know from first-hand experience that the vast majority of people in the thoroughbred industry do the right thing and treat horses with care and respect. But it did have a major impact on my kids, whose friends automatically formed the view that racing is cruel.”

He continued: “There are always going to be people on opposite sides of the argument ... But I still think there’s an opportunity for racing to bring some of the floating voters in the middle over to our side of the fence. If we don’t and we lose the social licence, then there’s a good chance that racing might not survive.”

“The goalposts have definitely shifted in recent years, in terms of what is and isn’t acceptable to society at large, so we as an industry need to adapt and ensure we ask ourselves some tough questions to enable us to live up to those changing expectations.” Henry Field, Newgate Stud Farm

Ballarat trainer Matt Cumani has a similar view. He said he saw only “one possible damaging force in the industry and that is ignoring thoroughbred welfare”. He said the panel “should put together an independent body that can take this on and manage it.”

In his submission, Victorian trainer Ciaron Maher said: “The equine welfare issue has been smouldering away for a while now and, whilst there’s probably a gap between the perception and the reality, it’s not an issue we can ignore.”

Mark Webster, managing director of auctioneer William Inglis and Son, argued that the industry had a wider responsibility for the welfare of thoroughbred horses.

“Inglis is supportive of the view that the thoroughbred breeding and racing industry has a social, moral and legal responsibility for the ongoing welfare of thoroughbred horses who have exited the industry, and this is a statement the industry should embrace.”

Communications

The public’s ability to receive information about animal welfare and engage in discussion has changed dramatically in the past decade, with the almost universal adoption of smartphones and the growth of social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.⁵

Where once a traditional media outlet – such as a newspaper, radio station or TV network – would have to report on an issue for it to be brought to the attention of a large group of people, information can now

be spread almost instantaneously through social media. This change has led to a far more extensive public debate on welfare issues within and around the thoroughbred industry.

Many in the industry also said the industry was failing to communicate effectively on welfare to the broader community.

Many said there was a lack of accurate welfare information published by industry bodies, and the state-based model of regulation meant there was no opportunity to communicate a consistent national message.

Trainer Tony Gollan said: “We’re very good about giving ourselves a pat on the back and preaching to the converted, but not very good at all when it comes to getting that message out to the wider public.”

Conversely, animal welfare groups are well organised and do an effective job at engaging the community and mobilising support.

This is highlighted by their audiences on social media. As of September 2021, Racing NSW and Racing Victoria, combined, had fewer Facebook followers than the Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses, and Animals Australia had 26 times more Facebook followers than both organisations combined.^{6 7 8 9 10}

The TAWWG considers the consequences of not meeting community expectations is significant.

Among the evidence heard from across the industry, including major race clubs, wagering operators, auction houses and stakeholder groups, was that failure to meet community expectations on welfare would likely result in:

- declining participation in the industry because of adverse publicity
- community pressure to increase regulation
- reduced wagering as a result of welfare concerns
- reduced corporate value of the sport, with declining sponsorships and income from media deals.

A wagering operator provided a good example of such impacts. It said a 2020 survey of its customers found 44% were less interested in betting on horse racing because of equine welfare concerns.

Achieving success

In compiling this report, the TAWWG has considered the many problems that face the thoroughbred industry in relation to welfare. Its focus has mainly been on improving outcomes for horses that have left, or are leaving, the industry.

However, it is clear that a horse’s handling through its entire life, including foundation training and while it is racing, influence its ability to be successfully rehomed later. This in turn has a profound effect on how it is likely to be treated in its later years. The report considers those issues when relevant.

The challenges are complex with different concerns at every stage of a horse’s life. In addition, oversight and responsibility for welfare fall on different organisations and governments at different stages.

Central to the TAWWG’s recommendations is the creation of a national welfare framework that supports measures to ensure thoroughbreds are treated well throughout their lives, up to and including their death.

It is clear there is no easy fix or single action that will improve the care of thoroughbreds and, in turn, the standing of the industry. What the panel proposes is a series of measures to achieve this outcome.

Improving thoroughbred welfare will also take a consolidated and collaborative effort. More rules or

heavier penalties will not, on their own, achieve success. An effective strategy must be ‘bottom-up’ as well as ‘top-down’, with all participants in the industry being engaged and building a culture of improvement for welfare.

The recommendations address the industry’s responsibility not only to the horses but to the wider community, to demonstrate beyond doubt that thoroughbred horses are cared for well.

Industry responsibility

One of the challenges that became apparent early in the TAWWG’s work was the lack of an agreed industry view of its responsibility for thoroughbreds after they had finished racing or breeding.

Without such agreement, it is difficult to determine where responsibility begins and ends, and impossible to develop a consistent view of the initiatives the industry would support.

While some submissions stated the industry should be responsible for all the horses it produced until the end of their lives, others pointed to the fact that many thoroughbreds would spend most of their years outside of breeding or racing and therefore their owner was responsible for their care at any given time.

A number of senior racing administrators made it clear that the industry had a wider responsibility for the welfare of horses beyond their time on the track.

The executive general manager, integrity at Racing Victoria, Jamie Stier, said: “In our view, it is impossible to decouple racing from both the before and after.”

Racing SA’s submission stated the body operated under the Equine Welfare Framework (EWF), which has three phases: before racing, during their racing career, and after racing and retirement.

Findings

The TAWWG believes that rather than the state-based administrations that run racing, successful animal welfare needs a consistent national approach, a consolidation of effort across the industry.

That in turn requires a national approach and message, a strategy that reflects the best welfare practices, as well as community values and changing community expectations.

The TAWWG’s first recommendation is that the industry should adopt a unified approach to horse welfare, namely, that it has a moral and social responsibility to take all reasonable steps to ensure thoroughbreds have a good life, including after they have finished racing or breeding, and a humane death.

Recommendation

1. The thoroughbred industry, which breeds horses for the purpose of racing, has a social and moral responsibility to take all reasonable steps to ensure thoroughbreds have a good life, including after racing or breeding, and a humane death.

CHAPTER TWO

National Approach to Thoroughbred Welfare

Introduction

The Australian thoroughbred industry is of national significance through its economic size, cultural importance and the enjoyment it gives to millions of Australians. It is seen as a world leader so it is imperative that this position is not undermined by failing to develop a nationally consistent, effective approach to thoroughbred welfare.

However, in the vast number of submissions and the evidence presented to the TAWWG, not one person or organisation said the industry's efforts in welfare could not be improved.

The TAWWG's role has been to listen to all stakeholders, examine international best practice, and consider and recommend policies that could make the most significant improvements to thoroughbred welfare.

The TAWWG's view is that the welfare challenges are complex and evolving. Their nature will change as community expectations evolve and the science of welfare and understanding of horse behaviour changes, too. The racing industry must be agile enough to move with, and incorporate, improvements in standards and knowledge.

Ensuring the welfare of thoroughbreds is a national challenge. Horses are highly mobile animals: they may be born in one state, race in two more, before being rehomed in a fourth.

But the governance structure of the industry means its response to the welfare challenge is essentially decided at state level. This federated system, which has largely worked successfully for the racing product, is an impediment to achieving the best welfare outcomes.

Rehoming and retraining programs, initiatives to stimulate demand for retired racehorses, safeguards to provide support to vulnerable horses, are among the many programs developed and implemented at state and territory level.

While there were many and diverse suggestions made to the TAWWG about improving the outcomes for horses leaving the thoroughbred industry, a key observation – made by many participants and regulators, as well as those outside the racing and breeding industries – was the lack of a national and collaborative approach to welfare.

Principal racing authorities (PRAs) and welfare

While most of the rules that govern racing and breeding are national, industry welfare policy is drawn up and implemented at a state level by the PRAs.

An example of how this can lead to differences in approach is the fact that only four of the seven PRAs have adopted the Five Domains welfare philosophy.

Without an agreed view on what constitutes good welfare, it is unsurprising that approaches vary. The

TAWWG notes that variations in budgets can also lead to significant differences in welfare programs, the enforcement of welfare standards, and welfare outcomes.

Brendan Parnell, the chief executive officer of Racing Queensland, told the panel: “The smaller PRAs like Tasmania, South Australia and Northern Territory are not as well equipped commercially to support a certain level of [national] standards.”

There is a pattern of horses that begin their careers in the major racing states of New South Wales and Victoria but are not competitive in city-class races. So they move to regional racing and states where there is weaker competition and the costs associated with racing, such as training fees, are significantly lower.

The migration of these horses to Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory also creates a mismatch between the aftercare welfare task and the resources to carry it out.

For example, Queensland has a large rural (non-TAB) circuit because community racing is very big in the state. This allows horses to continue competing but also concentrates a large population of older horses there. This increases the burden on the thoroughbred welfare system in that committed by state.

This was echoed by evidence heard from the NT racing authority. Chief executive Andrew O’Toole told the TAWWG the NT joined the other states in allocating 1% of stake money to assist in the welfare of horses leaving the industry, but this amounted to only \$80,000 per year. On a pro-rata basis, this amounted to significantly less per retiring horse than other states.

Mr O’Toole strongly supported the distribution of national thoroughbred welfare funding in a way that delivered satisfactory minimum welfare standards in all jurisdictions. He explained that nearly all thoroughbreds racing in the NT had begun their racing careers in other states, but there was no assistance from racing authorities in other jurisdictions with the costs of rehoming or retraining.

A review of racing in NT from July to September 2021 revealed that, of the 285 individual racehorses that participated in their meetings, just 7% had their first start in the Territory, with 39% beginning their careers in Victoria, 27% in NSW, 18% in SA and the other 9% coming from other states or overseas.

The role of Racing Australia

As the national body that collects industry data (including on breeding) and drafts the Australian Rules of Racing, Racing Australia (RA) has an important role in thoroughbred welfare.

However, during consultations, a number of racing administrators told the TAWWG that RA was not empowered as a national body. The TAWWG heard that RA cannot oversee a national welfare regime because it does not have a remit from its shareholders and members, the state racing authorities, to carry out such a role.

Furthermore, the current version of RA’s constitution, introduced in 2021, explicitly waives the usual statutory duties of directors in favour of the interests of the state PRAs that nominated them. The TAWWG believes this is likely to thwart consensus building and limit the impetus for fundamental reforms at a national level.

RA representatives provided a submission and attended a consultation meeting with the TAWWG. The panel is grateful for their insights, which have informed this report. RA refused consent for publication of any comments from either process.

The TAWWG heard from many stakeholders that RA’s structure had thwarted a consistent national approach on issues such as the use of whips, the national racing calendar, and the use of the medication altrenogest in competition.

After John Messara was appointed independent chair of RA in June 2021, he told the media his role would be that of “conciliator” to try to bring agreement among the states on issues on which they were not aligned.

Findings

The TAWWG’s view is that a thoroughbred’s welfare, and its opportunity for a purposeful second career after leaving the industry, should not depend on which state or territory it lives in.

The TAWWG strongly believes there is an urgent need to establish a single, national organisation dedicated to the development and rollout of a national welfare strategy. The panel proposes such a body and suggests the name Thoroughbred Welfare Australia (TWA), which is how this report will refer to it.

This organisation would have a leadership role in shaping welfare policy. It would work with state and federal governments and racing regulators and, importantly, carry out and fund key functions that drive better outcomes for thoroughbreds across the country.

To be successful, TWA will need to build on and effectively integrate existing PRA welfare commitments. The TAWWG sees the TWA’s role not to replace, duplicate or in any way undermine the welfare efforts going on at state and territory level, but to augment and support this work.

The TWA will also need a strong working relationship with RA, which develops the national rules and collects key industry data.

Through the proposed establishment of TWA, the TAWWG seeks to ensure a nationally consistent welfare framework for thoroughbreds, from the time of their birth through to their death.

The current state-based welfare programs are not based on agreed national standards or protocols, do not report in a nationally consistent, transparent manner to the industry or the public, and their impact has yet to be empirically demonstrated. The activities are extensive, but disparate and largely uncoordinated.

This does not mean TWA should advocate that all PRAs standardise their approach to welfare. There are good reasons, such as geography, climate and funding, for different policies in each state. However, a more nationalised approach –including agreed minimum standards – will bring significant improvements for welfare.

It is not adequate for administrators or participants to point to their efforts in their state and say they are doing enough. The industry will be judged on the treatment of thoroughbreds across the country.

A good example of this was the reaction to the ABC’s 7.30 report, *The Final Race*.³ The program showed footage of horses being mistreated in Queensland and NSW, yet the TAWWG heard evidence from administrators in Victoria that the program greatly damaged the industry’s reputation and threatened commercial revenues during the spring carnival.

The TAWWG’s recommendation for a new national welfare body should not be seen as a criticism of the work carried out by state principal racing authorities. A great amount of effort and significant resources have been devoted to welfare in recent years and the TAWWG has heard evidence that many of these initiatives are proving successful in improving outcomes for horses departing the industry.

Current approaches, which have grown organically over decades, can provide excellent outcomes for many horses. However, it is clearly possible for some thoroughbreds to fall through the present system and to be neglected or mistreated, with limited opportunity to be rescued.

In this context there is near-universal support – shared by the thoroughbred industry, veterinarians and animal welfare groups as well as the wider community – for a nationally coordinated and strategic approach to lifelong thoroughbred welfare.

Many stakeholders described a need for this to be at arms' length from racing, but in the TAWWG's view the best result will come from consolidating the vast expertise of the racing and breeding industry with knowledge from independent academics, veterinarians and specialists in animal behaviour.

Evidence to the TAWWG points to strong industry and broader community support for a welfare agenda that:

- specifies enforceable standards of management and husbandry for good horse welfare (see Chapter 3)
- improves the current situation whereby there are no national enforceable standards of care for thoroughbreds when breeding or racing (Chapter 4)
- provides for whole-of-life traceability and ownership records of thoroughbreds (Chapter 5)
- improves proper record keeping for the industry (Chapter 6)
- delivers productive and rewarding second careers and experiences for horses after racing and breeding (Chapter 7)
- provides opportunities to transition horses from racing and breeding into new careers and suitable homes where they will be well looked after (Chapter 8)
- provides a safety net for vulnerable thoroughbreds (Chapter 9)
- establishes a robust framework for decision-making at the end of life (Chapter 10)
- provides the research, education and training required to support continuing improvement in welfare practice (Chapter 11).

Industry support

The TAWWG believes setting up a national thoroughbred welfare body would have broad and strong support, not only from the industry, but from welfare groups, politicians and the public.

Below are samples of the many statements senior industry participants made to TAWWG on the need for a consolidated national approach.

“There are wildly differing levels of financial support and resources dedicated by the Principal Racing Authorities to the management of their programs ... A single platform is desperately needed to help educate and continuously inform the community and participants alike, with the unified aftercare message.”
Andrew Nicholl, Australian Trainers' Association

“The biggest problem we face in Australian racing today is the lack of a national approach, and that is particularly significant in the equine welfare space. It's a national problem so it needs a national approach. The various states often pull in different directions, but this is one area where we really need unity.”
David and Prue Hayes

“We need a national approach to help the general public see we are doing our best to ensure the welfare of retired thoroughbreds, which is a huge concern to the racing and breeding industry.”
Arthur Mitchell, Yarraman Park Stud

“All the jurisdictions need to come together and take a collaborative approach, which hasn't always been easy in the past. But when it comes to the issue of horse welfare, that is absolutely what needs to happen.”
Ciaran Maher

Thoroughbred Welfare Australia

If established, the TWA's mission would be to focus on the whole-of-life welfare for thoroughbreds. It would operate in a transparent and accountable manner and provide independent, national leadership on thoroughbred horse welfare issues, and carry out key functions that materially improve welfare outcomes.

The TAWWG is introducing the proposal to form the TWA early in the report because it sees it as a key recommendation. Its early introduction is also important because recommendations made in some later chapters will form TWA objectives.

However, if the industry decides not to establish the TWA, this does not diminish the need to implement the other recommendations in this report.

The following chapters expand on the potential role of the TWA whose key functions should be to:

- establish a national thoroughbred safety net for all Australian thoroughbred horses at risk of poor welfare outcomes
- work with Racing Australia and the thoroughbred industry to urge the federal, state and territory governments to develop and implement a national horse traceability register as soon as possible
- create significantly more, and increasingly diverse, opportunities for retired racehorses and breeding stock
- build consensus around the development and implementation of national animal welfare standards and guidelines for horses
- develop specific welfare standards for thoroughbred horses in collaboration with RA that can be incorporated in the rules of racing
- work with key sectors of the thoroughbred breeding, racing and rehoming industries to develop and implement quality assurance schemes
- develop welfare training modules for all staff in the racing and breeding industries to underpin the rollout of welfare standards and quality assurance schemes
- establish a national thoroughbred welfare information service to:
 - give the community access to scientifically sound and independent advice on thoroughbred welfare
 - provide transparency on the industry's compliance with equine welfare standards
 - inform the community about industry welfare programs.

It will be important that the TWA focuses on the whole-of-life welfare of thoroughbreds; that it operates in a transparent and accountable manner, and that it provides independent, national leadership on welfare issues.

Governance

The authority of the TWA and its ability to ensure consistent national adoption of world's best welfare practice will depend on three key points: that it focuses exclusively on the welfare of the thoroughbred horse, relies on scientific evidence to inform its work, and collaborates with all key stakeholders.

The governance of the TWA should reflect these foundations. All board members should have a strong interest in advancing the welfare of thoroughbred horses. To avoid conflicts of interest, board members should be appointed as individuals rather than as representatives of other organisations.

Funding TWA

The development and implementation of a comprehensive national welfare strategy is in the interests of all participants and the TAWWG's view is that all participants should therefore contribute to the cost of the strategy.

TWA should be a not-for-profit organisation with charitable (deductible gift recipient) status, funded by the racing and breeding industries, together with donations from individuals, businesses and philanthropic organisations.

TAWWG proposes that a levy be struck at the most efficient point for the main stakeholder groups so as to minimise red tape, maximise transparency and accountability, and pool resources and effort.

TAWWG discussions and consultations showed a willingness among many to make a further contribution if this money can deliver a strategic and practical framework for improving thoroughbred welfare.

The TAWWG believes there would be significantly more support for a levy to support the work of a body such as the TWA – established with a national vision and through a collaborative approach – than for this money to be given to PRAs to expand their welfare programs.

If the TWA is established, it will be its board that defines its precise remit and works with industry to develop an effective funding mechanism. Establishing the organisation's areas of responsibilities will be important to defining what level of funding is required.

However, in terms of policies to fund, the recommendations in this report that will be the costliest to implement – and which would be driven by the TWA – are: the development of a national safety net system (Chapter 9); significantly increase the opportunities for horses leaving the industry (Chapter 8); development of training modules for staff across the industry (Chapter 11); and the creation of a national thoroughbred welfare information service (Chapter 11).

The success of an organisation such as the TWA will depend on all stakeholders being engaged and supportive of its work. So when setting out the indicative framework below, the TAWWG has considered how to attract funding from a wide group of stakeholders, and the most efficient manner in which to do it.

The following table provides an indicative funding model based on a broad industry revenue base. The revenue raised does not represent an assessment of the budget required to perform the TWA functions detailed in this report and the TAWWG acknowledges that participants would need confidence in the remit and budgeted costings of TWA.

There was also strong support among stakeholders, including the steering group, for wagering service providers to make a contribution to funding TWA. With \$29 billion bet on horseracing in Australia last racing season, setting aside a very small percentage of turnover for welfare could easily make a significant funding contribution. Another mechanism worth exploring is seeking an annual payment from bookmakers for every active account that bets on racing. With an estimated 4 million active wagering accounts in Australia, a contribution of 50 cents per active account would provide \$2 million to fund welfare activities.

Whatever funding mechanism is selected by the industry, it should be designed to minimise red tape and costs of collection, while maximizing transparency and accountability.

Stakeholder Group	Proposal	Amount Raised
Breeders	A \$300 welfare levy on all foals when breeders complete the foal ownership declaration. Unlike a levy on sales, this ensures all breeders contribute.	With the current size of the foal crop (12,400), such a levy would generate about \$3.7 million. Even allowing for a decrease in the foal crop of 10%, this would raise more than \$3 million.
Owners	A \$300 welfare levy on all thoroughbreds when they are registered as a racehorse. As with the breeder levy, this ensures all racehorse owners contribute. This should also be levied on all racehorses imported from overseas as these are likely to need rehoming in Australia.	Working on 11,000 registrations per year, this would generate \$3.3 million.
Trainers	Trainers now receive 10% of the total prize money earned by the horses registered in their name. The TAWWG suggests levying 1% of this return (\$1 per \$100 earned by a trainer in prize money). This can be efficiently collected by PRAs.	With total prize money available in Australia of more than \$800 million, this would raise about \$800,000.
Jockeys	Jockeys now receive 5% of the total prize money earned by the horses they ride. The TAWWG suggests levying 1% of this return (as with trainers \$1 in every \$100 they earn through prize money).	Based on total prize money of some \$800 million, this would raise about \$400,000.
Racing Australia	RA has made a profit of more than \$4 million in three of the past four years. Given that it carries no significant debt and its profits come almost entirely from participants (such as stud book and registration profits), the TAWWG believes there is a moral argument that at least some of these profits be diverted to welfare, rather than to the consolidated revenue of PRAs. Given the ownership of RA (RNSW and RV own a combined 70%), making a significant contribution would be one way of the two most commercially successful jurisdictions supporting welfare in the smaller states.	This would amount to a contribution of \$1 million to \$1.5 million.
Sponsorship	There are a number of companies that the TAWWG believes would support the work of TWA, but it may be hard to structure a levy for them. These may be big in size, for example the major sales companies such as Magic Millions or Inglis, or smaller operators or service providers such as farriers or feed merchants. Businesses that may contribute include race clubs, veterinary practices and transport companies. There would be tiered sponsorship opportunities to allow for differences in scale.	This would raise \$400,000 to \$600,000.
Donations and bequests	The TAWWG was told many individuals would consider a donation to support thoroughbred welfare. While it is difficult to anticipate what the level of donations might be, other charities have suggested it may be hundreds of thousands of dollars.	This could raise \$300,000 to \$500,000.
Total		\$9.9 million - \$10.8 million

Recommendations

2. The thoroughbred industry should coordinate the development of Thoroughbred Welfare Australia (TWA), whose mission would be to focus on the whole-of-life welfare of thoroughbreds. The industry should convene key groups, including Racing Australia, PRAs, Thoroughbred Breeders Australia, RSPCA Australia and the Australian Veterinary Association, to nominate a steering committee responsible for establishing TWA, developing its constitution and appointing an independent skills-based board.
3. The steering committee should be an expert rather than a representative group to ensure that the single objective of establishing TWA is to create an organisation wholly focused on thoroughbred welfare. Its constitution and leadership should support delivery of positive life-long welfare outcomes.

CHAPTER THREE

Welfare and Regulation

Introduction

The TAWWG review of the animal welfare regulatory regimes applying to thoroughbred horses exposed some fundamental weaknesses.

Firstly, there is no agreed definition of horse welfare. This is a problem both for governments charged with creating a legal framework for welfare, and for racing authorities when drafting rules for the care of horses.

The development and implementation of an effective welfare regime for horses depends on a clear and agreed definition of welfare. Without it, it is difficult, if not impossible, to articulate a welfare policy both within the horse industry and to the broader community.

Secondly, there are no national enforceable welfare standards for horses. There are rules for some other species that provide minimum standards for animals and, when supported by legislation, are enforceable by state governments. Without these standards for horses, their only legal protection is through broad, non-specific, animal cruelty legislation.

The TAWWG's view is that cruelty legislation does not provide sufficient safeguards for thoroughbreds (or any horse), nor sufficient protection to meet community expectations.

Even though the breeding and racing industry has some welfare rules (see Chapter 5), the absence of national standards is an acute problem for the industry as most thoroughbreds will spend most of their lives outside the industry – and therefore outside the industry's welfare regime.

Defining animal welfare

The first widely accepted evidence-based framework to describe animal welfare was the Five Freedoms model, which set out the need to ensure animals were free from harm and able to express normal behaviour. However, in recent times, the way in which scientists approach and conceptualise animal welfare has moved from meeting the basic needs of animals to recognising their emotional needs and encouraging positive experiences. Further, it is clear to the TAWWG that community awareness and concern about the treatment of animals has also increased, driving up public expectations of high animal welfare standards.

In its submission to the TAWWG, RSPCA Australia said: “An animal's welfare includes its physical (physiological) state and its mental (psychological) state. Anything which has the capacity to affect these states can affect an animal's welfare, for good or bad ... RSPCA Australia considers that ensuring good animal welfare goes beyond preventing pain, suffering or distress and minimising negative experiences, to ensuring animals can express their natural behaviour in an enriching environment, feel safe, have healthy positive experiences and a good quality of life.”

The RSPCA cited the widely used definition from Donald Broom, emeritus professor of animal welfare at the University of Cambridge: “The welfare of an individual is its state as regard to its attempts to cope with its environment. This state includes how much it is having to do to cope, the extent to which it is succeeding in or failing to cope, and its associated feelings.”

In its submission, the UK charity World Horse Welfare wrote: “A horse’s welfare is not purely about its physical health but also its mental/affective state. Horses, along with other equids, are sentient beings. They are capable of feeling and experiencing a range of positive and negative emotions and states. Anyone who has owned or worked with horses will confirm that they are individuals with their own interests, personalities and feelings.”

Leading trainer, Chris Waller, highlighted the balance between a horse’s physical and mental wellbeing: “Training thoroughbred horses is not just about their physical wellbeing; their mental wellbeing is also important and should be given equal weight in any comprehensive training regime.”

The RSPCA also emphasised the importance of applying animal welfare principles at all levels of the industry, including by leaders and decision makers such as board members, stewards and veterinarians who can influence practice through the respect they command.

Welfare assumptions are also implicit in the attitudes and approaches of those whose everyday work involves handling horses, including breeders and their staff, trainers, stablehands, track riders and jockeys. Industry leaders should seek to develop organisational cultures that encourage staff to speak up about welfare issues, and be open to making changes where warranted.

However, without a clear model to define animal welfare, the TAWWG considers it difficult for industry authorities to develop guidelines and to communicate best practice to those caring for horses.

The Five Domains model

The Five Domains model of animal welfare emerged strongly and consistently from the TAWWG’s consultations as the preferred framework for considering the welfare of thoroughbred and other horses, because of its increased emphasis on psychological wellbeing.

Importantly, support for this model came from a wide range of stakeholders including Animals Australia, the Australian Jumping Racing Association, Racing Victoria, RSPCA Australia, Thoroughbred Breeders Australia, Racing SA, Racing Queensland and Tasracing.

The 57-country International Federation of Horseracing Authorities (IFHA) published Minimum Horse Welfare Standards in 2020, positioning lifelong welfare as “fundamentally important to the viability and sustainability of the industry”.¹¹ These standards adopt New Zealand’s welfare guidelines, which are derived from Five Domains. While the IFHA standards do not have formal status, they are intended to assist racing authority members.

“Good welfare for horses and a life worth living can be achieved by considering physical and functional wellbeing as well as giving horses the opportunity to experience positive emotions in all areas: nutrition, health, environment, behaviour, and interactions with humans.” Australian Veterinary Association submission

The Five Domains model was also endorsed by the Australian Veterinary Association, which wrote in its submission: “Good welfare for horses and a life worth living can be achieved by considering physical and functional wellbeing as well as giving horses the opportunity to experience positive emotions in all areas: nutrition, health, environment, behaviour, and interactions with humans.”

RSPCA Australia told TAWWG that Five Domains could also be applied both at individual level, helping owners and trainers recognise the welfare status of horses in their care, and in the broader racing industry.

The Equine Science Group at Charles Sturt University was another to support the Five Domains approach.

The Five Domains model for animal welfare assessment

The Five Domains are **nutrition, environment, health, behaviour** and **mental state**.

- This approach allows a distinction to be made between the physical and functional factors that affect an animal's welfare and the overall **mental state** of the animal arising from these factors.
- Through this framework, the model acknowledges that for every physical aspect of an animal's welfare, there is an accompanying emotion or subjective experience that also affects welfare.
- While previous models of animal welfare, such as the Five Freedoms, have focused on minimising or eliminating the negative experiences of animals, such as thirst, hunger and pain, the Five Domains model incorporates the assessment of positive experiences, such as satiety, contentment and curiosity.
- Thus, the model provides a means of evaluating the welfare of an individual or group of animals in a particular situation, with a strong focus on mental wellbeing and positive experiences.
- Agreed indicators of horse welfare under Five Domains are progressively being developed through expert consensus.^{12 13} The most recent update of the model, published in 2020, provides specific guidance on how to evaluate the negative and/or positive impacts of human behavioural interactions on animal welfare, an aspect of particular importance in assessing the welfare of thoroughbreds.¹⁴

Legislating for horse welfare

The benefits to horse welfare of establishing legally enforceable minimum standards that would cover all horses, at all ages, in all contexts, and in all Australian jurisdictions are significant.

Such standards would ensure at least a minimum level of protection for thoroughbreds at all stages of their lives, before, during and after their racing or breeding careers.

In Australia, the states and territories have responsibility for animal welfare, other than in relation to imports and exports of animals, which are overseen by the Commonwealth. (See Appendix 2)

Each state and territory has its own animal welfare legislation and associated regulations. Standards and guidelines for animal welfare are sometimes developed through a national process and then legislated uniformly to ensure consistency across Australia.

However, at present nationally applicable standards for horses do not exist. State animal welfare laws give horses only minimum protections against overt cruelty and neglect, except in Tasmania and Victoria.

The Victorian Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses (Revision 1) sets minimum standards enforceable under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986.¹⁵

The Tasmanian Equine Welfare Guidelines 2008 come under the state's Animal Welfare Act. While not legally enforceable, they are "official advisory documents [that] have been used by courts and others to help determine whether a particular action or inaction is a breach of the animal welfare legislation".¹⁶

TAWWG notes that Western Australia is developing state welfare standards and guidelines with input from a working group that includes Racing and Wagering WA and the RSPCA, which have the potential to be enacted within WA's animal welfare legislation.

Furthermore, the speed with which the national animal welfare standards are being developed does not

match the needs of the current situation and falls short of community expectations about the welfare of thoroughbreds and other horses.

Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Horses

The aim of the national standards and guidelines is to create a consistent and effective animal welfare system.

Animal welfare standards are intended to be consistently mandated and enforced across all jurisdictions. The standards should reflect contemporary scientific knowledge and community expectations and be maintained and enforced in a consistent, cost-effective manner.

According to Animal Health Australia, the body that originally coordinated the development of these standards, the main decision-making principles should be that they:

- are desirable for animal welfare
- are feasible for industry and government to implement
- are important for the animal welfare regulatory framework
- achieve the intended outcome for animal welfare.

National standards and guidelines for the transportation of cattle, sheep and livestock, including horses, and exhibited animals have already been established.

Governments and horse industry stakeholders began work on the development of national standards for horses and got as far as publishing a draft standard in April 2009.

However, unlike the livestock industries, work on horse standards was suspended in 2011 following a lack of agreement among horse industry groups over funding the work. The failure of this process clearly did not help improve horse welfare.

The TAWWG sees the development and implementation of national enforceable animal welfare standards for horses as an essential component of a national horse welfare regime.

For the thoroughbred industry such standards would mandate an enforceable minimum level of care for the thousands of horses leaving the thoroughbred breeding and racing industries each year.

The TAWWG's consultations revealed overwhelming support for the urgent development and implementation of Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for all horses. Among those calling for this regulation were PRAs, trainers, breeders and all sectors of the thoroughbred industry, as well as other horse industry sectors, animal welfare and veterinary groups.

In response to the question, should there be enforceable standards of care for horses, Racing Victoria stated: "Yes – the paramount objective of protecting horse welfare necessitates effective enforcement tools and resources to address situations where inadequate care is being given."

Racing and Wagering WA's submission states: "RWWA supports the introduction of further standards to ensure the welfare of horses during all stages of their lives, including retirement."

TAWWG notes that RWWA also supports the state government's development of Standards and Guidelines for the Welfare of Horses in WA (WA horse standards) and plans to adopt these as a code of practice under the Rules of Racing.

The Victoria Racing Club submission states: "VRC supports the introduction of minimum standards which could be administered and upheld by the Department of Agriculture (federally), or via the national Rules of Racing, as all registered and licensed people in the industry must adhere to these."

And Racing Queensland advised in its submission: “While RQ and QRIC [Queensland Racing Integrity Commission] will continue to enforce the welfare requirements of the Racing Integrity Act 2016, the Racing Act 2002, the Australian Rules of Racing and the Local Rules of Racing, it is RQ’s position that Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Horses should be developed to implement nationally consistent welfare outcomes for thoroughbreds who have retired from the racing or breeding sectors.”

A common theme in many submissions from the thoroughbred industry was that once horses had left racing or breeding, there was little the industry could do to prevent neglect or mistreatment. Specific standards and guidelines for all horses would address part of this issue.

“It is Racing Queensland’s position that Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Horses should be developed to implement nationally consistent welfare outcomes for thoroughbreds who have retired from the racing or breeding sectors.” Racing Queensland submission

For example, standard 1.1 in the April 2009 draft Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Horses states:

“Persons responsible for the supervision of horses must ensure reasonable measures to protect horses from disease, predation and unnecessary and unreasonable or unjustifiable pain, suffering, distress or injury.”

And 1.2 states: “Persons responsible for horses must be competent to perform the task required of them or must be supervised by a competent person.”

In the TAWWG’s view, the development of standards would clarify the responsibilities for those caring for horses, while the threat of penalties for breaches of these standards would improve welfare outcomes.

The process for developing this regulation is under the auspices of the interjurisdictional Animal Welfare Task Group (AWTG), which comprises senior representatives of Commonwealth and all state and territory governments and sits under the Agriculture Ministers Forum (AGMIN). The AWTG also prioritises which standards and guidelines are developed.

It should be noted that the process of setting animal welfare standards is increasingly controversial. Poultry standards, begun in 2016, are still to be finalised amid claims of industry influence and insufficient emphasis on community concerns. The work was progressed by an independent panel appointed by federal, state and territory agriculture ministers.¹⁷

Glenys Oogjes from Animals Australia described the national standards and guidelines development process as “glacial” and insufficiently independent. She said investment and goodwill would be required from all segments of the horse industry, including harness and thoroughbred racing, to develop viable standards within acceptable timeframes.

The TAWWG notes that RSPCA Australia policy recommends all animal welfare standards development should be led by a government institution that does not have organisational objectives and priorities that are, or could reasonably be perceived to be, in conflict with the objectives of promoting and protecting animal welfare through sustained improvements to existing practices.

Welfare during transportation

The TAWWG notes that the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Land Transport of Livestock, which include additional requirements by species, including horses, have been legislated by all states. The standards and guidelines specify matters such as maximum time allowed off feed and water, minimum spelling time between journeys, and additional care requirements during transportation for foals and pregnant mares.¹⁸

The Martin inquiry report in Queensland found the current national standards and guidelines were insufficient to protect horses during transportation. It called on the state government to strike a better balance between welfare and commercial interests, consider legislating for the Queensland transportation welfare code to apply when animals travelled interstate, and commission expert advice about “the types of amenities which need to be available en route, to enable transporters to meet requirements to unload, feed and water horses at acceptable points of a journey”.⁴

The TAWWG further notes the Queensland government’s response committed to “influence and actively support a review of the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Land Transport to make sure the specific needs of horses are provided for and record-keeping requirements are reviewed”.¹⁹

Proposed final amendments to the standards and guidelines are being drafted and will be circulated for public comment via a Regulatory Impact Statement to be released in October 2021. The aim is to have the amendments finalised by the end of 2021. Once the amendments are approved by AGSOC (Agricultural Senior Officers Committee) and all ministers, they can be adopted into legislation.

Enforcement

Prominent owner, breeder and member of the Victoria Racing Club board, Neil Werrett, told the TAWWG that welfare standards were important but the effective enforcement of those standards, along with appropriate penalties, was the key.

Under the current system, officers authorised under state and territory animal welfare acts, which include RSPCA inspectors and government officers, investigate welfare complaints, including possible breaches of animal cruelty laws, regulations and codes of practice, on behalf of state governments.

Government departments responsible for welfare laws, (usually the state departments of agriculture or primary industries), oversee the appointment of RSPCA inspectors, including their training requirements and, in most cases, can also terminate them if their performance is unsatisfactory.

Authorised officers have the right to enter property if there are reasonable grounds to suspect an offence, and can seize animals and evidence, issue welfare directions and on-the-spot fines, and initiate prosecutions for breaches of animal welfare laws.

Their work can result in animal owners:

- facing criminal charges
- receiving a fine or penalty infringement notice
- being cautioned.

It is clear to the TAWWG that there are several limitations to the powers and capacity of authorised officers to protect thoroughbreds. Officers cannot conduct random or pre-announced audits or enter premises unless a complaint has been made. They are also limited by available resources. Most authorised officers are in metropolitan areas and coverage of rural areas is limited.

One possible approach would be for state legislators to follow the lead of the South Australian

government which has given a welfare officer within Racing SA equivalent oversight and powers to RSPCA inspectors, increasing the capacity within the state to respond to welfare complaints and support investigations under animal welfare legislation.

In its submission, Racing SA said: “From a jurisdiction perspective, Racing SA can only act on welfare concerns that involve licensed personnel. However, Racing SA, through the South Australian government, is finalising arrangements for its equine welfare officer to have the same powers as an RSPCA inspector, under the Animal Welfare Act. This is a first for the country, and will enable Racing SA to act much quicker, achieving a significantly better welfare result for the horse.

“The other advantage to these powers is that a horse can be removed from a poor welfare situation, regardless if it is owned by a licensed person or not, including a horse if the horse is on private property, owned by an unlicensed person, acting within the scope of the Animal Welfare Act.”

Animals Australia also canvassed this idea of “partnership” between the industry and state enforcement bodies. The TAWWG’s view is that developing the relationships between racing regulators and animal welfare enforcement agencies can only be positive.

Findings

Developing a nationally consistent framework that supports thoroughbred welfare should be a key aim for all in the thoroughbred industry.

The basis for developing a successful framework has to be an agreed definition of welfare. Without such a definition, it is difficult to ensure all policies are supporting the same objective. It will also be very difficult to articulate what good welfare is to industry participants and the broader community.

A large number of submissions and stakeholder meetings confirmed to the TAWWG that the Five Domains model has widespread support in the breeding, racing, veterinary and animal welfare sectors.

Further, the TAWWG endorses the Five Domains model as the most appropriate basis for developing formal frameworks for the welfare of thoroughbred horses at all stages of life, because these principles can be applied to their specialised needs during training, racing, breeding, post-racing and other circumstances such as transportation and end of life. The principles underpinning this model can also accommodate growing scientific understanding of individual species and breeds.

In addition, the model is compatible with current community values about animal welfare and the expectation that horses should be treated with respect and have positive experiences throughout their lives.

Another key pillar of a nationally consistent welfare framework is the development of standards and guidelines for all horses that would be adopted by every state and territory government.

At present only Victoria and Tasmania have specific standards for horses, with horse welfare in the other states and territories regulated only through prevention of cruelty legislation. The TAWWG does not believe such legislation provides sufficient protection for horses throughout their lives.

For those involved in racing and breeding, the development of enforceable, national horse standards is vitally important. The industry’s regulatory regime is applicable only when a thoroughbred is in the care or ownership of an industry participant, so offers no protection to those that have been rehomed to people outside of racing or breeding.

Enforceable standards would provide a minimum level of protection for thoroughbred horses outside the racing and breeding industries.

The TAWWG believes it is vital that federal, state and territory governments urgently develop these standards. Given the evidence to the TAWWG that drawing up standards can be lengthy to the point of ‘glacial’, it is important the industry use its influence with governments to hasten their development and implementation.

The industry should also encourage governments to consider the particular needs of thoroughbreds in the process of developing standards for the land transportation of horses, which is already under way.

The TAWWG believes PRAs should develop a memorandum of understanding with animal welfare enforcement agencies in their jurisdictions to ensure consistency of enforcement and sufficient resourcing to support compliance.

Recommendations

4. The science-based, world’s best practice model of animal welfare, Five Domains, should be used as the foundation for all welfare considerations for thoroughbred horses, and all sectors of the thoroughbred racing and breeding industries should commit to its application.
5. The Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for horses should adopt the Five Domains model as the foundation for welfare assessment and be science-based, auditable and enforceable.
6. Thoroughbred Welfare Australia (TWA), working with other stakeholders, should advocate to state, territory and federal agriculture ministers to expedite the development and regulation of Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for all horses. This may require an alternative process, such as engaging an independent panel, to allow the standards and guidelines to be developed in parallel with current national animal welfare priorities.
7. The thoroughbred racing and breeding industries should fully support and engage to expedite the review and implementation of the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Land Transport of Livestock in relation to horses, to ensure the particular needs of thoroughbred horses are fully considered in this process.
8. Each principal racing authority (PRA) should develop a memorandum of understanding with animal welfare enforcement agencies in its jurisdiction to ensure consistency of enforcement, access and resourcing of animal welfare standards for thoroughbreds during and after their racing or breeding careers.

CHAPTER FOUR

Industry Policy

Introduction

After many conversations with racing industry stakeholders, supporters, welfare groups and the broader community, it is clear there is a widely held view that thoroughbred racehorses deserve special care.

These horses are bred to race, they are often sold for profit, and their endeavours on the racecourse not only provide entertainment for millions of Australians, but also support a multi-billion-dollar wagering industry.

Thoroughbreds must have speed and stamina. As such they have high risk for self-inflicted injury and injuries from high-speed activity both when in the paddock and racing.

Industry participants consistently stated that the care of the horses must be of the highest standard. They noted that most thoroughbreds received a high level of care when racing and breeding.

It is essential the industry takes responsibility to ensure these horses receive a demonstrably high standard of care all of their lives. And these standards not only need to be achieved but need to be seen to be achieved.

Currently, though, there are no national enforceable standards of care for thoroughbreds when in the breeding and racing industry. Instead, there are rules of racing that relate to welfare but the TAWWG's view is that these fall short of what is required to provide the proper regulatory framework to ensure good welfare.

Without the industry codifying the higher level of care it demands for its animals and having an effective compliance regime to ensure it is met, it is unlikely the public will accept these assurances in the future.

Overview of the rules

The Australian racing industry is regulated by statutory authorities in each state and territory. Participants have to abide by the rules of racing, which are developed nationally through Racing Australia. Each state, however, can implement its own rules in addition to those prescribed nationally.

The TAWWG notes that despite the current version of the rules of racing being some 180 pages long, there are few references to animal welfare, and most of the rules on this subject are contained in section AR231: Misconduct in relation to the care and welfare of horses.

This section states a person must “not commit or commission an act of cruelty to a horse”.

It goes on to say that those in charge of horses must exercise reasonable care or supervision to prevent cruelty; provide adequate feed and water; take steps to alleviate pain or suffering, and provide veterinary treatment where necessary.²⁰

Only participants in the racing industry – such as owners, trainers, strappers and jockeys – are bound by the rules of racing.

Therefore, once a thoroughbred has exited the industry and is in the care of somebody who is not bound by the regulations, these rules no longer provide any protection for its treatment.

Changes to the rules of racing in May 2021 clarified that all industry participants are bound by these rules in relation to welfare and traceability of all thoroughbreds in their care, even those that have been retired from racing and breeding.

However, once a thoroughbred has exited from the racing and breeding industry and is owned by someone outside the industry, the rules of racing have no jurisdiction and hence do not provide any welfare protection for that thoroughbred.

The rules of racing are comparable to state and territory animal cruelty legislation: they provide a regulatory welfare baseline for industry participants but the TAWWG believes they are not sufficient to ensure good welfare outcomes.

Given the importance of welfare to the thoroughbred industry, it is not surprising that a number of submissions supported the development of enforceable industry welfare standards for thoroughbred horses that would demand a higher level of care.

Across Australia, some PRAs have acted individually to give industry participants guidance on thoroughbred welfare beyond the rules.

Since 2004, Thoroughbred Racing SA has had a racehorse welfare policy “to ensure the welfare of registered thoroughbred racehorses in South Australia is maintained”.²¹ The policy does not include welfare standards but refers to the International Group of Specialist Racing Veterinarians (IGSRV) Welfare Guidelines, which are included in the minimum horse welfare standards set out by the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities (IFHA). They are a series of short advisory statements on welfare, ranging from good horsemanship and training methods to end-of-life management.²²

Racing Victoria also uses the IGSRV welfare guidelines as the basis of its equine welfare guidelines to “ensure the welfare of a thoroughbred racehorse is maintained at all times”.²³

However, these guidelines are not equivalent to enforceable standards. They are worded as ‘should’ rather than ‘must’ statements, do not provide the detail needed to ensure a minimum standard of welfare, and the PRAs that reference them do not have systems to enforce them.

Racing NSW has introduced its Minimum Standards and Guidelines of Equine Welfare. These are based on the Five Freedoms principles, rather than the Five Domains, and include minimum standards for providing appropriate nutrition, water and accommodation, identification and treatment of injury and disease, and freedom of movement and exercise.

The document states: “These standards detail the minimum standards of welfare for horses that ‘persons in charge’ (e.g. owners, trainers, breeders) of horses must comply with in the NSW thoroughbred racing industry.”

Racing NSW states that the standards and guidelines are “to be read in conjunction with NSW Local Rule 114”, but this local rule does not specifically reference the standards. Thus, it is unclear if the NSW standards are enforced.²⁴

As mentioned earlier, a number of submissions identified the lack of internal industry standards as something that must be addressed.

Many industry participants noted that thoroughbreds received a high level of care when in racing and breeding. However, without the industry codifying the higher level of care it demands for its animals – and having an effective compliance regime to ensure it is met – it is unlikely the public or politicians will accept these assurances.

Furthermore, the development of higher industry standards through a collaborative process would build support for the new rules and send a message to all participants that welfare must be a paramount concern.

The role of the steward

Stewards are employed by the PRA in each state to police racing and wagering, except in Queensland where the stewarding and integrity functions are now managed by the Queensland Racing Integrity Commission.

The Racing Victoria website describes the role of stewards as: “Stewards oversee all aspects of horse racing and wagering within the sport to ensure that the regulations and guidelines are adhered to. Often likened to the police force of the racecourse, stewards are well respected members of the racing industry who maintain the integrity of race day operations.”

Stewards also undertake important tasks such as supervision of trials and assessment of horses for barrier certification, stable inspections, property inspections and checks on individual horses to ensure the safety and integrity of racing.

In 2016, it was made clear that stewards could enter farms to check the welfare of thoroughbred horses and test young horses for prohibited substances, including steroids.

It is also clear that the development of industry standards would have strong public support.

The community attitudes survey commissioned to inform this report echoed the call for a stronger welfare regime. Of more than 1,000 respondents, 72% supported – including 38% who strongly supported – the idea of thoroughbred care standards that were continually reviewed and improved, while 69% agreed that such standards should be backed by sanctions for non-compliance.

Welfare in the breeding industry

The topic of how the breeding industry is regulated has generated significant interest and debate, both in many submissions received by TAWWG and among panel members. It is a critical issue for the overall welfare of thoroughbreds.

The two issues that drove the discussion were:

- how to ensure breeders are required to meet welfare standards for thoroughbred horses
- if it is necessary, what is the best way to restrict or control thoroughbred breeding in terms of quality and/or quantity (i.e. number of foals produced).

The TAWWG sees these two issues as quite distinct, but some stakeholders have proposed licensing of breeders as a response to both.

The Martin inquiry recommended the licensing of breeders to improve breeding quality and welfare.⁴ Racing Queensland proposed licensing breeders to improve welfare standards – as did Racing and Wagering Western Australia.

Other groups, including Animals Australia, the Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses, and the RSPCA, also said breeders should be licensed.

But some breeders, owners and trainers argued passionately that breeder licensing was against the spirit and traditions of Australian thoroughbred racing.

A typical comment came from Vin Cox, the managing director of Godolphin Australia, who said: “[Breeding] should be aspirational. It shouldn’t be exclusive, and I think the further we can get away from an elitist sport or elitist breeding, the better off we are. And if someone is in the back of Bourke and has a paddock stallion and a paddock mare, he’s entitled to breed his horses and breed a thoroughbred and turn

up at the races at Bourke – or good luck to him if he turns up on Melbourne Cup day.”

Trainer Matt Cumani said all sectors of the industry, including breeders, may have to be subject to transparent standards “if we want to be a professional sport”. But he echoed Cox’s point: “One of the charms of Australia is that you do get plenty of mum and dad breeders out in the bush somewhere that suddenly breed a horse that’s competitive in the Melbourne Cup. I’d hate to stifle that quite unique character about Australian racing.”

Thoroughbred Breeders Australia (TBA) in its submission said it was important to identify what behaviour of breeders needed changing because only then could “pragmatic, effective, proportional and evidence-based measures to deal with the problem be developed”. TBA said there was no evidence to suggest the mistreatment of thoroughbreds in their early life occurred in anything but a very few situations.

“While we believe the standards of horse care in breeding are very high, we recognise that it is not good enough for us as an industry to say, ‘we’re doing the right thing, trust us’.” Thoroughbred Breeders Australia submission.

TBA told TAWWG a regime for ensuring compliance with welfare standards already existed in the Australian Stud Book (ASB) and the rules of racing.

The organisation called for specific welfare standards to be adopted in the ASB rules and said significant breaches should result in a breeder “being excluded from the ASB, an exclusion that would remove them from the thoroughbred industry if PRAs also barred them from owning racehorses”.

It is worth noting that all domestically raised thoroughbreds must be registered in the ASB to be eligible to race or be bred. Therefore, if a breeder or owner were found to be in breach of the proposed national thoroughbred welfare standards and was excluded from registering stock, or banned from owning a registered thoroughbred, this would constitute a significant penalty.

The ASB was owned jointly by the Australian Turf Club and the Victorian Racing Club until 2014, when it was acquired by RA. After this ownership changed, so too did the rules governing breeding.

Since 2016 breeders and owners of any thoroughbred not yet registered to race have been required to fill in a foal ownership declaration within 30 days of a foal’s being born. This documentation requires all beneficial owners to be recorded with RA, along with the location of the horse. Any further movements or ownership changes must be updated with authorities.

Importantly, it also requires the owners of these horses (breeders) to be bound by the rules of racing that relate to welfare, traceability and the banning of the use of anabolic steroids and prohibited substances. Owners of broodmares must complete a mare return form each year. This process requires the owners to agree to be bound by the rules of racing regarding horse welfare requirements, traceability and prohibited substances.

A joint press release from Racing Australia and Thoroughbred Breeders Australia (TBA) in September 2016 made clear that stewards could enter farms to monitor the health and welfare of horses generally, including testing for steroids in young horses and for prohibited substances in racehorses, and to monitor the health and welfare of horses generally.²⁵

The reporting requirements on breeders, and the owners of all unnamed thoroughbreds, were further strengthened in May 2021. These rules require any change of ownership, location (with some exceptions) or death of a horse – whether foal, mare, unraced horse or retired horse – to be submitted to RA within seven days.²⁶

What is a breeder?

For the purposes of this report, the TAWWG considers the owner of a broodmare a breeder. This is in keeping with the industry's use of the term, though some submissions referred to those who provided care for mares and foals as breeders. Many breeders will never care for their horses themselves, instead agisting their stock on farms and relying on those service providers to ensure their animals are adequately cared for.

The effect of these rules is that the location and ownership of every horse in the breeding industry should be known by racing authorities and all owners bound by the rules about welfare, traceability and prohibited substances.

Given the submissions and evidence to the TAWWG, especially from some racing authorities, it is the panel's view that there is still some confusion about what regulatory framework breeders are captured under.

Quality assurance programs

The panel also heard evidence that there is an opportunity to improve outcomes for horses through the development of quality assurance programs.

With such schemes, participants agree to meet higher standards than the minimum prescribed rules set by legislation or a regulator. To be involved in the scheme, participants agree to opt in and meet the standards; they are then assessed to ensure compliance with the standards.

QA schemes have been widely – and largely successfully – used in other Australian industries where animal welfare is important.

QA schemes also exist where a third party sets the standards. For example, the RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme (AFS) has developed animal welfare standards for layer hens, pigs, meat chickens, turkeys, farmed Atlantic salmon and dairy veal calves.

These standards are set higher than legislation or those recommended by the model codes of practice. Producers whose farms meet the RSPCA's standards can apply to join the scheme. Approved farms are regularly assessed by RSPCA assessors to check compliance with the relevant RSPCA AFS standard. Once a farm has been approved, the AFS logo may be used on the packaging of products from that farm, subject to ongoing assessments.

In its submission, the TBA advocated QA schemes and said it had started work on developing such a program for breeders.

TBA's submission stated: "While we believe the standards of horse care in breeding are very high, we recognise that it is not good enough for us as an industry to say, 'we're doing the right thing, trust us'.

"As a responsible industry we are seeking to establish a conformity assessment scheme for breeders. This would entail establishing a set of standards that would be considered world's best practice and developing these standards with expert advice ... while not all breeders may wish to participate in the scheme, there would be (commercial) benefits to those farms that did."

The TAWWG notes that such schemes can provide significant benefits for participants and industries, especially when an independent third party carries out the inspections to ensure standards are being met.

These benefits include building community confidence that higher standards are in place, strengthening customer confidence, providing a platform for industry progression, and for participants to drive reform.

The standards developed as part of a conformity assessment scheme are significantly higher than mandated standards and it may be that not all businesses in an industry are able to meet them. As such, they can encourage improvement across an industry as businesses seek to be involved in the scheme.

Findings

The thoroughbred industry considers itself well regulated, with a clear set of rules and mechanisms to ensure compliance. The rules relating to welfare allow for punishment of those that breach them and are similar to animal welfare legislation enacted by state governments that provide a regulatory baseline.

The TAWWG's view is that, as an absolute minimum, anyone who has been convicted of an animal cruelty offence, in relation to any animal, should be considered unsuitable to participate in the thoroughbred industry. This baseline needs to be established as a specific rule of racing.

Developing more detailed industry standards for all sectors of the industry would set a higher bar for participants than the current rules on welfare. Furthermore, the development of these transparent standards, along with a compliance and auditing regime, would allow the industry to better demonstrate to the public the high level of care for thoroughbreds.

The TAWWG notes that some PRAs have published welfare standards; these are different in each state and few participants consulted by TAWWG were aware of them. The TAWWG believes the development of higher industry standards through a collaborative process would build support for these new rules and send a message to all participants that welfare must be a paramount concern.

As mentioned earlier, it is also clear to the TAWWG that the development of these industry standards would have strong public support.

On the question of welfare in the breeding sector, TAWWG believes enforceable minimum welfare standards should apply equally to breeders along with other sectors of the thoroughbred industry.

Options to achieve this include:

- **licensing breeders separately through the seven individual PRAs**
- **requiring breeders to meet the proposed thoroughbred welfare standards as a condition of being registered with the ASB and RA.**

Despite the popularity of the concept with the PRAs and others, the TAWWG is unconvinced that licensing is the best option for achieving this objective.

In its view, the framework for an effective regulatory regime for the breeding sector already exists through the rules of the ASB and the rules of racing. For instance, breeders cannot conduct their activities unless they can register their stock in the ASB.

The TAWWG recommends that new thoroughbred welfare standards specific to breeding be created and that all breeders be required to meet these standards or face the threat of not being able to register their horses. These standards would, of course, need an effective compliance regime, but under the current processes of registering mares and young stock, breeders are already required to allow stewards on to their properties to monitor the welfare of horses.

The benefits of using the framework that already exists are not insignificant: the system is already established; breeders are familiar with complying with the rules of the stud book and rules of racing; and this regime is national and encompasses every participant in the sector.

If each PRA were to develop its own licensing regime, it would likely take a considerable time and there might be different rules in the states, which could cause confusion, especially as thoroughbred breeding stock is easily and frequently moved across borders.

The TAWWG also believes the use of quality assurance schemes could be very effective in improving standards. These work in a different way to traditional rules, with the emphasis being on participants who want to commit to higher standards. This approach would be new in the thoroughbred industry, but would place the emphasis on participants to drive best practice in consultation with welfare experts.

The TAWWG believes there are sectors of the industry where quality assurance schemes could be particularly effective. These include breeding, foundation training, retraining and rehoming.

Taking the breeding sector for example, the development of a QA scheme would give potential buyers, as well as the public, confidence in the way young horses were raised. For foundation trainers, demonstrating they were using the most modern techniques that encouraged the best behavioural traits would be a way of standing out from other service providers. Similarly, for retrainers, having the credibility of a third-party endorsement of their services would likely increase the demand for their horses.

TWA would be well placed to take a leadership role, in conjunction with the thoroughbred breeding industry, in developing a positive, forward-looking, scientifically based QA scheme for the breeding industry.

Recommendations

- 9.** TWA should work with the breeding and racing industries, Racing Australia and the principal racing authorities (PRAs) to urgently develop and implement national thoroughbred welfare standards, based on the Five Domains model and covering the care and welfare needs of thoroughbreds across all stages of their lives.
- 10.** Racing Australia and the principal racing authorities (PRAs) should work with TWA to develop and implement an effective and transparent compliance and enforcement regime, with significant penalties for non-compliance, to ensure the national thoroughbred welfare standards are fully and appropriately enforced.
- 11.** Racing Australia, through the Australian Stud Book (ASB), should require all owners and breeders to meet the national thoroughbred welfare standards and be subject to its rigorous compliance regime.
- 12.** TWA should work with the breeding industry to develop and implement a welfare quality assurance (QA) scheme for breeders
- 13.** Any person with a criminal conviction for an animal cruelty offence should be presumed unsuitable to be an industry participant. Such individuals should be barred from becoming a licensed participant, a registered owner, or having their horses registered in the Australian Stud Book (ASB).



CHAPTER FIVE

Traceability

Introduction

At present there is no national traceability register for horses in Australia. This means there is no way to quickly, accurately and efficiently individually identify horses, their location and current owner.

This presents a myriad of issues that undermine the welfare of all horses, as well as presenting specific challenges to the thoroughbred industry.

Without a database collecting information on who is responsible for every horse – no matter what its breed or for what purpose it is kept – it is difficult for enforcement agencies to hold people to account.

While all thoroughbreds are permanently identified with a microchip and are traceable while in the industry, the lack of accurate data on thoroughbreds once they leave the industry means there is no way to fully understand the life history of many former racehorses.

This means the industry cannot accurately say how long racehorses live in retirement or monitor their treatment. Such information is vital to convincing the community that racehorses are properly cared for and not simply a commodity to be discarded when their racing careers are over.

The lack of a national traceability register also means that the effectiveness of an Australian national horse welfare regime, proposed in Chapter 3, will be limited.

Another challenge with this lack of a traceability register is that it denies the industry the ability to link data on horses throughout their lives: for example, a national database that tracked thoroughbreds after retirement would give greater understanding of the impacts of areas such as foundation training, injuries and retraining had on the long-term welfare of horses.

Similarly, any attempt to benchmark investments in retraining programs or initiatives is also undermined by this lack of data.

This chapter does not deal with the current traceability regime for thoroughbreds while they are in breeding and racing, as this is considered in the following chapter.

The need for traceability

All registered thoroughbreds born in Australia are permanently, individually identified with a microchip and a visible freeze brand. Thoroughbreds are closely watched while they are racing, their movements are documented and changes of ownership recorded. Essentially this is to protect integrity within Australian racing by ensuring that a horse competing in any race is the horse it is claimed to be.

When they are racing or breeding, they are registered in the ASB and then as a racehorse with RA, together with full ownership information. However, once thoroughbred horses leave the racing or breeding industries, beyond the first post-racing owner, there is no requirement to maintain this information on any database. Nor do the racing authorities have any jurisdiction to track these thoroughbreds.

Without the development of an Australia-wide database that would collect regular data on all horses,

it becomes almost impossible to categorise the journey of thoroughbreds in retirement from racing and breeding.

While traceability does not guarantee welfare, the present lack of traceability creates a situation in which it is much more difficult to identify the owner of the horse at risk, increasing the likelihood of poor welfare outcomes.

The TAWWG notes that the Australian Rules of Racing require a thoroughbred's owner and location upon retirement – which occurs typically between the ages of five and eight years – be provided to racing regulators.

However, a number of submissions to the inquiry said the reality for most, if not all thoroughbreds, was that this would be only the first stop on a journey that might last another decade or longer.

Key stakeholders said the ability to trace thoroughbreds from birth to the end of their life was fundamental to maintaining oversight of retired thoroughbreds and to ensuring they were properly cared for.

“The issue of traceability is central to any strategy for improving thoroughbred welfare,” the TBA submission said.

The RSPCA concurred, saying “... lifetime traceability of horses is a fundamental prerequisite to ensure that all thoroughbreds have a good quality of life, throughout their life.”

Both organisations argued for a national, lifetime traceability register of horses. But they were not alone.

“Without an operational national horse traceability register, it is unlikely the thoroughbred industry can expect to maintain visibility over horses that leave, or do not enter racing, highlighting the need for this national approach,” said Roly Owers, chief executive, World Horse Welfare.

“An operational national horse traceability register is the only system through which the public can have confidence in the true outcomes for horses exiting the racing industry.” Glenys Oogjes, CEO of Animals Australia

Godolphin said it, “would be supportive of a national system that identifies the person responsible for the care of the thoroughbred at any point in time”.

The Victoria Racing Club emphasised that the racing industry's lack of jurisdiction for retired thoroughbreds was a concern.

In 2019 the Senate rural and regional affairs and transport committee held an inquiry into the merits of developing a horse traceability registry, while also considering some of the challenges of devising such a system.²⁷

The committee identified significant gaps in the understanding and management of Australia's horse population. Its report noted traceability systems existed for other livestock, but not for horses because they were not used for human food in Australia.

The report recommended a register should operate by sharing information from existing equine databases – the ASB and equivalents for other breeds and industries – to provide an integrated view of microchip numbers, property identification codes, ownership and location, and clear visibility of individual horses registered on more than one database.

The Senate report stated: “The committee is convinced of the merits of establishing a national horse

traceability register,” adding that there was overwhelming support for such a register in some form.

The Senate committee determined the primary rationale for a register related to biosecurity, but that there would also be significant other benefits, including welfare. Furthermore, it said, establishing a register would “complement efforts by the racing industry to track retired racehorses”.

UK’S Central Equine Database

The UK’s Central Equine Database was developed under contract to the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) by a private company, Equine Register, to support biosecurity and lifetime traceability of horses.

All owned horses and other equines in the UK must be microchipped, entered on the Central Equine Database and have a horse passport, which records the microchip number, a basic description of the horse and details of its ownership and vaccination status.

A hard-copy passport must accompany the horse whenever it is moved, sold or receives veterinary treatment, and returned within 30 days of the horse’s death to the original passport issuing organisation, of which there are 81, typically associations representing particular breeds.

Owners can create a free online access account to the Central Equine Database, which stores an electronic version of each horse passport and automatically compiles the records of horses by owner into a “digital stable”. Vets, farriers, dentists and other service providers are separately identified in the system.

Stewart Everett, the chief executive of Equine Register, told the TAWWG the database, which holds 1.5 million records, was intended to be “light touch” with records automatically updating over time.

The National Horse Traceability Working Group, in response to the Senate report, is charged with developing a practical plan for a register under the auspices of the Agriculture Ministers’ Forum (AGMIN) and the Australasian Racing Ministers’ Conference (ARMC). Its report cautioned there were significant complexities to developing a workable register.

One of the issues identified in the working group’s terms of reference is: “It is likely to be more difficult than registers for other commercial livestock species because in those cases animal identification, inclusion on a register and movement recording [via property identification codes] through to death, processing or live export, are effectively conditions of sale helping to ensure participant compliance. Unlike other livestock species, horses are often traded through private sales or online auctions, and are moved regularly for exercise, breeding, veterinary care, exhibiting and for competition.”²⁸

Stuart McLean, who chairs the working group, told the TAWWG it was important to understand the traceability needs of different horse industries and potential user groups, to ensure the register met all requirements. Other challenges are to develop a compliance framework for the register, determine how it is funded, and ensure the system benefits from current and emerging technologies while not getting locked into a solution that could become obsolete.

The Martin report was sceptical about the value of a traceability register for improving welfare, arguing any register would take years to implement and would not offer a welfare solution for individual horses. It also cautioned against onerous reporting requirements, which might discourage people from rehoming

thoroughbreds. The report found the most effective and immediate way of registering and tracing thoroughbred horses for life would be through extending an individual horse's identification record in the ASB.⁴

Findings

Based on current evidence and consultations with stakeholders, TAWWG believes that without a national traceability register supported by federal and state governments, it is almost impossible for the horse industry to demonstrate that horses are being cared for in retirement.

The TAWWG is convinced that complete lifetime traceability and a national horse traceability register are fundamental to assuring horse welfare. However, accommodating the diverse needs of different equine industries, combined with the lack of a universal approach to identification and a large number of private owners, means developing a register will inevitably be a long process – and its success in improving welfare is not guaranteed.

While these issues are being addressed, the industry has an immediate opportunity to improve traceability through a whole-of-life approach that includes horses leaving the industry, which is discussed further in the following chapter.

The TAWWG notes that to ensure any national traceability system can be effective, all horses must be uniquely and reliably identifiable. All thoroughbreds are microchipped, but other breeds often are not.

Recommendations

- 14.** A national horse register and traceability system should be established with utmost priority. The system must allow for all horses to be individually identified and traced to their current owner.
- 15.** The thoroughbred industry should actively lobby state and federal governments on the urgent need for a national horse traceability register.
- 16.** Federal, state and territory governments should commit to funding the establishment of a national horse register and traceability system.
- 17.** Racing Australia should encourage the national traceability of thoroughbreds for life by developing the capacity to update ownership and other details at any stage of career and life and providing incentives for owners to do so.

CHAPTER SIX

Industry Traceability and Data

Introduction

When thoroughbreds are breeding or racing, or are owned by an industry participant, the rules of racing and those of the ASB mean the location of every horse should be known, along with details of its ownership. This should amount to full traceability over every horse in the thoroughbred racing and breeding industries.

From the time of conception, records are being accumulated – principally by RA – that should follow a horse until it leaves the industry.

As RA, the body responsible for all data collection and national reporting for the industry, told the Senate committee, thoroughbred racing and breeding have the most detailed record keeping of any equine industry in Australia.

But the TAWWG also heard evidence that the reliability of this data was questionable, with regulators and participants stating there were issues with compliance, and with how data was collected, that undermined the effectiveness of these traceability rules.

This lack of accuracy raises a number of challenges for the industry. It cannot give credible information on the outcomes for horses if it does not have confidence in its data. Nor can it assure the broader public or politicians that horses are well cared for without robust and reliable information on where they are, and in whose care.

High quality data is the foundation of sound policy development. This lack of credible information makes it difficult to accurately assess the success of welfare, retirement and rehoming initiatives.

Collecting the numbers

The rules of racing and the ASB govern the data that must be collected on Australian thoroughbreds involved in racing and breeding.

It is worth emphasising that no locally produced thoroughbred horse can be eligible to compete in races unless its birth is recorded in the ASB and it has been registered as a racehorse with RA.

To ensure each horse can be individually identified, from the 2003 foal crop onwards, all thoroughbreds have been microchipped with a passive integrated transponder (PIT) chip in the neck that responds with the horse's ID when a dedicated reader device is passed over the skin. These chips do not include a power source and are activated by a magnetic field generated by the reader.

Each horse also has DNA testing to verify parentage and is freeze branded with a visible, individualised identification.

RA has developed an app which, when used in conjunction with a scanner, will allow information on a horse's identity and location to be uploaded to RA's databases immediately. This technology, however, has not yet been rolled out on any scale to participants.

Other emerging approaches include scanning the horse's iris for unique biometric features or scanning its unique facial markings and structure with a facial recognition system like those used in human security

applications. Either of those techniques could potentially be operated through a smartphone.

Through submissions and consultations, the TAWWG learnt about different approaches that combine identification with database technology to support whole-of-life horse traceability.

A particular emphasis of such systems is on accumulating new records automatically as a horse is relocated, receives veterinary care, enters a competition and other routine events, thereby building up a comprehensive individual history without its owner having to initiate a new database entry. This would address a major issue with the ASB and many other registration systems: incompleteness and/or inaccuracy of records when owners are responsible for making updates.

The Australian Stud Book is the official record and publication of thoroughbred bloodlines for horses in Australia. Its core responsibility is the maintenance, accuracy, quality and integrity of these records. The ASB operates under the rules of the ASB and Australian Rules of Racing and the International Stud Book Rules. Racing Australia website²⁹

Advances in technology increase the ability to identify and locate microchipped horses, making up-to-date records of ownership readily retrievable. This has the potential to improve welfare by promoting owners' accountability for horses.

Future developments are likely to build the capacity for more comprehensive records for each horse, including its racing history, health and behaviour. This may inform retraining, rehoming and retirement decisions, with potential welfare benefits from appropriate and successful placements.

Participant traceability obligations

In recent years RA has made a number of rule changes to increase the amount of data it collects. Among the more significant changes was the introduction in 2014 of a requirement for owners to formally notify authorities when their horses were retired, and to provide information on what sector that horse was transitioning to (e.g. breeding, equestrian, euthanasia and knackery/abattoir).

In 2016 RA introduced a foal ownership declaration that compelled owners of newly born thoroughbreds to provide their details, as well as their location.

In May 2021 RA informed all industry participants – breeder, owner, trainer or stablehand – that they would have to keep updated details on all thoroughbreds in their care, even if those horses had been retired.

Because many of these changes are recent, it is not yet possible to assess their contribution to understanding when and how horses leave the industry.

History of data collection

Historically, the data systems that relate to racing have been operated separately from those of the ASB.

However, in September 2014, Racing Information Services Australia Pty Ltd (RISA) purchased the assets of the ASB. In April 2015, RISA and its assets in the ASB merged with the Australian Racing Board to form Racing Australia Pty Ltd. In September 2015, Racing Australia Pty Ltd converted from a proprietary company to a public company named Racing Australia Limited.

Because of these changes, Racing Australia Limited is now responsible for all data collection and reporting for the thoroughbred breeding and racing industries.

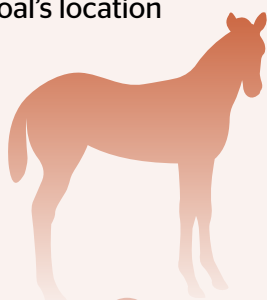
Major Data Collection Points

1. Mare return

Updates the Australian Stud Book of result of mare's breeding activity (including details of foal), plus any changes in location or ownership

2. Foal ownership declaration

Details of all beneficial owners registered with Racing Australia, plus foal's location



3. Identification

All horses are individually microchipped and permanently freeze branded

4. Racehorse registration

Horses are named for racing and ownership details are recorded

5. Retirement notification

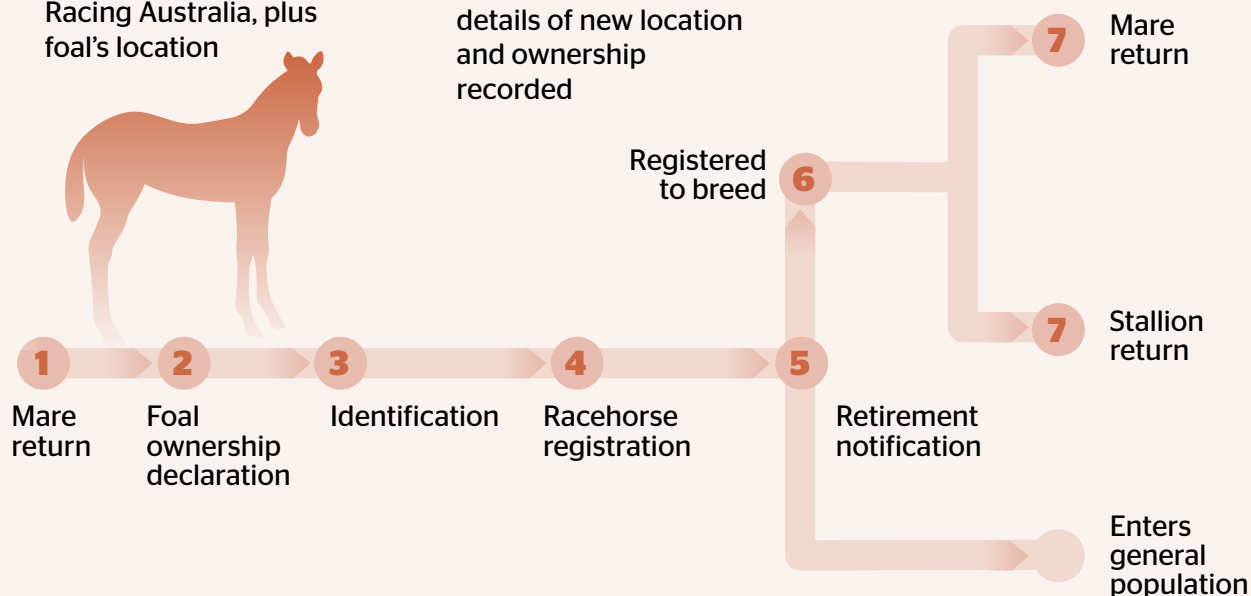
Official retirement, details of new location and ownership recorded

6. Registered to breed

Details lodged with Australian Stud Book

7. Stallion return

Details of mares covered



Summary of traceability responsibilities *

Breeding stock	Unnamed Horse	Racehorse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must register horse to breed • All changes of ownership notified in 7 days • Change of location to be notified in 7 days • Decision to retire horse from breeding must be notified in 7 days • Notification of death within 48 hours • Within 30 days of a foaling a mare return must be completed • All breeders must update a horse's status every 12 months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foal Ownership Declaration made within 30 days of birth • All changes of ownership notified in 7 days • Change of location to be notified in 7 days • Decision to retire horse from breeding must be notified in 7 days • Notification of death within 48 hours • Decision not to race horse notified within 7 days of decision • All owners must update a horse's status every 12 months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horse must be registered to race • All changes of ownership notified in 7 days • Decision to retire horse from racing must be notified within 7 days • Notification of death within 24 hours • If a horse changes location its trainer must update details through Stable Return process immediately • If horse has no activity recorded with Racing Australia a status update must be provided every six months

* a full list of traceability requirements is provided in Appendix 3

RA is extending its Single National System (SNS) platform, which is now used by all PRAs, to integrate these parallel functions of the ASB. It has the potential to improve understanding of how individual horses' breeding relates to their track performance.

It is working on migrating all data on ownership, trainer and breeding records to the SNS. This would give each horse a single record that was regularly updated throughout its life in the industry. However, this process, which was championed as one of the reasons for RISA purchasing the ASB, has still not been completed, some seven years after that sale. A number of submissions said this lack of a single database to follow a horse throughout its life was a significant impediment to collecting high quality data.

Challenges with industry data collection

Many submissions and consultations said RA and ASB records were incomplete and inconsistent. Racing Victoria said a 2020 audit of horses that were recorded as not having raced or trialled in the previous six months found nearly one-third were documented incorrectly and needed to have their status updated. Similarly, an audit of Victorian broodmares covered in 2015 found 10% had not had a mare return lodged. Furthermore, the Racing Victoria audit found:

- poor knowledge among trainers of stable return requirements
- ambiguity in the “transferred” status about who is responsible for a horse at any given time
- possible under-counting of the foal crop
- mares can be covered again even if there is no recorded outcome of the previous covering
- stallion owners sometimes hold back registration papers in lieu of payment, if the mare's owner cannot pay the stallion fee, meaning the foal goes unregistered
- insufficient penalties to discourage poor record keeping.

The chief executive of Racing Queensland, Brendan Parnell, told the TAWWG that accessing “high quality data” on its horses was one of the industry's biggest challenges.

Racing Victoria said poor compliance on traceability was evidence of a need for “tightening of rules and robust monitoring, auditing and policing”.

However, while Racing Victoria may be right to call for more robust policing of compliance, the TAWWG also notes that industry data collection systems do not help participants in meeting their obligations.

Another example of poor record keeping was the number of horses that appeared in the ABC program, The Final Race, that were still listed as active – and therefore supposedly in training – on the RA system. In fact, these horses had been sold for slaughter.³

During the Senate inquiry into horse traceability, RA was asked questions on notice about its retirement data. RA said it was unable to provide a figure. Instead, it said a figure would be obtained when it engaged a consultant to examine the “completeness and accuracy of Racing Australia's horse records”.

Similarly, when asked, RA did not provide the committee with the number of thoroughbreds listed as active, but which had not raced or trained in the past 12 months.

TAWWG understands RA has not yet engaged a consultant to review the accuracy of its horse records.

The Martin report highlighted the lack of confidence around retirement data as a particular problem. It stated: “The unreliability of retirement data for racing horses is a critical issue that the racing industry needs to address as a matter of collective priority. Without it, meaningful decisions about managing the

welfare of retired racing horses is difficult and determining the amount of effort and investment it will require is impossible.

A 2020 audit of horses that were recorded as not having raced or trialed in the previous six months found nearly one-third were documented incorrectly.

Racing Victoria

“Without it, the industry has been unable to defend itself against public and media backlash and the inquiry has been unable to accurately assess the size of the problem that it was established to address.”⁴

While the decision to retire a racehorse is quite clear in many cases, and this retirement can and should be reported immediately, there are many examples where the reason for the decision is not clear.

For example, a relatively young horse may be injured, or require more development and/or maturity, and the owners may put the horse out for a considerable period before deciding whether it is suitable to return to training and, perhaps, racing.

There are situations where horses have returned successfully to racing after several years of “retirement” or paddock rest. In these circumstances, RA may need to re-examine how it collects data on the retirement of racehorses to ensure it is relatively up to date and accurate.

The TAWWG notes that RA has introduced a system whereby racehorse owners are contacted if their horses have not been retired and have not raced nor been part of a stable return in six months. This system will need monitoring to understand its effectiveness.

New technology provides opportunities

The Thoroughbred Breeders Association (TBA) said traceability rules had been changed before RA’s technology platforms had been updated to allow data to be submitted easily. An example was the establishment of the Foal Ownership Declaration in 2016, which for a number of years after its introduction required breeders to download a form and fill it in by hand.

TBA’s submission called on RA to urgently embrace technology and described many of its systems as belonging “in the past century”.

As noted in the previous chapter on traceability, an effective system for monitoring the whereabouts of horses and their status depends in part on records being updated automatically, or at least having data collection being built into the life cycle of each horse.

At present, however, RA’s systems have a weakness as they rely on participants – breeders, owners, trainers – to manually update all records.

In the past year, RA has developed its own app that, when used in conjunction with a registered scanner, will allow information on a horse’s identity and location, as well as who scanned it, to be uploaded to RA’s databases immediately.

As previously mentioned, while this technology has not been rolled out to industry participants, it, and other similarly available technologies that combine identification with database management, offer an opportunity for whole of life traceability through processes that are more convenient than the current system.

One technology that already exists, as presented to TAWWG by EquiTrace, is a microchip that not only provides data on a horse’s identity, but serves as a thermometer that can be read by a scanner.

Given the frequency with which thoroughbreds of all ages – from foals, to yearlings, racehorses and mares – have their temperature checked, combining this with sending real-time information to regulators would provide huge benefits for ensuring accurate and comprehensive databases.

Providing the right incentives

As well as issues around technology, the TAWWG heard evidence that the fees RA imposed on participants to update horse records also served as a disincentive for people to upload timely data.

For example, every update to a horse's ownership costs a minimum of \$70, no matter if hundreds of dollars in fees have already been paid for that horse in the same year (i.e. it was already registered to race or, if it was a broodmare, had a mare return completed).

RA makes a significant profit: more than \$4 million paid to its shareholders, the state racing authorities, in three of the past four years. The TAWWG understands most of this profit was generated by fees paid by the breeding industry to the ASB.

This approach to charging participants for a service is significantly different to other industry bodies providing similar roles, such as the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS). This is run by a subsidiary of Meat & Livestock Australia and set up to retrieve costs on running the tagging of all beef and sheep. Any profits go back to programs that raise awareness and promote adoption of best practice for NLIS activities.

Dr Eliot Forbes, formerly chief executive of Racing Queensland, former chairman of Racing Australia's Retirement of Racehorses Committee and a founding member of the International Federation for the Aftercare of Racehorses (IFAR), highlighted that Australia was the first racing jurisdiction in the world to implement a notification of retirement rule. While the data sets provided a foundation for understanding retirement outcomes, he stressed the need for supporting initiatives to "drive compliance".

Tracking thoroughbreds in retirement

As was noted in the previous chapter, it is the TAWWG's strongly held view that a national, comprehensive, traceability database for all horses is essential for a successful welfare framework.

However, this is a complex process that will not occur in the short term. While these challenges are being addressed, the thoroughbred industry has an immediate opportunity to enhance traceability through the creation or extension of a database or databases that would include horses that have left the industry.

The Victoria Racing Club (VRC) proposed extending existing registration and traceability protocols to allow all owners or lessees of retired racehorses – whether an industry participant or not – to record their details on the existing RA databases.

TAWWG notes that Racing Victoria has developed its own off-the-track, post-racing database to allow retired racehorses to be registered and traced through their post-racing career.

The system, which was released publicly in May 2021, is accompanied by incentives for registering, such as access to events and educational opportunities.

This platform represents a shift in policy. Racing Victoria had told the panel it was unable to provide any data on the number of thoroughbreds that had participated in its off-the-track sponsored events historically as there were "no means to collate the individual horses". Similarly, it was unable to state how many horses had been repurposed by Racing Victoria-acknowledged retrainers before the 2019 racing season as these records were not kept.

While the TAWWG congratulates Racing Victoria on its recently released platform, it is important that such data is collected and available nationally so that the most comprehensive understanding of traceability can be developed.

There are also databases of horses that are outside racing but contain thoroughbreds. These include the National Vaccination Registry that records Hendra vaccinations, operated by manufacturer Zoetis Australia. These databases provide an opportunity to improve traceability of thoroughbreds after racing if linked to the RA database.

Data that provides visibility on the lives of thoroughbreds after retirement is very valuable and all efforts should be made to collect this.

The TAWWG notes that other racing authorities, including Queensland and South Australia, have developed data-sharing agreements with equestrian groups to enhance the visibility of retired racehorses. Again, these efforts should be encouraged.

Findings

It is essential the industry has proper record keeping. Under its rules and obligations, it should know where all horses are and who owns them while they are racing or breeding. By racing regulators' admissions, this is not the case.

The industry should use the opportunity to improve traceability of horses that have left the industry through the creation or extension of existing databases.

Without accurate and robust data, the industry cannot make evidence-based decisions to improve welfare outcomes. Furthermore, without having accurate numbers, the industry will not be able to give the public confidence about its population, nor demonstrate that welfare programs are working.

Furthermore, the TAWWG believes RA should consider options to allow all owners of retired thoroughbreds, irrespective of whether they are current industry participants, to maintain their horses' records on RA's existing platforms.

Given the value of this information, this should not only be a free service to those owners, but RA should consider what incentives would encourage owners to update their data. This is an area that the proposed TWA should also assist with.

A good example of a racing authority offering incentives to track the lives of thoroughbreds after retirement was provided through the US Jockey Club's Thoroughbred Incentive Program (see Chapter 8).

This program organises events and competitions across the country but requires owners to have accurate details of ownership and location on a database in order to compete. In the seven years to the end of 2019, it hosted almost 6,000 events in which 51,125 individual thoroughbreds competed. The data collected at these competitions is incredibly valuable to understanding the life cycle of thoroughbreds.

Recommendations

18. Racing Australia should adopt and implement a policy of open and transparent publication and access to data relating to thoroughbred racing and breeding.

19. Racing Australia should review its data collection system to ensure it:

- a) delivers a comprehensive statistical profile of all horses in the thoroughbred racing and breeding industries from birth to retirement
- b) captures all the data required by different industry sectors

- c) promotes compliance with reporting requirements across the industry
- d) informs all industry participants about the purpose and benefits of the data they provide
- e) provides for the validation of data to ensure it is robust
- f) underpins a transparent and accountable welfare regime
- g) encourages and incentivises participation by industry.

20. Racing Australia should use its data capabilities to:

- a) inform policy development across the Australian thoroughbred racing and breeding industries
- b) benchmark the welfare performance of the industry
- c) inform the development of a community thoroughbred welfare information campaign.

21. TWA in conjunction with Racing Australia should publish annually a report that provides industry information on the number of racehorses, broodmares, stallions and unraced thoroughbreds that have left the racing and breeding industry that year, and their destination.

22. Racing Australia, together with TWA, should seek opportunities to work with the broader horse and equestrian sectors to share registration and traceability information, especially for thoroughbred horses that have left the racing and breeding industries.

23. Racing Australia should expedite the introduction of existing and emerging technologies such as database linkage, real time geolocation and mobile phone apps. These should be used wherever possible to improve user experience and extend functionality of traceability systems.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Aftercare Challenge and Sustainable Racing

Introduction

The Australian thoroughbred racing and breeding industry is the second largest in the world. The foal crop – the term used to describe the number of horses born across the country in each season – is behind only the US. Such scale is not surprising, given that Australia also hosts more races than any other nation, bar the US.

The foal crop fluctuates each year but the overarching trend in the past two decades is downwards, albeit with the number having plateaued in the past few years close to 13,000.

The fluctuations occur naturally and there is no agreed indicative number of horses that the industry needs to be sustainable. Put simply, apart from the impacts of market forces on their behaviour, breeders decide how many horses they will produce.

But while the number of horses born each year is published, data on the number of horses exiting racing and breeding is surprisingly hard to find, with no information publicly available on the number retired from racing or breeding. Nor is there detailed information available about those thoroughbreds that do not become racehorses, nor the fate of horses exiting the industry.

Without this data it is almost impossible for the industry to provide an appropriate number of opportunities for horses exiting the industry.

These knowledge gaps present a series of challenges for the industry: without an understanding of how many horses are required to sustain the industry, there is a very real risk of a significant mismatch between demand and breeding industry supply.

If there is overproduction, this will result in more horses needing to be rehomed, greatly increasing the risk of some thoroughbreds having poor welfare outcomes.

Similarly, there is a risk that an undersupply of thoroughbreds could result in the industry contracting, resulting in significant job losses.

Another challenge is to ensure the number of opportunities to transition horses into a suitable home upon retirement is aligned with the number of thoroughbreds exiting racing and breeding.

The TAWWG believes the thoroughbred industry can ensure the support of the broader community only if it has a plan to guarantee that the vast majority of its horses can be appropriately rehomed.

This is no small task. Research commissioned by the TAWWG, combined with the data publicly available, suggests that about 8,500 thoroughbreds leave Australian racing and breeding each year.

However, evidence heard by the panel suggested it may be possible to make the foal crop more productive, with the result that fewer horses were needed to maintain the industry's size. This could be achieved through improvements in areas such as breeding and race programming.

The potential for creating a more efficient industry should be seen as a win-win. If the thoroughbred

population can be more productive, with more foals getting to the track and racing for longer, that is a positive in itself. Additionally, if this means fewer foals are needed, this makes it easier for the industry to ensure appropriate opportunities for its horses in retirement.

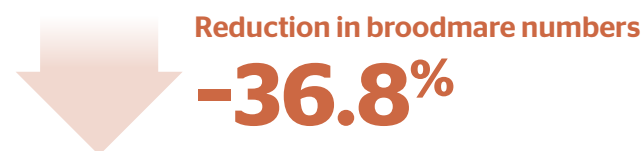
The foal crop

The foal crop has significantly reduced in the past two decades, dropping by almost a third since the turn of the century.

This fall has been brought about by a decrease in the number of broodmares, with 37% fewer mares registered with the ASB than in 2000. But, while overall numbers are down, the breeding industry has become more efficient in that time, with the number of foals born per hundred broodmares increasing by 9%.



The data shows a continuing significant reduction in the annual foal crop throughout this century. In 2017-18 there were 30.9% fewer foals born than in 1999-2000.



The data shows a sustained reduction in the numbers of broodmares. In 2017-18 there were 36.8% fewer broodmares than in 1999-2000.



The number of live foals born per hundred broodmares increased by 9.3% from 59.3 in 1999-2000 to 64.8 in 2017-18.

Despite continuing reductions in the number of broodmares and foals born between 1999-00 and 2017-18, the total number of races held across Australia has only dropped by 12%. Average field sizes have remained stable in that period, dropping from 9.59 runners per race, to 9.40.

These developments, particularly the reduction in foal numbers, are welcome but do not ease the immediate challenge of rehoming. This is because horses that retire now and in the coming years will enter a post-racing environment in which many horses born in the 2000s – when the foal crop was routinely more than 18,000 – are still alive and active in equestrian and other occupations. Assuming, conservatively, a thoroughbred lifespan of 15 years, the legacy of previous larger foal crops is likely to affect rehoming opportunities at least until the late 2020s.

Mapping thoroughbreds' lives

The TAWWG has tried to develop a comprehensive understanding of the life cycle of thoroughbreds in Australia, to better inform its work. This analysis was limited by the lack of available information, particularly about horses that do not enter training stables and the racing industry, as well as the lack of

accurate data on retirements from racing and breeding. Additionally, a request for more detailed data from RA was refused (see note below).

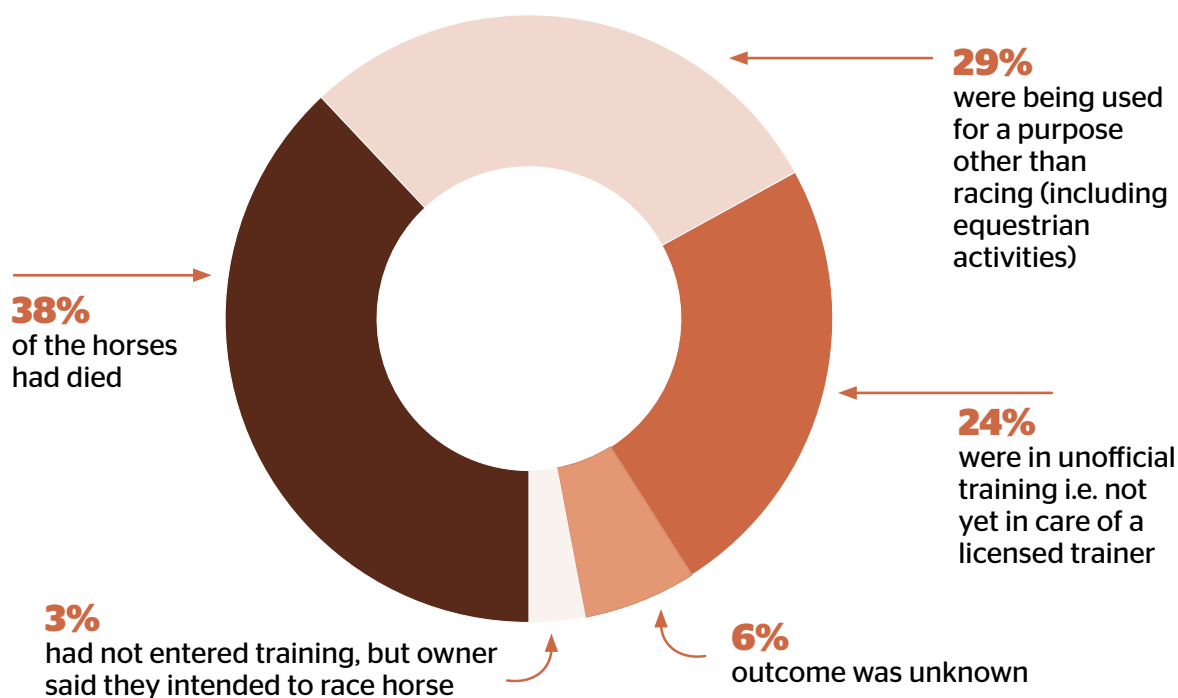
In the absence of a complete dataset including all major life events for thoroughbreds born into the breeding and racing industries, TAWWG commissioned its own research and also met with Dr Meredith Flash, who provided a considerable amount of information.

In a 2020 study, Dr Meredith Flash and the Australian Thoroughbred Wellbeing Project at the University of Melbourne, matched ASB birth records for every thoroughbred in the 2014 foal crop (13,677 horses) against RA stable returns, racing records and industry exit records.³⁰

The study found that 28% of horses had not officially entered training by age four years and followed up this result by sending a questionnaire to the breeders of 1,275 of these, selected randomly from the whole group of untrained horses.

Outcomes for unraced four-year-olds

This study looked at outcomes for the 28% of the 2014 foal crop that had not raced, trialled or officially entered training by age four.



Source: Australian Thoroughbred Wellbeing Project

These findings need to be interpreted with caution because only half of the contacted breeders responded to the survey, raising the possibility the results may not be representative of the cohort. However, the study said those who responded were demographically similar to the survey group, including consistent representation from all states and territories, and most non-responders were breeders who could not be contacted. Of those who were contacted successfully, only 5% opted out of the study.

If extrapolated to the whole foal crop, the findings would suggest upwards of 10% of the total foal crop – more than 1,300 thoroughbreds a year – may die before they turn four without ever entering training for a racing career.

The survey statistics show that among all deaths of untrained thoroughbreds in the first four years of life, more than half are during the first year.

Congenital malformations are the most significant reason for death in the newborn period and remain significant during the rest of the first year of life, along with digestive conditions and fracture. Fractures in horses are serious because of the difficulty of managing horses with these injuries, meaning euthanasia is usually the most appropriate course of action. Fracture is the largest reason for the death in one- to four-year-olds.

The study recommended a focus on the first year of life, including property design and stud management, to identify and reduce paddock accidents, as well as research into assessment of readiness for training and transition into training, with the potential for better introductions to training and racing, and potentially longer careers.

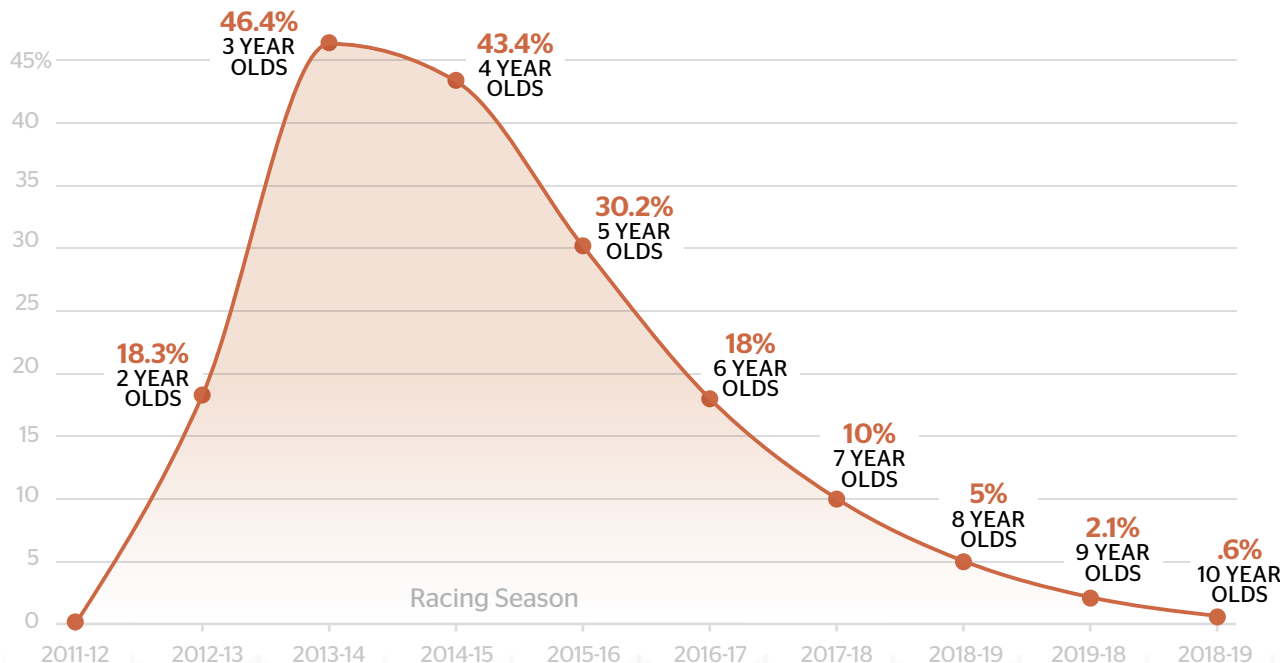
The primary causes resulting in death – congenital malformation, fractures and colic – offer opportunities for intervention, the study says, which might lead to improved survival and the opportunity for these foals to enter the racing industry.

In a separate study of the 2010 Victorian foal crop, Dr Flash examined the reasons for thoroughbreds’ exit from the industry. Following up the Victorian foal crop at the age of eight years – she excluded the 4% that had been exported and 7% still actively racing – Dr Flash was left with 3,167 horses. She then sent a questionnaire to the trainers or breeders of these horses.³¹

She received 2,005 responses, a rate of 63%, though these results must be interpreted cautiously because only 38% of responses related to horses that had not been formally trained for racing, compared with 74% in relation to trained and raced horses.

Percentage of the 2010 Australian foal crop that raced by age bracket

Graphic shows the percentage of individual horses from the 2010 foal crop (16,065 foals) that raced in each season, from two-year-old through to 10-year-old. Each year is a separate data set and data identifying the total number of foals from the 2010 foal crop that raced was unavailable to the TAWWG.



Source: Arion Pedigrees for TAWWG

Foals born and registrations

A review of foals born and racehorse registrations from two five-year blocks shows a decline in foal crop, but a significant increase in the proportion of thoroughbreds being registered to race.

2009-10 to 2012-14



2014-15 to 2018-19



Source: Racing Australia Fact Books.

Race and export record of yearlings sold at sales from 2013-2017					
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Yearlings sold	5195	5029	5132	4912	4983
Raced in Australia or exported to race	83.20%	84.90%	84.50%	86.00%	86.70%
Did not race, nor exported	16.80%	15.10%	15.50%	14.00%	13.30%

Source: TBA submission

Dr Flash found that by the age of eight years, 65% of thoroughbreds were reported as having been retired/rehomed, and a further 16% had died. Those horses that did not have an industry record of entering training had a higher proportion of deaths; one-third were found to have died, while 27% were reported as retired or rehomed.

Of the 1,637 thoroughbreds that had entered training, 59% of retirements were reported as voluntary (due to poor performance or owner request) and a further 28% were forced to retire due to injury. Most thoroughbreds that had raced were retired at age five, regardless of sex or age at entering racing.

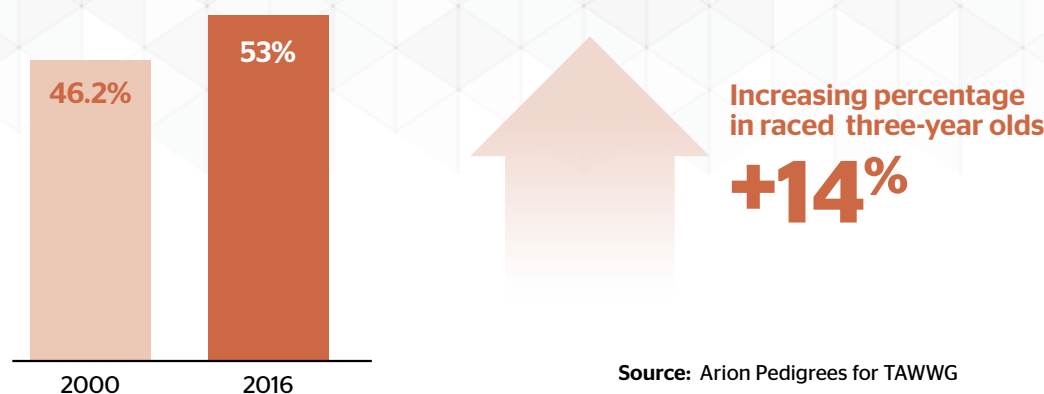
As part of the TAWWG's efforts to better understand the trajectory of the foal crop, it commissioned Arion Pedigrees to perform a detailed analysis of horses listed in the ASB from 2000 onwards, showing by foal crop and year the number and proportion of horses active in racing or breeding.

These numbers coincide broadly with Dr Flash's findings, showing that 43% of the 2010 foal crop were still racing as four-year-olds before dropping to 30% when they turned five.

The Arion analysis also reveals, encouragingly, that over time a higher proportion of older horses is being retained in racing; the proportion of five-year-olds racing grew from 28% of those born in the year 2000 to 34% in the 2014 foal crop.

Other potentially important trends include an apparent increase during the past two decades in the proportion of thoroughbreds born that make it to the racetrack, measured by the percentage of the foal crops that raced as three-year-olds:

Percentage of the foal crops that raced as three-year-olds



An analysis of ASB records of the number of horses registered for racing as a proportion of the foal crop, over two consecutive five-year periods, shows that as the foal crop has fallen dramatically, the number of registrations has also dropped, but more slowly. Meanwhile, the number of horses that remain unregistered has almost halved between the two periods.

Similarly, a growing proportion of yearlings sold at sales is either starting in racing or being exported as racehorses, again suggesting the industry is producing fewer horses that are unsuited to racing.

Size of the aftercare challenge

Analysis of the studies undertaken by Dr Flash, together with the data from Arion, suggests that as the Australian thoroughbred foal crop matures and the horses reach around eight years of age, about 16% will have entered the breeding industry, another 14% will have died and 4% will have been exported.

A further 5-10% of the foal crop will still be racing, but with every expectation that these horses will also retire from racing within one to two years.

These figures indicate that an estimated 66% of every foal crop will be requiring positive aftercare opportunities. This does not include imported thoroughbreds, or the horses that will subsequently retire from breeding.

Applying this percentage to the average annual Australian foal crop (12,932 based on 2014-19 figures) suggests an estimated 8,535 horses will leave the industry each year and require rehoming. Of course, all members of a foal crop do not leave racing or breeding at the same time, and actual departures from the industry include horses from multiple foal crops. However, this cohort analysis is likely to be broadly representative of current trends.

A recently published study from Dr Flash's team used a different approach to determine that 17% of the total population of horses racing or training in Australia will retire in a given year. Based on the 37,750 horses recorded in the RA database in 2017-18, an estimated 6,400 horses retired from racing or training that year. However, this figure does not include horses that did not enter racing or training.⁴²

These data provide a more comprehensive picture of thoroughbred life trajectories, including retirement, than is available from other sources. But no study to date has been able to accurately quantify the overall number of thoroughbreds that are likely to require rehoming every year across Australia.

In the absence of a definitive study, in the rest of this report the figure of 8,500 is used to represent the number of thoroughbreds that leave the industry and require rehoming each year. This is the TAWWG's estimate of the scale of the aftercare challenge facing the thoroughbred racing and breeding industry. (For detail of how this figure was calculated see Appendix 4).

Ideal size of the foal crop

As stated above, the number of thoroughbred foals born in Australia has fallen significantly since the turn of the century, from 18,671 in 1999 to 12,898 in 2017, a reduction of 31%. Yet over the same period, the number of races and average field size across Australian racing has remained relatively constant.

This raises a question that is very relevant for breeders, the racing industry and everyone concerned about the long-term welfare of thoroughbreds: how many foals are needed for a sustainable racing industry that genuinely cares about the welfare of horses post-racing?

In most of the TAWWG submissions and consultation meetings on this topic, participants stated there was no ideal foal crop size, nor any evidence that the current foal crop was too large. Instead, they pointed to a dynamic balance between the size and characteristics of the foal crop, the number and types of races and participation in them, and demand for aftercare places for thoroughbreds that do not go into racing or retire from racing or breeding.

In his submission, trainer Richard Freedman argued that market forces, rather than deliberate planning or welfare concerns, were behind the change in the size of the foal crop.

The industry needed to clearly signal its aspirations for the size and shape of Australian racing in the coming years, Freedman wrote, to allow breeders to make strategic decisions.

“Economics is currently reducing the size of the foal crop, and this trend may continue until an optimum size is reached. The explosion in the cost of yearling horses over the past 20 years reflects the demand for them, which has been driven up by increasing prize money, cheap and easy credit, and speculation created by the rising prices,” Freedman said.

Racing NSW told the TAWWG the foal crop had reduced significantly in recent years and that it needed to be maintained, rather than reduced, to ensure the needs of the thoroughbred industry.

Thoroughbred Breeders Victoria similarly argued that breeding would reflect the racing industry, race programming and field sizes. And the industry must ensure it neither overbred nor under-produced.

Equine Veterinarians Australia Group, a special interest group of the Australian Veterinary Association, pointed to the reduction in the foal crop during a prolonged period of economic growth as evidence that micro-economic market forces are working efficiently in the thoroughbred market.

Kevin Ring, national work health and safety officer of the Australian Jockeys’ Association, was among the few to estimate an ideal size for the foal crop – 10,000 to 11,000 annually – which he said would minimise the number of foals that did not enter training.

In determining the size of the ideal foal crop for a sustainable racing and breeding industry, the number of imports and exports must also be considered. These numbers will directly influence the total number of horses available for racing and breeding in Australia, as well as the requirement for post-racing and breeding opportunities.

Ensuring responsible breeding

Submissions to the TAWWG have proposed potential responses to address any ‘over-breeding’ that may be identified, including licensing of thoroughbred breeders and/or applying controls or restrictions on the number and/or quality of thoroughbred horses allowed to breed.

As noted in Chapter 4, thoroughbred breeders and their breeding activities must be registered with the ASB. However, the ASB places no restriction on the number of horses somebody can breed, nor are there any rules relating to the quality of horses used in production. That means there are no rules or controls about the number or quality of thoroughbreds produced in Australia.

While industry participants will argue, quite rightly, that market forces have a major impact on the number and quality of horses being bred, the Martin report found Australian thoroughbred (and standardbred) breeding was “largely unregulated”.

It states breeding was “undertaken with little regard for the size of the problem being created at the end of their careers. Racing Queensland, Racing Australia and Harness Racing Australia have not offered any evidence to counter the claim that the breeding of horses for racing is ‘indiscriminate’.”⁴

Thoroughbred Breeders Australia has publicly supported an industry review of appropriate foal numbers to maintain the racing industry.

In its submission to the TAWWG, the TBA again advocated for more research into the alignment of the foal crop to racing demand, rather than a move to breeder licensing and/or breeding caps: “It is imperative that a problem is identified and fully understood. Only then can pragmatic, effective, proportional and evidence-based measures to deal with that problem be developed.”

In its submission, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) stated: “Excessive breeding without adequate retirement provision is a lethal cycle.”

The Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses (CPR) called for disincentives to curb production of lower-quality horses that were genetically “unlikely to be successful”.

“The racing industry profits from the thousands of racehorses it breeds every year and, in doing so, creates an oversupply of horses that ultimately require permanent homes,” CPR added.

It should be noted that the TAWWG heard evidence that typically, only a third of the foal crop changes hands at yearling sales before becoming eligible to race. In 2020, 4,946 yearlings were offered by the two bloodstock auction houses, Inglis and Magic Millions, with 4,000 sold, from a foal crop of almost 13,000.

**“Excessive breeding without adequate retirement provision is a lethal cycle.”
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) submission**

This reflects the reality that the breeding sector is not a homogenous group. There is a large number of breeders whose activities the industry considers “commercial”, meaning their horses have enough appeal to buyers to be offered at a yearling sale. But a bigger proportion of breeders do not conduct their activities at this level.

Some of these industry participants may still be operating a business that involves breeding and then selling their stock, but their horses are generally not considered sufficiently “commercial” to be accepted by Inglis and Magic Millions for a yearling sale.

There are also many breeders who are producing and raising horses as a hobby or an interest and, while some may sell or part-sell some of their stock before they race, many will keep a horse to race in their own name. The TAWWG also notes that some thoroughbred breeders are producing horses for broader equestrian purposes, rather than for racing.

Dr Flash, whose studies are quoted above, told the TAWWG that many people often confused the foal crop (horses born) with the number of horses available to race, leading them to overestimate the problem of horses bred that do not race. There are many reasons, including death, being bred for a different purpose, physical unsuitability and a lack of athleticism, that mean a significant proportion of the foal crop will never race.

Asked specifically to comment on overbreeding, she said: “There is currently no available evidence that the foal crop needs to be reduced in size.”

Submissions also proposed potential responses to address any “overbreeding” that may be identified, including licensing of breeders and applying controls or restrictions on the number and quality of thoroughbred horses allowed to breed. While the issue of breeder licensing was addressed in Chapter 4, it is worth noting that a licensing regime in itself would not address overproduction, if it is occurring. Any licensing scheme would need a further regulatory layer to restrict breeding in some way, to effectively influence the numbers of foals born each year.

“There is currently no available evidence that the foal crop needs to be reduced in size.” Dr Meredith Flash, University of Melbourne

Many of these submissions referenced controls in the greyhound industry to address welfare concerns caused by overbreeding. These principles, which prevent breeding from animals whose offspring have been unsuccessful in racing and limit the total number of progeny allowed from one animal, could be applied to thoroughbreds, they suggested.

When comparing thoroughbreds and greyhounds, it is important to note the significant physiological differences between the species. Even under the current rules restricting production, a greyhound brood bitch can produce two litters of six or more pups within 18 months, whereas a thoroughbred mare produces only one foal a year at most.

However, the principle that only animals with a sound performance or a strong pedigree should be used for breeding is certainly worthy of discussion and consideration.

State breeding schemes

While there is no overarching plan to align breeding and racing, each state racing authority encourages the production of thoroughbreds through state breeding schemes. These programs, which vary between jurisdictions, pay bonuses to the owners (and sometimes the breeders) of horses that win races in the state in which they were born.

But for a horse to be eligible for such schemes, both the breeder and owner need to pay fees (typically more than \$1,000 each) to the state racing authority that organises the scheme. These fees are used to fund the bonuses.

These schemes aim to attract and maintain thoroughbred breeding in each jurisdiction, given the significant jobs and economic benefits involved, rather than encourage excessive breeding. Indeed, in the 20 or so years of operation of the schemes across Australia, the total number of thoroughbred foals born each year has declined by more than 30%.

There are, however, some who argue that these incentive schemes could be more effectively targeted to further improve the quality of thoroughbred breeding, rather than be open to all breeding horses nominated by their owners. For example, in Germany the progeny of any stallion that has undergone corrective surgery for conformation or had a “wind” operation is ineligible to register for the country’s valuable breeding schemes. This does not prevent breeders using stallions that have undergone such procedures, but is a strong incentive not to do so.

Longer racing careers

Several submissions addressed the structure of racing and its impact on the duration and characteristics of thoroughbred careers, suggesting opportunities for change that could keep more horses in the industry longer. The benefits of extending thoroughbred careers would likely be twofold: fewer horses would be

needed to maintain the industry, and horses would need to be rehomed for a shorter period.

In her extensive studies, Dr Flash found 59% of racehorse retirements were voluntary, i.e. not associated with injury or behavioural issues. She noted the median age of retirement was five, irrespective of sex or whether the horse began its racing career at two, three or four years of age.

She concluded: “The finding that the majority of horses (68.5%) are using three years or less, of a potential 11 years of racing, combined with the finding that they are predominantly leaving for voluntary reasons suggests that there is capacity for the industry to make changes to race programming and prize money distribution to positively influence racing career duration.”

Breeder and owner Peter Wallace submitted that poor programming, poor tracks, poor training facilities in the country and regional areas added to the problem of how to handle “average” horses which, in turn, could result in their being retired prematurely or experiencing other welfare issues.

In a consultation meeting, executives from Racing SA were optimistic about the prospect of developing racing events for expanded participation. While field sizes had been increased for different reasons, this brought additional welfare benefits because thoroughbreds are extremely well cared for during their racing life.

During Covid-19 restrictions, Racing SA had adjusted country racing to ensure some less competitive horses had an opportunity to run, and there was potential for this approach to be extended as racing resumed.

Racing and Wagering WA similarly commented that it was important to keep country racecourses vibrant and open, and give lower-class horses an option so they did not face early exit from racing.

The NSW Racehorse Owners’ Association said an increase in prize money from Racing NSW Country and Racing NSW at community “picnic” race days had increased the popularity of such events before they were restricted in 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Equine Veterinarians Australia Group noted that the harness racing industry had created a range of “limit” classes for older horses, “successfully extending the racing careers of the horses in this sector with no detriment to their welfare”.

Breeder Mick Malone called for more, longer-distance races to encourage older horses, as well as races over progressive distances in a time that fits in with a trainer’s programming and training regime.

The enormous success of, and popular support for, the Victorian staying race The Jericho Cup, and its associated series of qualifying races, is an example of how opportunities can be made for older, locally bred staying horses, many of which would otherwise have been retired. The Hotham at Ballarat and the Drought Breaker at Swan Hill are further examples of races for mature horses that are still fit and sound. While both are for maidens, events could be created for horses that have not won for two years or longer, for horses with two or three times as many places as wins, or many other qualifying criteria.

However, several correspondents urged caution about extending racing, saying it could put additional pressure on less suitable and unsound horses, to the detriment of their welfare.

Other factors that may influence the length and quality of a horse’s career include training methods, track surfaces and veterinary care. Further study of the contribution of these factors may result in new approaches and protocols.

Kathy Guillermo, from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) USA, said earlier identification of injuries could prompt a period of rest and recovery, preventing further stress on the injured limb and avoiding later breakdown or permanent lameness.

Emerging scientific evidence suggests it may be possible to selectively breed for longer racing careers. A University of Sydney study – of the racing records of 169,000 thoroughbreds in Hong Kong and Australia between 2000 and 2011 – found both the time between a horse’s first and last races (its durability), and the total number of races in its career (its persistence), were strongly heritable.

The results suggested a genetic basis for longer and more active racing careers, wrote study leader Dr Brandon Velie. Individual physical traits, such as a predisposition towards tendinitis or fracture, could also be inherited, he said, but it might be more effective to breed based on overall strong careers. As well as allowing horses to be used more efficiently in racing, this was likely to improve welfare, because conditions and injuries that limit careers also cause pain and suffering.

Imports and exports

As well as those horses born on Australian stud farms, consideration also needs to be given to the number of horses imported and exported each year. There is significant international movement of horses for racing and breeding. Many horses are imported from New Zealand and the northern hemisphere for racing, and Australian racehorses are in strong demand in Asia.

Data published by RA suggests Australia is a net importer of thoroughbreds, to the tune of about 600 per year. While these imports are more likely to be competitive racehorses and or valuable breeding stock, these extras must be considered when calculating the long-term aftercare challenge.

Thoroughbreds not bred for racing

The TAWGG also heard evidence that a significant number of thoroughbreds are bred for equine activities other than racing but are still registered with the ASB. This may inflate the apparent proportion of foals that do not enter training or race, making the industry’s performance in bringing foals to the racetrack look poorer than is the reality.

In its submission, Thoroughbred Breeders Australia wrote: “It is clear that there is a group of people who breed thoroughbreds that have no intention that those horses will be used for racing or sold with the aim of racing. Racing Australia has previously told TBA that somewhere between 1,000 and 1,500 foals may be bred by this group per year, accounting for 8-12% of the total foal crop.” It is understood that these thoroughbreds are bred for the broader equestrian market.

Placing thoroughbreds that are not bred for racing, and will never race, in a separate section or classification within the ASB would ensure more accurate data about thoroughbred breeding as it relates to the racing industry.

A note on data availability

The TAWWG received a submission from RA and met with its executives. The TAWWG then requested a detailed breakdown of RA/ASB statistics to inform this report. RA refused to provide any of the information requested.

In its report on the feasibility of a national horse traceability register, the Senate committee on rural and regional affairs and transport also noted that it did not receive useful data about thoroughbred retirements from RA. This contrasted unfavourably with Harness Racing Australia which provided numbers by foal crop, numbers unraced, retired, dead from natural causes and euthanised.²⁷

The TAWWG’s analysis of retirement and aftercare needs is limited by its lack of access to official records.

Findings

The TAWWG panel believes the potential for overproduction of thoroughbreds is very real. This significantly increases the risks of horses becoming unwanted and experiencing poor welfare outcomes.

The TAWWG cannot make a definitive judgement on whether there is overproduction because it does not have enough reliable data on which to make this assessment.

However, the scale of the aftercare challenge is significant, with more than 8,500 horses from each foal crop likely to exit the racing and breeding industries each year.

The TAWWG believes the likelihood of producing excessive numbers of horses is increased because there is no medium- to long-term sustainable breeding and racing plan to ensure alignment between breeding, the needs of the domestic industry and Australia's export market.

The TAWWG also believes that fundamental to any sustainable breeding and racing plan must be provision for the long-term welfare for all horses produced under that plan.

While a number of PRAs have state-based strategic plans, there is no comprehensive national plan to inform production and investment strategies for the racing and breeding industries. Given the size and importance of the industry, not least in supporting almost 80,000 jobs, it is surprising the industry does not have a plan to ensure the supply of its most essential component, the racehorse.

Such a plan should be undertaken as a matter of priority by RA, state racing authorities and the Thoroughbred Breeders Association.

If the plan identifies a need to reduce the size of the foal crop, the industry should examine all options to achieve this objective, including incentives and disincentives, as well as ASB registration criteria.

This plan should not only consider how many thoroughbred foals are needed to meet the needs of the racing industry, it should also fully and properly consider the industry's responsibility to provide adequate and appropriate post-racing and breeding opportunities for all the horses it produces. As noted earlier, the thoroughbred industry must accept responsibility for the lifelong welfare of all the horses it breeds.

If the plan advises that the number of foals born each year can be reduced while still providing sufficient horses for the racing industry, then reducing the foal crop would lessen the aftercare welfare need and help improve the welfare of all thoroughbreds. Such an outcome should be seen as a win-win by the industry, as it would decrease the burden of trying to ensure appropriate outcomes for the horses it produces.

There is also a significant opportunity to further research the genetics of thoroughbreds to better select and breed horses that have greater racing longevity and are less prone to injury and career-limiting conditions.

If such research proved effective, it is likely fewer horses would be needed to maintain the industry's size. Therefore, it is important that all sectors of the industry support this work.

To highlight how significant improving the durability of thoroughbreds could be, TAWWG analysis shows that if every individual racehorse that competes could participate in one extra race per year (the average starter now competes in 6.3 races per 12-month season), 3,900 fewer active racehorses would be needed to maintain the current number of starters and race sizes.

There is an opportunity for the industry to better understand the foal crop. This can be achieved in part through more effective data collection (as mentioned in Chapter 6), but also through understanding the different segments of breeder.

The TAWWG notes there is a relatively small but significant number of breeders who specifically breed for non-racing purposes. These foals should be classified separately within the ASB. This would help clarify how many foals are potentially available for racing, and would inform breeding strategies.

Another area that should be considered in any work seeking the most efficient use of the foal crop is programming. The racing program presents one of the most effective levers the industry has to extend opportunities for thoroughbreds that might otherwise be retired prematurely.

The evidence that most Australian thoroughbreds are retired from racing at a relatively young age due to an apparent lack of opportunity on the track, rather than injury or health issues, indicates a real opportunity to adjust race programs to allow these horses to have longer racing careers.

Recommendations

- 24.** As a priority, Racing Australia should work with industry stakeholders to develop a well-researched, medium- to long-term sustainable national thoroughbred breeding and racing plan. This should aim to align the size of the foal crop with the current and future requirements of the racing industry, and of the export and non-racing thoroughbred markets, while providing appropriately for the aftercare needs of all horses the industry produces.
- 25.** Racing Australia should create a separate category in the Australian Stud Book (ASB) for thoroughbred horses that are not bred for racing purposes and would not be eligible to race.
- 26.** Principal racing authorities (PRAs) should consider adjusting their racing programs, particularly in country areas and at community picnic races, to provide more opportunities for older horses.
- 27.** Racing Australia should work with industry stakeholders to commission scientific studies to determine how the thoroughbred breeding industry can better understand and use genetics and the heritability of desired attributes such as speed, staying ability, soundness and racing longevity to improve the quality of thoroughbred horses.



CHAPTER EIGHT

Retraining and Rehoming

Introduction

One of the key challenges facing the industry is to successfully transition horses out of racing and breeding and into new careers and suitable homes where they will receive appropriate care to ensure high quality welfare and longevity.

The task is significant: as stated in the previous chapter, there are likely to be 8,500 thoroughbreds leaving the industry each year. While there is a lack of empirical data, it is the TAWWG's view, based on the weight of evidence presented, that there are currently insufficient post-racing opportunities to meet this supply. This means some horses are at risk of a poor welfare outcome, including possible slaughter, after leaving racing or breeding.

While meeting this challenge may be daunting, it is clear to the TAWWG that there are significant opportunities for the industry to improve and coordinate its approach to retraining and rehoming as well as stimulating significant growth in demand for retired thoroughbreds, thereby reducing the risk of poor welfare outcomes.

There is currently no reliable information on the number of thoroughbreds that could be absorbed by the equine community, but many submissions stated this capacity could be significantly enlarged with further investment in policies and programs to encourage the use of thoroughbreds in activities such as equestrian, polo, pony club and recreational riding, through to equine-assisted therapy.

Evidence was also presented that establishing clearer pathways for horses exiting racing or breeding would assist this transition, with many owners and trainers finding it difficult to place their retiring horses, especially those involved at the lower tiers of racing.

Additionally, the panel heard it is harder to rehome horses that may require more time to retrain, have soundness issues, are older, or are less good looking.

At present there is a number of programs, funded by the industry and running across Australia, that do a good job in stimulating demand for horses or assist their transition into a second career or a suitable home. In some states, support is also provided through industry-controlled properties where horses can go to be assessed, retrained or even be given a home indefinitely.

The findings and recommendations in this chapter should be seen as an endorsement of the current private and industry efforts and programs to promote, encourage and support effective retraining and rehoming of thoroughbreds. However, there is an urgent need to significantly boost these efforts, to develop and implement a genuinely national strategy and approach to retraining and rehoming, to effectively address the demand created by the number of thoroughbreds exiting racing and breeding and seek to ensure no horse is left behind.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the TAWWG is also concerned that the varied levels of funding available in different states and territories means there are contrasting opportunities available to thoroughbreds across the country.

As well as the efforts already being made throughout Australia, the TAWWG has examined the work

of many of the leading thoroughbred welfare organisations across the globe. Their efforts can provide additional ideas and inspiration as Australia seeks to meet its welfare challenge.

This chapter also considered the evidence from many stakeholders that the way a horse is handled and treated throughout its life, and especially in its early years, can have a significant impact on its ability to be retrained successfully. This influences how many horses can be rehomed in long-lasting placements that increase the chances of positive welfare outcomes.

Early handling for successful rehoming

Two-thirds of the natural life of a thoroughbred horse is likely to be after it has left the racing industry, and it is clear its early handling can influence welfare at every stage of life – including in later career transition and retirement.

In the past, the specific education and training of young horses to prepare them for a racing career was called “breaking in”. This involved teaching a horse to submit rather than focusing on quiet, co-operative whole-of-life training. “Breaking in” can make some horses “hard in the mouth” and difficult to stop, while others become fearful, difficult for a leisure rider to handle, and harder to rehome.

Today the term “foundation training” reflects a more educated approach to preparing the horse. Many successful owners, breeders and trainers are changing their handling practices for foals, yearlings and young horses, emphasising calmer responses that are delivering a double benefit: improved results on the track and expanded opportunities for post-racing careers.

Professor Natalie Waran, from the New Zealand Eastern Institute of Technology, told the TAWWG that everything that happens to a horse will influence its ability to be either rehabilitated or to recover or have a changed working life.

Racing SA submitted that: “Education is a critical element of welfare before racing, in the racing industry and into retirement, and quality practices at the start of a racehorse’s journey can assist in its whole-of-life welfare. This includes the breaking-in and training of horses, as this process should be completed with a second career in mind, including equestrian and pleasure riding components including trails, dressage and arenas.”

“The pretraining of racing thoroughbreds involving education for their intended purpose after they complete their racing careers, could potentially make retired racehorses more easily repurposed.” Australian Veterinary Association submission

Several owners and trainers said handling practice was evolving as it became clear that more sympathetic approaches produced better results. The comments of Vin Cox from Godolphin were representative: “We spend a lot of time with the staff to ensure that they treat the horses appropriately. Foundation education is a slow process and it’s not the traditional dominating way of going about it. It’s not getting them to submit to the saddle or to the bridle or to the bit.”

Thoroughbred owner Michael Drapac said repurposing should begin on the day the foal was born: “Every key stakeholder has a role to play in the ultimate transition of the horse: so it informs how we break the horse in; it informs its yearling preparation; it informs how it’s actually trained, and it even informs how we spell the horse.”

Equitation Science 10 Training Principles*

1. Regard for human and horse safety

Acknowledge that horses' size, power and potential flightiness present a significant risk. Avoid provoking aggressive/defensive behaviours

2. Regard for the nature of horses

Ensure welfare needs: lengthy daily foraging, equine company, freedom to move around. Avoid assuming a role for dominance in human/horse interactions

3. Regard for horses' mental and sensory abilities

Avoid overestimating the horse's mental abilities (e.g. *"he knows what he did wrong"*)
Avoid underestimating the horse's mental abilities (e.g. *"It's only a horse..."*)

4. Regard for current emotional states

Ensure trained responses and reinforcements are consistent. Avoid the use of pain/constant discomfort in training

5. Correct use of habituation/desensitisation/calming methods

Gradually approach objects that the horse is afraid of or, if possible, gradually bring such aversive objects closer to the horse (systematic desensitisation)

6. Correct use of operant conditioning

Understand how operant conditioning works: i.e. performance of behaviours becomes more or less likely as a result of their consequences

7. Correct use of classical conditioning

Train the uptake of light signals by placing them BEFORE a pressure-release sequence. Precede all desirable responses with light signals

8. Correct use of shaping

Break down training tasks into the smallest achievable steps and progressively reinforce each step towards the desired behaviour. Plan training to make the correct response as obvious and easy as possible

9. Correct use of signals/cues

Ensure signals are easy for the horse to discriminate one from another. Ensure each signal has only one meaning

10. Regard for self-carriage

Aim for self-carriage in all methods and at all levels of training. Train the horse to maintain gait, tempo, stride length, head and neck carriage, body posture

*This is a summary of the 10 principles. Go to equitationsscience.com for further information.

Racing NSW, in its Minimum Standards and Guidelines of Equine Welfare, says sufficient training should be provided in the early education of a horse to enable the horse to conduct its work with minimal anxiety, free from fear and distress. Investment in this foundation training will assist the horse and its handlers throughout its racing life and career beyond racing.³²

The Australian Veterinary Association's submission advocated a "cross-training" approach combining sport horse training with racing training.

It stated: "Pre-training is regularly being undertaken by the sport horse businesses including eventers, showjumpers and the dressage community, and becoming increasingly popular ... The pre-training of racing thoroughbreds involving education for their intended purpose after they complete their racing careers could potentially make retired racehorses more easily repurposed."

Leading trainer Chris Waller said he regularly breaks up the stable routine for horses in work with a short spell on the farm and a change in routine including dressage schooling and showjumping. He said that approach delivered short-term benefits on the racetrack and longer-term benefits when horses were retired.

The TAWWG was told that experienced equestrian riders were increasingly conducting foundation training. Current and former Olympic-level equestrians are some of the biggest foundation trainers by volume of horses they prepare for racing. Kolora Lodge is run by Peter McMahon with his wife Michelle, who are both international-level showjumpers. Another is Limitless Lodge run by Tim Boland, and a third is Bimbadeen Park, run by Shane Rose.

Several correspondents mentioned the emerging discipline of equitation science, which advocates working with horses' sensory capacities and natural behaviours as the basis of training that promotes welfare and is likely to enhance both racing training and performance, as well as enhancing the potential for successful post-racing placement.

Di Evans, from RSPCA Australia, said: "There's potential to have a really close look at training methods and some of the equitation science in terms of working with natural behaviours and using positive cues and those sorts of things. Just understanding the basics of learning theory could help improve the behaviour of thoroughbreds, and definitely improve their rehoming potential."

Retraining after racing

Across the industry there is already a vast network of people involved in retraining and rehoming horses that have retired from racing or breeding, or that did not make it to the racetrack. Most of these people operate through informal networks to provide new opportunities for horses.

In addition, there is an increasing number of dedicated professional and semi-professional retrainers, some of whom are now receiving support, assistance, advice and even some funding from the racing industry through PRAs, owners and trainers. This support and professional assistance is further improving the quality of retraining programs and the success of rehoming.

Racing NSW established a direct retraining and rehoming program for retired NSW horses in 2012, becoming the first PRA to do so. In its submission Racing NSW states horses in that state are treated equally irrespective of whether they have made it to the track and whether or not they have future prospects as an equestrian horse.

A thoroughbred's capacity to successfully transition out of racing is based on both physical and behavioural characteristics and matching these to appropriate alternative careers. Jennifer Hughes, Racing Victoria's general manager of equine welfare, presented an approach to these issues at the International Forum for the Aftercare of Racehorses conference in South Africa in 2020.

She said a high proportion of retiring horses could be readily retrained for rehoming with minimal formal assistance, and many owners and trainers were already doing so successfully. Some physically unsound horses could also be prepared for equestrian or other post-racing careers with adequate time and rehabilitation.

Hughes outlined Victoria's post-racing framework, which describes five categories of retiring thoroughbreds and can be used to understand their post-racing options and transition pathways.

Those in category A are easy to rehome, while those in B and C have good long-term post-racing prospects but require additional transition support. Thoroughbreds in category D have specific rehoming requirements and the smaller number assessed as category E are unsuited to a secondary career due to physical or behavioural unsoundness.

Racing Victoria supports the retraining and rehoming of some horses in the B, C and D categories through the Racehorse Evaluation, Support, Education and Transition (RESET) program, as well as funding a humane end of life for those in Category E, including through initiatives such as the Onsite Humane Euthanasia Program (OHEP).

Despite more funding becoming available in recent years, the retraining of thoroughbreds to prepare them for a new career appears now to be mainly conducted as a labour of love. People who provide retraining services are typically owners or trainers who are passionately committed to thoroughbreds and their welfare. Most say the duration and tempo of retraining needs to be individually programmed for every horse, and the potential for successful rehoming is not directly correlated to its condition immediately on leaving the racetrack.

Many retrainers do not consciously choose to enter this sector but find themselves with a local reputation as someone who will take in a horse and set it on a new path. It is not a lucrative activity; though retired racehorses may cost relatively little, there is often minimal if any profit after weeks or months of highly individualised and intensive preparation when the horse is resold as an equestrian sporting horse, working horse or recreational horse.

Horses that are inadequately retrained are more likely to be inappropriately rehomed, leading to increased welfare problems. There is a poor understanding of available pathways to maximise rehoming opportunities, which in turn means some horses may be killed unnecessarily.

Several submissions identified a lack of oversight and funding of retraining programs, to ensure all retiring horses had an opportunity to be retrained, and not just those with the best prospects for quick success.

In Western Australia, the PRA has a welfare plan that incorporates an 'off the track retrainer package'. This includes a retrainer accreditation program and a model for temperament assessments of thoroughbreds.

Racing Victoria runs a system of acknowledged retrainers to which retrainers can apply to have their services listed. While the retrainer must describe their claim for inclusion, there are no formal criteria against which they are assessed and the listings – of more than 50 individuals and organisations – vary greatly in the detail they include about retraining methods.³³

The owner of a retired racehorse, Jodie Compton, shared her experience of the need for sufficient time to allow horses to let down after exiting racing. "Making long-term decisions about his [her thoroughbred] future when he was straight off the track would have been the equivalent of picking up a child from a birthday party full of red drink and asking him to sit a mathematics exam."

Jane Gollan, horse welfare and rehoming manager for Gollan Racing and winner of the Stud and Stable Staff Award for thoroughbred care and welfare in 2017, agreed at least four to six weeks of spelling were

Case Study

Nikki Cook, who won the prestigious Australian Stud and Stable Staff Awards (SSSA) thoroughbred care and welfare prize in 2016 and was Racing Victoria's 2019 Retrainer of the Year, began retraining as a hobby subsidised by her real estate career. Now she takes up to 60 horses at a time on a 32.4 hectare property near Geelong in Victoria.

"They all get three months' spelling out in the big grassy paddocks, whether they've raced as three-year-olds or nine-year-olds, sometimes longer if they have injuries or niggles," she said. "And then they commence the retraining program, which can take a short time or a long time. Some I've had for up to three years because they're just tricky or may have niggles or injuries and need a little bit more time. Others can be through the program in six to eight weeks, depending on their trainers and what tools they've been given before they come to us."

Accepting about 220 horses a year, Cook believes hers is the largest retraining business in Australia.

Her work is mainly self-funded and supplemented by prize money from her awards. Some owners pay Cook a weekly fee for retraining their horse at her establishment, creating a more dependable income stream.

Racing Victoria has also provided grants for retraining during the Covid-19 pandemic. Most horses are donated by trainers, while others come from individual owners and a significant number have been purchased at the Echuca horse sales. The economics of these transactions are unpredictable because of the variation in how horses respond to retraining.

needed as the horse adapted physically, which she believes should be the financial responsibility of the owner.

"There's a period they don't look too good. They drop weight. Then all of a sudden they blossom into a different horse, using different muscles." Ms Gollan uses Equestrian Australia's Level 1 training certification as the base standard for the retrainers she employs, ensuring they have solid handling skills. Beyond this, she says, successful retrainers are those that can recognise a horse's needs and respond sensitively, adapting the pace of intervention as the horse settles to the program.

In addition to the challenging economics of retraining, the principles and practice of the discipline are also in their infancy. In its submission, the Charles Sturt University's Equine Science Group pointed out that many practitioners might not be benefitting from recent evidenced-based knowledge. They proposed a holistic, objective approach to the assessment of horses undergoing retraining to improve rehoming prospects, which could be developed through partnerships between practitioners and equine scientists.

Assisting the transition out of racing

A large number of industry participants said it could be difficult to know what options were available for rehoming, with many trainers and owners stating they relied on relatively small networks to find a suitable home for a horse.

This lack of information can lead to welfare issues, with horses at risk of becoming immediately unwanted, being transferred to an inappropriate home, or pushed towards a second career that may not be suitable.

This concern was raised by participants across the country and whose businesses vary in size.

Queensland trainer, Tony Gollan, called on the industry to establish better pathways to assist this transition.

He stated: “The biggest problem racing faces is the transition of horses out of the industry, and into secondary careers or homes. There’s not a clearly defined pathway or framework in place. That’s why Jane [Gollan’s wife] set up her foundation, because there’s a big void between the racing industry and the off-the-track industries. It’s not easy to rehome a horse, from a financial perspective but also from a knowledge perspective. A lot of trainers or owners in this country wouldn’t have a clue how to go about it.

“So, we need people in the middle ground, if you like, to bring the two worlds together and make it easier. It’s vitally important to identify what other disciplines your retired racehorse might be suitable for.”

This sentiment was echoed by trainer David Hayes and his wife Prue, formerly a director of Racing Victoria, in their joint submission. While their business, Lindsay Park, has well established protocols for transitioning horses, trainers and owners needed more information about retraining or rehoming.

They wrote: “So as an industry, we therefore need to have clear processes and pathways in place to ensure that their horses are properly looked after in retirement. There should be a national number you can ring if you have a racehorse that is coming to the end of its time on the track, so you can get the right information and guidance on the options available.”

“The biggest problem racing faces is the transition of horses out of the industry, and into secondary careers or homes. There’s not a clearly defined pathway or framework in place.” Tony Gollan, Queensland trainer

Similarly, Peter O’Brien, manager of Segenhoe Stud in the Hunter Valley, wrote: “Many breeders, trainers and owners don’t really know the options open to ex-racehorses, or even how to access any information. As it stands, we don’t have a clear pathway or framework for horses exiting the industry.”

Safety

A number of submissions highlighted the inherent danger of riding any horse that has recently exited the industry.

Retrainer Dr Kate Fenner described the risk of repurposed thoroughbreds, even those that had apparently been adequately retrained: “When off-the-track horses are under the care of skilled trainers and riders they may perform well. However, unlike computers, where one can install new software and the machine will then perform new tasks whenever the correct directions are given, horses are always learning and changing to adapt to their environment.

“These horses often have many years of race training and a few weeks of retraining is unlikely to solidify the drastic behavioural changes necessary to provide pleasure riders with a safe and reliable mount.”

Several correspondents favoured mandatory training for new owners and riders of retrained thoroughbreds.

Since the tragic death a decade ago of her daughter Sarah from injuries received while riding a retired racehorse during a TAFE NSW course, Juliana Waugh has advocated for improved rider safety standards and traceability of all horses. She believes that if training and retraining history were documented on a national register, new owners would more readily understand a horse’s history and avoid letting a novice ride an unsuitable animal.

Stewards' reports, which provide commentary on individual horses' performance in races, may offer a useful source of information about possible behaviour in their post-racing careers. Making stewards' reports available and searchable by a thoroughbred's name would be beneficial to understand the patterns of behaviour of particular horses.

New careers

Many of those who made submissions or presented evidence stated the importance of finding opportunities for horses to have purposeful second careers. Whether competing in the equestrian sector, being used for activities such as polocrosse, pony club or equine assisted therapy, a common view was that having horses engaged in an activity or purpose gave them a value and a connection with their owner that meant they were less likely to be treated badly.

Among the biggest opportunities for new careers are equestrian activities, which are likely to ensure a horse's welfare for the time it is competing. The scale of that opportunity is unclear; some correspondents said there was unprecedented enthusiasm for the sports, which include dressage, showjumping and eventing, while others said the sector was in decline.

Thoroughbreds are an integral part of the equestrian industry. The Australian Veterinary Association's submission cited a 2010 survey investigating the number of horses participating in membership

Summary of PRA welfare activities*		
 <p>Established a program to support horses that are unable to be rehomed, while also putting in place a regulatory framework for participants who fail to ensure the ongoing welfare of their horses.</p> <p>Team Thoroughbred NSW is funded through 1% prize money levy, totalling over \$2.8 million per year.</p> <p>Spent \$33 million buying and upgrading four properties designed for caring, retraining and rehoming NSW thoroughbreds.</p> <p>Other initiatives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a local rule prohibiting participants from sending a thoroughbred to a knackery or abattoir • adopting a policy to seize or purchase at-risk thoroughbreds • introduction of end of life program to provide free euthanasia • sponsorship of thoroughbred classes and equestrian events. <p>* a more detailed list is provided in Appendix 5</p>	 <p>Introduced a levy of 1% of prize money for welfare and retired racehorses in 2020. This amounts to about \$1.5 million a year.</p> <p>This funds the Queensland Off-The-Track Program (QOTT), which was established after the Martin inquiry.</p> <p>The QOTT initiative supports both thoroughbreds and standardbreds and aims to assist a high quality transition out of racing through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting the placement of horses into second careers • promoting the versatility and adaptability of horses post racing • promoting the care and welfare of thoroughbreds and standardbreds during their lifetime • supporting lifelong traceability. <p>Responsibility for QOTT is shared between RQ and the Queensland Racing Integrity Commission (QRIC).</p>	 <p>The OTT program is funded by a 1% levy on prize money, which is then topped up by \$100,000, providing an annual budget of \$277,000 in FY 20-21.</p> <p>The program, which promotes thoroughbreds and standardbreds, aims to support new owners of OTT horses, to ensure horses remain in their first post-racing home as long as possible.</p> <p>Among its funded programs are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subsidised lessons for owners of OTT horses with approved coaches • nutritional support initiative to help owners manage their horses' diet • sponsorship and promotion of equestrian events • marketing to promote good news stories • a site to advertise OTT horses for sale.

organisations of the Australian Horse Industry Council. It found that 63% (103,405 of 163,890) of horses were thoroughbreds registered with the ASB.





The national participation in organised and non-organised equestrian activities fell from 1.5% to 1% of the population between 2001 and 2010, according to annual surveys from Sport Australia (formerly the Australian Sports Commission).³⁴ More recent AusPlay data suggests participation has stabilised at this lower level in the decade since then.

Dr Flash's analysis of the 2010 Victorian foal crop showed that the highest proportion of horses that left the racing and breeding industries became pleasure horses or hacks, followed by showjumping, eventing, adult riding and pony club. Some horses were counted in multiple categories.³¹

A recent University of Queensland study following 110 retired racehorses found 108 were successfully repurposed. Nearly half were in equestrian activities, including 18% in eventing or showjumping, 13% as show horses or in dressage, and 15% in pony clubs or as equestrian all-rounders. A further 37% entered breeding while 15% were rehomed as pleasure horses.³⁵

Pony Club Australia said 2,500 of its 25,000 members were identified thoroughbreds, though this was probably an underestimate as the horses' breed was not consistently recorded. This suggests it may be possible to increase the number of thoroughbreds in pony clubs.

Thoroughbred Racing SA has launched a sponsorship of the Pony Club Association of SA through which

 Racing Victoria	 RACING AND WAGERING WESTERN AUSTRALIA	 TRNT <small>THOROUGHBRED RACING NORTHERN TERRITORY</small>	 RACING SA
<p>In 2019 announced a \$25 million commitment over three years to implement its welfare strategic plan, in part funded by a 2% levy on prize money.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has an OTT program supported by 56 acknowledged retrainers. • developed the RESET program to help transition horses into suitable homes. • other initiatives include: grants to encourage use of thoroughbreds; an online platform to improve data collection of ex-racehorses; a foster program to support horses that no longer have a responsible owner • Established panel of independent welfare and veterinary experts to guide welfare plan. 	<p>In 2019 the Off The Track WA (OTTWA) program was expanded with a commitment of \$5 million. Annual funding is about \$3 million. This included opening a welfare facility, OTTWA Estate, that provides emergency care and retraining, and hosts clinics and events for owners of OTT horses.</p> <p>Priority is given to horses that may be challenging to rehome.</p> <p>OTTWA programs include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clinics for OTT owners in regional areas through partnership with Equestrian WA • a passport to improve traceability and better understand welfare challenges post racing • website with information on pathways for retired racehorses, educational material and platform to offer horses for sale. 	<p>Introduced a 1% levy on prize money for welfare in 2021, which equates to about \$80,000 per year.</p> <p>Initiatives funded include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating a portal where horses can be listed for rehoming • sponsoring events for OTT horses • hosting training sessions for owners of OTT horses • paying freight subsidies for OTT horses to be moved interstate. <p>Additionally, through a sponsorship with Hygain, new owners of OTT horses are provided with free feed, while also receiving vouchers for training clinics.</p>	<p>Implemented a 1% levy on prize money for welfare in 2020. This equates to about \$400,000 per year.</p> <p>Racing SA seeks to drive demand for OTT horses through a series of partnerships and sponsorships, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creation of formal partnerships with state equestrian bodies • assistance packages to new owners of OTT horses • financial support for two equine welfare properties • creating new brand - Thorough Care SA • a hotline to report any welfare concerns.

it runs events to showcase the performance and versatility of the thoroughbred.³⁶

While there appear to be no recent official statistics about the breeds of horses used in equestrian activities, the TAWWG was told that in recent years there had been an increasing preference for non-thoroughbreds, notably warmbloods and Irish sport horses.

Dr Warwick Vale, an equine veterinarian and the president of the Australian Veterinary Association, said that in the past two decades “warmbloods and specifically bred sport horses from warmblood lines in the elite levels of sport” had taken over from thoroughbreds in equestrian sports. But he said PRAs’ off-the-track programs, combined with increased prize money, were creating new equestrian opportunities for thoroughbreds.

Dr Vale said the thoroughbred industry could focus on regaining this ground by designing and promoting competitions and events in which thoroughbreds were primed to excel: “There’s some entertaining novelty type of showjumping competitions where you have two riders jumping mirrored horses at the same time against the clock. If there was prize money available, showjumpers would come for that. They would take thoroughbreds in preference to warmbloods because they perform better under those circumstances.”

Horse behaviour specialist Professor Paul McGreevy agreed it would be possible to reverse that trend and revive the popularity of thoroughbreds in competition, if their early management was mindful of their needs in a future equestrian career.

Thoroughbreds are likely to be cheaper to purchase than sport horses, especially if sponsored or subsidised by the racing industry, increasing their capacity to regain market share if their physical and behavioural development is adequately addressed in early management and retraining.

Kim Duffy, from Racing Queensland, summarised the PRAs’ different approaches to increasing demand for retired racehorses: “They have been sponsoring off-the-track events and clinics. They also provide prize money incentives to encourage people in the equestrian world to take on an off-the-track thoroughbred rather than a warmblood. A number of authorities have developed sponsorship agreements with their peak equestrian bodies and ... have provided incentives through partnered brands, such as feed companies offering discounts, whether it’s a percentage discount or vouchers, for owners who take on off-the-track horses.”

Caroline Searcy, a director of Thoroughbred Breeders NSW, said there was an opportunity for the industry to give equestrian sports more support to rehome former racehorses.

Most PRAs have also established their own retraining and rehoming programs but these are generally in the early stages. According to figures published by RA in its annual report for 2019-2020, just 2% of horses retiring from racing exit into a program run by a racing authority.³⁷

A number of industry participants said there was little or no available information on how industry funds were spent on these initiatives. Nor was there any way to assess whether these were successful.

Trainer Tony Gollan said in his submission: “We have 1% of all prize money allocated to an equine welfare fund, but nobody really knows how that money is being spent.”

The TAWWG heard that sponsorship of events and competitions featuring thoroughbreds could encourage demand for them and in a cost-effective manner.

The Thoroughbred Sport Horse Association (TSHA) was established in 2019 to create second careers and increase demand for retired thoroughbreds. Director Krissy Harris and her team work with show organisers to create dedicated thoroughbred classes, seeking contributions to prize money from the racing industry. Before Covid-19 interrupted the project, Harris had presented competitions at 10 shows in NSW,

Queensland, Western Australia and the ACT, in which almost 500 thoroughbreds, aged from four to 21 years, competed.

The TSHA told the TAWWG there was a great opportunity to build upon existing local events and networks to create a “lifetime purpose” for thoroughbreds. The association’s work has been supported by trainers such as Gai Waterhouse and Chris Waller, who provided funding for prize money, but not yet by any racing authority.

With more than 500 country shows across Australia, Harris said there was a “huge opportunity” to develop significantly more events for thoroughbreds, which would in turn increase demand.

The TAWWG notes that the national body, Agricultural Shows Australia, may help coordinate a national thoroughbred program across a range of disciplines.

While thoroughbreds’ use in equestrian sports and as pleasure horses is likely to represent the largest opportunity for retiring horses, there is also demand from tourism, equine therapy and groups such as Riding for the Disabled.

The TAWWG heard from a Victorian charity, Horses for Hope, one of a number involved in the emerging area of equine therapy. It uses retired thoroughbreds in “equine-assisted narrative therapy” based on the creation of an emotional bond between a horse and a person who has experienced psychological trauma. Unlike the equestrian sector, this therapy model particularly values horses with behavioural issues, because of the challenge that presents in creating trust between the horse and a person. Similarly, physical soundness is less important as the horses are not ridden and they can participate even at advanced ages.

According to the charity’s submission: “A traumatised horse is an excellent teacher. For example, if the horse is on edge, the participant has to learn self-control and calmness in order for the horse to feel the same. Equally, an anxiety-prone person needs to learn to use strength without aggression in order to get the horse to do what is required of it by the participant.”

Horses for Hope maintains 10 retired thoroughbreds at its base in Shepparton with funding provided through mental health support programs or the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Other submissions said tourism, including beach riding and high-country riding, all valued calmer, older horses, and might be particularly appropriate for retiring broodmares or older, quieter horses.

Thoroughbred broodmares that have retired from thoroughbred breeding can be used in the broader horse breeding world – either mated to other breeds or as a recipient in surrogacy.

Lessons from overseas

The TAWWG has reviewed the work of many of the major thoroughbred welfare organisations around the world including Retraining of Racehorses (UK), Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance (US), Au-delà des Pistes (France), Retired Racehorse Project (US), Thoroughbred Incentive Program (US), New Vocations (US), Canter (US) and Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation (US).

A number of their initiatives and activities are worth considering and could be adopted in Australia.

Central to the work of both Retraining of Racehorses (ROR) and Thoroughbred Incentive Program (TIP) is creating opportunities for horses that have left racing, as well as developing communities for their new owners.

ROR was established in 2000 and has focused on giving horses a purpose, rather than providing a “sanctuary” to live out their days. Before Covid, ROR was running more than 300 events annually, both competitions and educational classes, with opportunities for horses and riders at all levels. These are

divided over a dozen disciplines and all horses need to be registered with ROR to participate.

Di Arbuthnot, head of ROR, told TAWWG that while the organisation puts some prize money into elite levels so that top riders are using thoroughbreds – which encourages grassroots riders to want a retired racehorse – its main focus is sustaining a community of riders at the lower levels.

This strategy is cost effective – prizes at many ROR events are a rosette and a pair of socks – but these owners value their horses.

“It’s about creating opportunities and communities for riders. Our regional groups are more or less like adult pony clubs. They all get together as a group; they have thoroughbred camps; they have training; they do low level dressage; they go on hacks; they win a rosette.

“But the most important thing is that they (owners) keep their horses and love them and normally they’ll keep them until they die.”

In the US and Canada, the Thoroughbred Incentive Program (TIP) has organised 5,751 horse shows and events between 2012 and the end of 2019, at which more than 51,000 individual thoroughbreds competed. In 2020, more than 1,400 shows were approved in 41 states and Canadian territories.

The scale of these events – both in terms of the numbers of shows and competing horses, and the geographical footprint of TIP’s activities across a continent – demonstrates what can be achieved on a national level.

To be eligible, all horses need to register in a stud book and separately with TIP, which creates oversight and traceability of horses that have left the industry.

TIP also has a recreational riding program that incentivises riders to log their hours in return for prizes such as a saddle pad, vest or fleece jacket.

Another initiative of note is the Retired Racehorse Project (RRP), which was started by a small group of people unconnected to the racing or breeding industry, but who used thoroughbreds in the show ring. They were concerned that the breed was falling out of favour in equestrian disciplines, as well as activities such as polo.

“It’s about creating opportunities and communities for riders. Our regional groups are more or less like adult pony clubs ... the most important thing is that they (owners) keep their horses and love them and normally they’ll keep them until they die.” Di Arbuthnot, chief executive of Retraining of Racehorses

They created a format to showcase retired racehorses. Their signature event is the annual Thoroughbred Makeover, in which hundreds of retired racehorses compete for US\$135,000 in prize money and the title of Makeover Champion.

The event showcases the versatility of off-the-track thoroughbreds and inspires good trainers to become involved in transitioning horses to second careers. The Makeover is billed as a competition for retrainers rather than a horse show and entrants have to demonstrate their skill and knowledge in retraining before they are allowed to compete.

One of the strict criteria is that people can compete only on horses that are in retraining for no more than 10 months (based on a horse’s last race start or official trial). This differentiates the Makeover from other horse shows and emphasises the skills of retrainers.

Alongside the Makeover competition is a national symposium that educates those involved in the care and retraining of thoroughbreds. It involves workshops, demonstrations, guest speakers and a trade fair.

Together the Makeover and symposium attract thousands of visitors each day from across North America. Jen Roytz, executive director of RRP, told TAWWG its key objective was to change the perception that retired racehorses had no value.

“The goal is to increase the demand and value of thoroughbreds in the equestrian world. From a marketing angle we tried to change the narrative about off-track thoroughbreds, promoting them as versatile purpose-bred athletes that can excel in many equestrian disciplines. We encourage people to not only appreciate and celebrate their pedigree and accomplishments on the track, but also see the potential and value in them as sport horses.

“The Retired Racehorse Project is one of the biggest catalysts the industry has seen in creating demand for thoroughbreds after racing in North America.”

After cancellation due to Covid in 2020, in this year’s Makeover 480 retrainers will compete on more than 950 horses. Many of the horses competing at the Makeover are available for sale, with prices ranging from US\$1,700 to US\$20,000.

The 2019 winner was world champion barrel racer Fallon Taylor, who has a huge following on social media, including 194,000 YouTube subscribers. Her victory increased awareness of the use of thoroughbreds in a discipline not traditionally popular for them and stimulated significant demand for retired racehorses in this sector.³⁸

One US charity that particularly emphasises retraining is the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance (TAA). Since 2012 it has granted more than US\$17 million to organisations that have retrained and rehomed 11,000 thoroughbreds.

“We tried to change the narrative about off-track thoroughbreds, promoting them as versatile purpose-bred athletes that can excel in many equestrian disciplines.” Jen Roytz, Retired Racehorse Project

TAA was established to give greater oversight over those receiving industry funds to retrain and rehome thoroughbreds. To become an accredited TAA organisation and receive funding is a significant task, but it aims to make providers stronger, more efficient and capable of raising their own funds.

Among the requirements to obtain funding from TAA are: be established as a not-for-profit organisation; have been in operation for a minimum of three years; must own and care for a minimum of five thoroughbreds, or have a history of rehoming; must have a written euthanasia policy; and the organisation or principal can have no legal proceeding pending or convictions that could adversely affect aftercare operations.

Accreditation lasts two years and organisations are inspected to ensure they are meeting the TAA standards. Among the bodies currently receiving funding are adoption programs, rehabilitation programs, sanctuaries and equine-assisted therapy programs.

Stacie Clark, an operations consultant at TAA, said its strict criteria for accreditation gave confidence to industry participants who funded the charity.

She said it was crucial for racing and breeding to ensure the initial transition out of the industry was well managed and stood up to public scrutiny. “If we are breeding them and we are responsible for them after racing or breeding, which we should be, then we should have some plan – a responsible plan. And we have to be able to answer the first exit in racing question; this is the most important thing to get across to the public, and it’s the right thing to do for our horses and our industry.”

Supporting at-risk thoroughbreds

Even if thoroughbreds are successfully rehomed or retrained, it is still possible for them to be at risk of poor welfare outcomes later in life. For example, a horse may be sold a number of times as an equestrian horse, only to be retired and neglected in a paddock later.

As well as expanding opportunities for thoroughbreds to find new careers, it is also important to address the needs of the minority that, for reasons of age, health, behaviour or temperament, are unlikely to be successfully placed. Without a potential alternative use, and if they are of low or no commercial value, these unwanted horses are most at risk of poor treatment or being sent to an abattoir or knackery.

Racing NSW already takes in some thoroughbreds where owners cannot care for them, including seizing horses for which there are welfare concerns, and buying NSW thoroughbreds from owners or at auction if there is a risk they could be sold to a knackery or abattoir. In a press release, it said that since 2016 it had taken in, seized or purchased more than 200 thoroughbreds on welfare grounds.³⁸

In its submission, Racing Victoria called for research into why horses bred for racing become unwanted, arguing, “the horse industry in general and racing specifically must take responsibility for the unwanted horse ... understanding what makes certain thoroughbreds unwanted following their racing career will focus initiatives on ensuring horses retire from racing with the best possible opportunities for a successful post-racing career, therefore reducing the number of thoroughbreds ending up in this ‘unwanted’ category”.

The submission cited the work of US researcher Dr Tom Lenz who predicted that “euthanasia at the request of the owner, because they no longer want or can afford to care for an unwanted horse, may become a recognised action of a responsible owner in the future”.⁴⁰ The British Horse Society already lists “change in owner’s circumstances” as an acceptable reason for euthanasia.⁴¹

The TAWWG deals with this issue in the following chapter.

Retirement farms

Racing NSW has invested significantly in four rural properties that provide indefinite homes for thoroughbreds unsuitable for rehoming. There is little publicly available information on the operations of these properties. The TAWWG received a number of other submissions proposing the use of sanctuary-style properties.

One example, from the not-for-profit aftercare organisation The Horse and The Human, proposed “a national not-for-profit organisation providing exemplary programs, facilities and resources in equine and human welfare” including “whole-of-life care of the thoroughbred horse – from early development to dignified end of life”. It outlined a three-phase post-racing program:

1. **assessment and care (the let-down phase lasting four to eight months)**
2. **education and specialised training, and allocation (rehoming)**
3. **whole of life observation and management, and dignified end of life care.**

This model proposes an owner contribution of \$8,500 to \$10,000 per horse for life-long retirement farm care.

The TAWWG also received a submission proposing thoroughbreds be rehomed to a large property in central western Queensland and the NT. This would see horses allowed to roam across large land areas, but with their welfare being monitored when they came to watering holes. This would, it was proposed, be an inexpensive option for rehoming large numbers of horses.

While this is an innovative proposal, there are genuine questions to be considered about the financial and environmental sustainability, and provision of adequate care, under this model.

Findings

Thoroughbreds are highly versatile animals that should be celebrated for their athleticism and intelligence. They are retired to stud or leave the thoroughbred industry at an early age, with many years of their natural life ahead of them.

The TAWWG believes the welfare of these horses is best served if they can be found a purposeful and stimulating second career. As well as providing them with positive experiences, transitioning thoroughbreds into homes and roles where they are valued means they are far less likely to suffer poor welfare outcomes.

There is clear evidence that use of modern foundation training, diversity in racing training, and equitation science, delivers positive results for thoroughbreds on the track and, importantly, increases their opportunities after racing.

While the industry has invested significantly in retraining and rehoming, there is a need to focus more resources in this area. With about 8,500 thoroughbreds leaving the industry each year, there is an urgent need to introduce and extend initiatives and programs that stimulate demand for these horses and provide support for their new owners.

While the recommendations throughout this report should be taken together, and cumulatively provide a framework to ensure the care of horses after racing or breeding, the suggested actions in this chapter are a central plank in improving welfare outcomes through increased opportunities.

There are some compelling lessons from overseas organisations working in rehoming and retraining, as well as initiatives already under way in Australia, to stimulate demand for off-the-track horses.

For example, the success of ROR and TIP in organising events and developing networks and communities of those who have rehomed thoroughbreds is an effective but economical way to drive rehoming. The ability of TIP to roll out programs across the US and Canada, both federated nations larger than Australia, should be an inspiration, and demonstrates that a national approach can be successful.

The TAWWG notes the evidence of the Thoroughbred Sport Horse Association and the opportunity that exists to build upon already established networks by developing thoroughbred events and competitions at country shows across Australia.

While nearly all state and territory racing authorities sponsor off-the-track events, these efforts need to be increased significantly and combined with measures to develop communities with support and education for new owners. The experiences of ROR in fostering these networks, whether through competitions or its regular workshops that build the knowledge and skills of owners of retired racehorses, are particularly relevant.

As was stated by Racing Victoria's Jennifer Hughes, a great many horses can be retrained with minimal formal assistance. The TAWWG's view is that an appropriate period of rest and recuperation should be given to all horses when leaving racing.

For those horses that need more assistance, either physically or behaviourally, it is clear that an appropriate retraining program can put a retiring thoroughbred on a path to a new career in which it is valued, and its welfare secured for many years.

The Racing Victoria RESET program is a valuable model that could be replicated across Australia. It provides direct support for those horses that are sound and have good prospects but have not been successful in transitioning to a second career outside of racing.

The TAWWG's view is that there is potential to establish retraining as a formal discipline based on scientific principles, giving more horses the opportunity to be educated for new careers post-racing.

The work of TAA in the US in assessing and funding organisations that assist the transition of horses is also worth considering, and the TAWWG believes that TWA could provide a similar function in Australia. The TAWWG's view is that any program funded by the industry, whether through a PRA or by TWA, should be understood by industry participants, nationally consistent, informed by science, and have measurable objectives.

Targeted initiatives, similar to the Thoroughbred Makeover, could also encourage more skilled horsemen and women to acquire a thoroughbred, retrain them, and use them in an array of disciplines. Fostering the use of thoroughbreds among high-level riders, as the Thoroughbred Makeover does and ROR has through targeted prize money, is also likely to influence lower-level riders to embrace off-the-track horses.

Racehorses are generally retired from racing at a relatively young age and as sound horses. Therefore, they are well placed to be retrained and rehomed into a wide range of different careers.

With a well-researched and developed, concerted, nationally coordinated approach, the TWA, together with the PRAs and the broader industry, has the very real opportunity to significantly boost the existing rehoming places and options for retired racehorses and breeders.

This would include the more traditional equestrian pursuits as well as expanding opportunities across a wide range of other activities.

This nationally coordinated approach would require a significant injection of funding, which would be a major component of the TWA budget.

The TAWWG received many submissions, and heard substantial evidence, that highlighted the opportunities to promote, support and significantly increase the use of thoroughbreds across the full range of traditional equestrian activities such as showjumping, eventing, hacking, pony club, recreational riding, dressage, polo and polocrosse.

The submissions and evidence presented to TAWWG outlined many successful initiatives and ideas that need to be considered for inclusion in a national approach to increasing rehoming opportunities, such as:

- (a) sponsorship of events and activities involving rehomed thoroughbreds
- (b) education and training programs for current and potential owners and riders
- (c) access to products, services, discounts, advice and support
- (d) development of a national program of events for rehomed thoroughbreds through agricultural shows
- (e) holding promotional equestrian competitions and events, featuring rehomed thoroughbreds, on selected race days
- (f) celebration and promotion of successful rehomed thoroughbreds, especially using social media
- (g) regular appearances of rehomed thoroughbreds at race meetings, public events and activities (the Subzero model).

In addition, there is the opportunity to develop, promote and celebrate the use of retired thoroughbreds in a wider, more diverse and often unusual, range of careers including:

- (i) support, including financial assistance, to further encourage the use of retired thoroughbreds in therapy programs, such as Riding for the Disabled, Horses for Hope, programs for people with post-traumatic stress disorder, mental health

issues or addictions

(ii) recreational and tourism trail riding

(iii) riding schools

(iv) using retired thoroughbreds in education and training programs for equine industry training

(v) as companion animals

(vi) use in public roles such as police horses, and clerk of the course horses

(vii) use of suitable broodmares, who are no longer wanted for thoroughbred breeding, in either cross breeding programs or as surrogate mares.

TAAWG believes foundation training and retraining are areas where the development of accreditation or quality assurance schemes may well improve standards, helping to educate participants on best practice, and provide confidence to the community. The TAA accreditation program in the US is one example.

Another impediment to successfully transitioning horses is a lack of awareness of options among owners, trainers and breeders. This could be overcome if there was a dedicated resource to provide information on rehoming and retraining post-racing or breeding.

The TAAWG sees this as an advisory service, with the responsibility remaining on owners to transition their horses successfully. If rehoming and retraining were accredited or part of a quality assurance scheme, such an advisory service would also assist those responsible operators who were accredited by directing business to them.

Recommendations

28. TWA should work with the industry to develop a national framework for the assessment, retraining and rehoming of thoroughbreds exiting the racing and breeding industries.
29. TWA, working with RA, the PRAs and the broader industry, should develop and implement a comprehensive coordinated national plan to significantly increase the number and diversity of opportunities for all thoroughbred horses leaving the breeding and racing industries.
30. TWA should implement programs to improve the sharing of knowledge and experiences across Australia and internationally, with respect to retraining and rehoming of thoroughbreds. This should include the development of best practice guidelines for the retraining of retired thoroughbreds.
31. All retired racehorses should have an appropriate period of rest and recuperation, followed by an appropriate health and welfare assessment, before entering a retraining and rehoming program.
32. TWA should develop an advisory service to provide information on pathways to successfully transition horses out of the thoroughbred racing or breeding industry.
33. TWA, working with relevant stakeholders, should develop and implement QA schemes for key thoroughbred industry participants, including trainers, foundation trainers and retrainers.

CHAPTER NINE

A National Safety Net

Introduction

The focus of the TAWWG has been to ensure there is a system that supports the welfare of all thoroughbreds from birth to death. The adoption of the key recommendations made in earlier chapters, such as the development of enforceable national welfare standards for all horses, lifetime traceability of all horses, the creation of specific industry welfare rules, and significantly more investment in programs, will help transition horses out of the thoroughbred breeding and racing industries and support them into alternative careers. Thoroughbred welfare will be significantly enhanced as a result.

With such measures in place, far fewer thoroughbreds will experience poor welfare outcomes or become unwanted and at risk of poor treatment.

However, even with those policies, the TAWWG accepts there will be some thoroughbreds whose treatment does not meet standards considered appropriate by the community.

The TAWWG heard examples of horses transitioned into suitable homes where they were well cared for, only to change hands later (often due to a change in the owner's circumstance) and be placed in a home where their care was not acceptable.

Given the increased awareness and commitment to lifelong thoroughbred welfare of all sectors of the breeding and racing industries – strongly led and supported by the PRAs together with the additional measures recommended in this report – it is expected that few thoroughbreds will not be properly and adequately cared for throughout their lives. However, a national safety net is needed to protect the welfare of each of these few horses at risk.

For racing and breeding this presents a particularly difficult challenge. How can a responsible industry try to support those thoroughbreds that fall into this at-risk category? And how can it do this if the horse is no longer in the industry's care?

Another reality is that, even if a thoroughbred is mistreated long after it has exited the industry, if and when that mistreatment is exposed, the public will, rightly or wrongly, hold the industry accountable at some level. This was confirmed in the public insights research conducted to support this report, in which the majority of respondents' opinions could be summed up as, "once a racehorse, always a racehorse".

As noted in the previous chapter, some PRAs are taking action to support this cohort of unwanted thoroughbreds through the development of sanctuary farms where horses can stay indefinitely, or through initiatives such as Racing Victoria's RESET program.

Many who made submissions, both participants and those outside of the industry, called for policies at a national level that would support at-risk horses at any stage of their life, essentially providing a safety net to protect thoroughbreds that would otherwise be at risk of poor welfare outcomes.

This chapter will consider options to deliver that important objective.

Potential schemes

There is broad consensus in the industry that it is necessary to make provision early in horses' lives for their welfare at older ages, to prevent neglect and/or the possibility of a horse becoming unwanted and being sold for commercial slaughter.

Thoroughbred breeder Henry Field highlighted the challenge of preventing mistreatment after rehoming.

“If a horse finds a second career as a show horse or in equestrianism and is treated cruelly, then there is very little we could have done to prevent that.” He added: “But if there was a funding model to try to ensure that horses don’t fall into the wrong hands and instead end up either back at the farm or at a happy home elsewhere, then most breeders would be happy to contribute.”

Another to call for a mechanism to prevent the commercial slaughter of thoroughbreds came from breeder and bloodstock agent Sheamus Mills, who advocated a buy-back bounty funded by a levy on foal registrations.

He wrote: “If the knackereries are paying \$400 then we (thoroughbred industry) give \$600. The reality is these horses filter down through all sorts of non-industry participants and so we need a way to get them back in the system when somebody makes that choice.”

Similarly, breeder Godolphin said it would support a system that provided for traceability and prevented horses becoming vulnerable.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) called for substantial and mandatory payments, starting with a fixed percentage of prize money that should be directly deposited in a trust to fund aftercare.

It stated: “Just as jockeys are paid a percentage of the prize money that they have earned, the horses themselves, as the featured athletes, have rightfully earned a percentage of these race purses.”

In a similar vein, a number of submissions said a welfare bond should be created for each individual horse – similar to a superannuation scheme – where contributions are made along the life cycle of a thoroughbred, for example by the breeder or owner, and kept in a trust that can be accessed should that horse become at risk or need support.

The Racing NSW submission states that the NSW Welfare Program provides a safety net for all NSW Thoroughbreds to ensure that every thoroughbred finds a suitable new home when it leaves racing. The submission states that if owners are unable to rehome their horses themselves, they can surrender the horse to Racing NSW so they can be cared for, retrained, and ultimately rehomed.

“We should all contribute something so that there is enough money to deal with that horse if it ends up in a situation that there is no one who wants to look after it.” John Kelly, Newhaven Park Stud

Others suggested that, rather than individual trusts for each horse, the industry should have to ensure there was a national safety net with adequate funding, and that this would likely require additional funding.

The principal of Newhaven Stud, John Kelly, said he favoured a system whereby all who profited from racehorses were required to make a contribution to fund a safety net. “We should all contribute something so that there is enough money to deal with that horse if it ends up in a situation that there is no one who wants to look after it,” he said.

The chief executive of Racing Queensland, Brendan Parnell, said he supported any proposal to provide a safety net, but any mechanism for funding would need to factor in the multiple levels of the thoroughbred industry: “The question is, where is it most fairly levied? Then how is it managed right through to the horse’s end of life? We certainly in principle are in favour of the concept.”

In its submission, Thoroughbred Breeders Australia highlighted the work of the charity ROR in the UK through its vulnerable horses program, and suggested a similar scheme be developed here, providing a “safety net” for at-risk or unwanted horses.

The TBA stated: “If a thoroughbred cannot be looked after properly by its owner, they should be able to transfer it back to the care of a welfare body.” Under its proposal, such horses would be assessed by the welfare body and either retrained and rehomed, or humanely killed.

The safety net provided by ROR is worth considering. Its program is designed to assist “former racehorses that land in situations where intervention is needed to secure their welfare”.

In summary, anyone concerned about the welfare of a thoroughbred or who is responsible for a thoroughbred but can no longer care for that horse, can contact the charity which will arrange a veterinary assessment.

After this assessment, the vast majority of horses are moved to a retrainer or a property to allow time to recuperate before being rehomed or retrained. In some circumstances veterinarians, in accordance with ROR’s euthanasia policy, will decide to put a horse down. Of some 213 horses accepted by the scheme in 2018 and 2019, 42 were euthanised.

Each horse that enters the scheme is allocated funding of £5,000, which is used to pay all expenses for up to a year. The retrainers and rehomers the charity uses are encouraged to find suitable new homes for the horses within that 12 months but, should no suitable place be found and the allocated resources be exhausted, those horses are humanely killed. However, no horse in the program has yet been killed for this reason.

The program is not available for horses exiting racing or breeding, because the charity believes that any support for this transition should be the responsibility of the horse’s owner.

Findings

The thoroughbred industry has significant existing commitments to improving welfare and this report has already made many recommendations on how to augment and develop this work.

However, even with significantly more resources to help transition thoroughbreds out of the industry and into suitable homes, there is always likely to be a cohort of horses that become vulnerable to poor welfare outcomes. The reasons may include change of ownership, illness or injury, or a change in the circumstances of their owner.

The TAWWG’s view is that the industry needs to develop a mechanism to assist these vulnerable horses, and this needs to be effective both nationally and consistently.

While there may be benefits with a superannuation-style scheme for every thoroughbred, this would involve a significant administrative burden that would likely soak up valuable resources, and some horses, especially those unraced, would probably lack funds in their accounts. Similarly, any scheme to “buy back” or put a bounty on thoroughbreds may simply drive up the price paid by horse abattoirs or knackerries and still leave the issue of how to manage those horses once acquired.

Therefore, the most appropriate way to achieve this outcome is through a national thoroughbred safety net

(NTSN). This would rely heavily on a national traceability register to accurately verify the identity and ownership of horses being considered.

The example of the scheme run by ROR in the UK is compelling and provides the template for what should be adopted here.

The TAWWG notes that during 2018 and 2019, the scheme took on 105 and 108 horses respectively (numbers dropped significantly in 2020, likely as a result of Covid-19).

Given that the active racing population of the UK was 23,357 last year compared with 34,337 in Australia, it is likely that Australia's larger population would increase demand for the scheme here.

However, TAWWG does not believe the numbers would be unmanageable. Using the take-up of the British scheme as a guide suggests the number of horses that could enter the scheme in Australia would be in the mid-150s.

Among the key features would be a national hotline to allow people to report at-risk thoroughbred horses, an assessment of every horse conducted by a veterinarian and the movement of that horse to a suitable property where it could be retrained or given time to recover or recuperate, before an attempt was made to rehome it.

To support this work a clear euthanasia policy is needed to give veterinarians the framework to make appropriate decisions.

As with the British model, there would also be a finite pot of funds available to each horse in the scheme, with the possibility that some horses are humanely killed when this is exhausted. The TAWWG notes, however, that no horse has yet been put down for this reason in the life of the scheme, with all finding suitable homes within 12 months.

For such a scheme to work effectively in Australia it would require a network of people or organisations with the skills to care for vulnerable horses and retrain or repurpose them. This would be best managed centrally, with one hotline, even if the assessments and retrieval and rehoming of horses is conducted at state level. The TAWWG is in no doubt that suitable rehoming and retrainers exist and that funding these providers to care for horses in the safety net would support their activities.

The safety net should be available only for thoroughbreds at genuine welfare risk. The safety net hotline should not be the contact point for owners and trainers simply seeking advice or assistance on retraining and rehoming opportunities.

This recommendation, if adopted, would be a considerable commitment from the thoroughbred industry, but the benefits would be significant.

Firstly, and most importantly, a safety net would provide an effective means to assist horses that have the potential to have a purposeful second, third or fourth career but are presently at risk of mistreatment or slaughter. This cannot stop people selling thoroughbreds to abattoirs or knackeries, either directly or through a third party, for financial or other reasons. However, it will provide an outlet for those that can no longer care for a horse they are responsible for.

As well as being a boon for welfare, the adoption of a safety net scheme would send a powerful message to the broader community: the thoroughbred industry is committed to welfare and to giving every vulnerable horse an opportunity to be rehomed.

Furthermore, the relative simplicity of the concept would allow for it to be communicated efficiently to thoroughbred participants, the broader equine community and the public, greatly increasing the chances of its becoming a successful measure to prevent mistreatment.

The TAWWG's strong view is that this policy must be adopted nationally to be fully effective and that it would best be driven by a newly formed TWA with the support of state racing authorities. While there are many sound reasons that welfare policies vary from state to state – such as funding, geography and size of the challenge – having the industry unite behind this policy would send a powerful message on welfare.

As described in Chapter 2, TAWWG proposes TWA be funded by a levy struck at the most efficient point in the supply chain for each stakeholder group so as to minimise red tape, maximise transparency and accountability, and share the cost of this body equitably across all sectors of the industry.

The cost of the safety net will be met through that funding mechanism.

Recommendation

- 34.** TWA should develop and implement a national safety net that develops and oversees a thoroughbred welfare hotline to advise on welfare options for at-risk horses. It would include a service to assess at-risk thoroughbreds and provide advice on options including rehoming, retraining and on-site humane killing. The national safety net would report annually on all activities.

CHAPTER TEN

End of Life

Introduction

The TAWWG's consultation with stakeholders revealed support across the industry, and the wider community, for the proposition that the thoroughbred racing and breeding industries have a responsibility for both the welfare of horses after they retire from racing and breeding and to ensure, when the time comes, that they experience a humane end of life.

The responsibility for the health and welfare of any thoroughbred lies primarily with its owner, as do end-of-life decisions.

However, the breeding and racing industries must, and increasingly do, accept a shared responsibility for the lifelong welfare of the horses they breed and race. This responsibility is shared by state and territory governments that regulate and enforce animal cruelty laws.

The importance of these industries meeting their responsibilities, particularly as they relate to a horse's end of life, cannot be overstated.

Both this report, and the inquiry led by Terry Martin SC in Queensland, were commissioned in response to the ABC 7.30's investigation on the mistreatment of horses at the Meramist abattoir in Caboolture and the widespread community outrage that followed.

The racing and breeding industries face a number of complex challenges and opportunities in ensuring all thoroughbreds have a productive post-racing career, a healthy and safe retirement and a humane death.

The TAWWG's estimate, based on the available data, is that about 8,500 thoroughbreds leave the racing and breeding industries each year (see Chapter 7).

Previous chapters have considered many opportunities that, if implemented, would lead to longer, more productive lives for thoroughbreds after they exit the racing and breeding industries.

However, there will still be some retired thoroughbreds that are at risk of poor welfare outcomes during their retirement and their end of life. Further, because of injury or temperament, there will also be some horses that cannot be retrained or rehomed.

As RSPCA Australia pointed out in its submission, if circumstances arise where a horse can no longer be appropriately cared for, ensuring a humane death is preferable to the horse being left alive but suffering neglect.

Addressing the needs of horses when considering end-of-life decisions requires a comprehensive policy framework designed to deliver the most humane outcome in all circumstances, from rehoming through to euthanasia or humane killing. The evidence before the TAWWG confirmed there is presently no clear policy framework that consistently helps thoroughbred owners manage these difficult decisions.

Views on the use of abattoirs and knackeries

The TAWWG found the killing of thoroughbred horses to be a highly emotive issue, particularly when it involves knackeries or abattoirs.

The research on community attitudes conducted to assist this report clearly demonstrated the public does not view thoroughbreds, or horses in general, in the same way as cattle or sheep.

Some people said they believed horses should not be sent to knackeries or abattoirs. Others said their key considerations were establishing a defined reason for killing a horse and the need for a humane death.

The views of individuals on this issue are informed by personal ethics and moral judgements about how society should treat horses.

In recent years, such views have shifted, having been affected by the availability of information and emerging science, and this will continue into the future. The industry must keep abreast of advances in welfare science as well as community attitudes so it can respond positively to ensure its long-term future.

In considering end-of-life issues, the TAWWG has focused on the best interests of the horse.

In that context, the TAWWG strongly believes its recommendations, if implemented, would significantly reduce the number of horses that are unwanted or at risk of poor welfare outcomes, including inappropriate dispatch or sale to abattoirs or knackeries.

However, as well as ethical and moral judgements, there are practical issues that need to be considered. The panel has heard evidence, for example, that knackeries that provide onsite services can offer a valuable alternative to veterinary intervention, especially when the disposal of a carcass presents real problems for owners.

In considering abattoirs and knackeries, the TAWWG has focused on improving the welfare of thoroughbreds, such as regulatory reforms for these facilities and services.

End of life options

Euthanasia is the intentional ending of a horse's life for the specific purpose of relieving or preventing pain and suffering. It is most often used with terminally ill, unwell or injured animals, where the prognosis is considered hopeless.

In almost all circumstances, euthanasia should be taken on the advice of a veterinarian and consider the horse's quality of life, body condition, injuries, disease and behaviour when determining what is in the best interests of the horse.

In an emergency, such as an accident or sudden illness, a horse may need to be euthanised without delay. This should be carried out in situ by a veterinarian or, in the absence of a veterinarian, a trained and competent firearms operator.

“Euthanasia is an essential welfare tool applicable to the entire life span of horses and should be regarded as a positive outcome rather than a failure. It is a protection mechanism to avoid animal suffering and unacceptable quality of life. Horses must not be forced to endure a poor quality of life due to lack of feed, water or comfort.” UK Horse Welfare Board⁴³

In submissions and consultation meetings, the TAWWG sometimes heard the term “euthanasia” applied to the humane killing of horses that were at the end of their “useful” life, but not suffering.

The TAWWG uses the term euthanasia only in the context of relieving or preventing suffering. However, it quotes from some sources that apply the wider usage. These instances will be clear in their context.

Whatever the reason for ending the life of a horse, it should always be carried out humanely. The term

humane killing is used to describe ending the life of an animal without pain, suffering or distress. Humane killing, by definition, should not cause a welfare issue as there is no pain, suffering or distress and the animal is not aware of its impending death.

The term “humane killing” refers to the method of killing and the animal’s experience, rather than the purpose or reason for the horse to be killed. The term “slaughter” refers to the killing of an animal for the primary purpose of producing food, and generally takes place at an abattoir (when the end product is intended for human consumption) or a knackery (where the end product is for animal consumption or other uses).

Methods of humane killing and euthanasia

The question of whether to end a horse’s life should, wherever possible, be separated from the question of how and where it is to be killed. Once that first, difficult decision has been made, owners of thoroughbreds should be guided towards the most humane option for their horse. Decisions on which option to choose should be based on the best interests of the horse but will need to take some practical limitations into account, including access to a veterinarian and environmental considerations around carcass disposal.

Animal welfare veterinarian from the University of Technology Sydney, Dr Andrea Harvey, said the only realistic ways to ensure that ending a horse’s life had minimal impact on its welfare were either to perform euthanasia in the horse’s home environment or to have state-of-the-art euthanasia facilities designed specifically for horses.

The least stressful and lowest risk option from an animal welfare perspective is generally for a horse to be humanely killed in familiar surroundings by a registered veterinarian. The preferred method is a lethal intravenous injection of barbiturate, with prior administration of a sedative to reduce anxiety and increase the safety of the handlers.

Where the use of barbiturates is precluded due to environmental restrictions (see below), an alternative veterinary method is heavy sedation followed by using a penetrating captive bolt, though this is rarely used as it requires bleeding out immediately after the bolt is applied.

Where attendance by a veterinarian is not feasible, shooting with an appropriate calibre firearm, carried out according to best practice by a trained and competent operator, is also a humane option. This method also avoids restrictions on carcass disposal associated with the use of barbiturates.

Carcass disposal

Thoroughbred horses are large animals, which presents environmental and financial challenges in disposing of carcasses. Each method of euthanasia or humane killing has different implications for carcass disposal.

The carcasses of horses that have received a barbiturate lethal injection cannot be used for pet food and, in some jurisdictions, cannot be buried due to environmental concerns. There are also significant risks to scavenging wildlife and other animals from barbiturates if they access a carcass. These risks may give rise to welfare concerns if the safest, most appropriate and preferred method of euthanasia or humane killing cannot be used because of issues about the disposal of the carcass.

Dennis King, the executive officer of the Australian Renderers Association, also advised TAWWG that its industry is increasingly moving away from processing dead animals (horses and livestock) collected from farms, preferring to source products from animals that have been slaughtered for human consumption and

Advantages and limitations of on-farm humane killing methods

Method	Advantages	Limitations
Lethal injection Sedation followed by intravenous lethal barbiturate (pentobarbitone) injection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The method is quick, safe, effective and reliable. The use of a prior sedative reduces anxiety and fear. It can be administered on farm in a quiet location with familiar handlers present. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It can be performed only by a veterinarian. Carcass cannot be used for pet food. The contaminated carcass must be buried, cremated or removed from the property for safe disposal. Burial is prohibited in some areas such as water catchments.
Captive bolt Heavy sedation followed by penetrating captive bolt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The method is safe, effective and reliable when performed by a trained and competent operator. The use of a prior sedative reduces anxiety and fear and avoids movement during bolt placement. It can be administered on farm in a quiet location with familiar handlers present. Carcass can be easily disposed of. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sedation can be performed only by a veterinarian. Bolt must be accurately placed in direct contact with the head. Possibility of pain and suffering if operated incorrectly. The captive bolt shot should be immediately followed by bleeding out or pithing, which is aesthetically challenging. If the carcass cannot be buried on site, it needs to be removed from the property.
Firearm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick and effective when performed by a trained and competent licensed firearm operator. It is commonly available to respond quickly to an animal in distress. It can be used where horses are anxious or unused to handling. Carcass can be used for further purposes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no registered competency assessment or training program for the humane killing of horses by a firearm. There is possibility of pain and suffering if operated incorrectly. There is potential danger to humans if operated incorrectly. There are restrictions on discharging firearms in enclosed spaces. If the carcass cannot be buried on site, it needs to be removed from the property.

are thus subject to higher standards about hygiene and drug residues. He also confirms that animals killed with barbiturates are unacceptable for pet food and now also for broader stock feed industries, because of barbiturate residues in the rendered meat.

This trend may have significant implications for the thoroughbred industry's preference for on-farm humane killing through lethal injection if it removes financial incentives for knackery operators to retrieve horse carcasses. However, at this stage, the rendering industry has discussed but not yet decided whether to exclude "dead stock" from all processing except for blood and bone fertilisers.

In many jurisdictions, carcasses can be buried on-farm, with some restrictions. The Victorian Environment Protection Agency, for example, allows "limited numbers of dead stock [to] be buried on a farm, as long as the burial site does not adversely impact the land, surface waters, groundwaters or the air (odour)". Burial also must be on an elevated site at least 300 metres from the nearest house. There are additional stipulations about slope, soil type and proximity to surface and ground water.⁴⁴ In NSW, carcasses can be accepted by licensed landfill sites that have the necessary infrastructure to manage long-term containment issues. Composting or above-ground decomposition is also permitted, unless the method of killing was via barbiturate injection.⁴⁵

Another option is for the carcass to be transported for cremation. Some crematoriums for companion

animals, such as the Animal Welfare League in South Australia, offer a service for horse owners though the price of \$1600 to transport and cremate a horse of 500 kilograms or more makes this prohibitive in most circumstances. Similar services are also available in NSW and Victoria.^{46, 47}

Concerns have also been raised that using fossil fuels to cremate a large horse carcass is environmentally inappropriate.

Current policies

While different jurisdictions have many rules about how to end the life of a thoroughbred and dispose of the carcass, there are few guidelines about how to make a decision to do so, either by humane killing or euthanasia.

There is no decision-making framework for owners and other industry participants to determine whether ending a horse's life is an appropriate or reasonable option.

Australian Rules of Racing

Recent changes in May 2021 to the Australian Rules of Racing require participants covered by the rules to notify Racing Australia of the death of a thoroughbred and for the cause of death to be certified by a veterinary surgeon.²⁰

Racing Victoria's Onsite Humane Euthanasia Program

In May 2021 Racing Victoria announced that its Onsite Humane Euthanasia Program (OHEP) was operational.⁴⁸

The program aims to help owners euthanise their horse onsite, rather than having to transport it to an abattoir or knackery. The OHEP may also help with payment for the euthanasia and disposal of the carcass, in certain circumstances.

However, the TAWWG notes that the OHEP is applicable only after the decision to euthanise the horse has been made and its eligibility criteria include specific reason/s for the decision to euthanise the horse.

To be eligible for the OHEP, horses must satisfy at least one of the following criteria. These may be valuable in considering and developing an end-of-life decision-making process (or decision tree) for thoroughbreds.

- A veterinary certificate certifies that the horse has a chronic injury or disease with negligible prospect of recovery.
- The horse has been assessed by a veterinarian as having a body condition score of one or less.
- The thoroughbred is the subject of a direction or advice to euthanise by an authorised RSPCA inspector, a police officer or an RV steward or RV veterinarian.
- A thoroughbred exhibits dangerous behaviour that makes it unsuitable for rehoming.
- Rehoming has been unsuccessful following a minimum of two genuine attempts.
(One of these must be via RV's post-racing framework of initiatives).

Racing NSW Local Rule 114

In October 2017, Racing NSW introduced Local Rule (LR) 114 "to ensure the welfare of thoroughbred horses from birth, during their racing careers and on retirement".⁴⁹

This rule initially sets out minimum care and welfare standards. It says owners, trainers and persons responsible for a horse must not "euthanise or destroy a horse (or permit a horse to be euthanised or destroyed) unless a registered veterinary surgeon has certified in writing that it is necessary on

welfare or safety grounds, or for reasons approved in writing by Racing NSW, or unless under extreme circumstances where it is necessary for a horse to be euthanised immediately and the decision is subsequently confirmed by a veterinary surgeon”.

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) argued that Local Rule 114 encouraged misrepresentation of the real reason for a euthanasia request, with vets being coerced to euthanise former racehorses for medical reasons because the owner no longer wanted that horse.

While Rule 114 was created with the best of intentions, the TAWWG heard evidence that many owners and trainers believe it would be better for the horse that had a severe injury or acute illness if the person responsible for it could immediately euthanise it rather than delay for fear of repercussions under Rule 114. These include potential arguments about whether the “extreme circumstances” threshold applied. One trainer, who was unsure whether the situation met the threshold of extreme circumstances, described waiting four hours for a veterinarian to euthanise a horse with a broken shoulder.

Rule 114 also includes important requirements about retirement and rehoming of thoroughbreds and makes it clear that in NSW thoroughbreds are not to be sent to an abattoir, knackery or similarly disposed of, and are not to be sold or gifted at a livestock auction not approved by Racing NSW.

It should be noted that this rule applies only in NSW and can regulate behaviour only of industry participants who are bound by the Rules. Racing NSW told the TAWWG that it was committed to Rule 114 as it opposed thoroughbreds in NSW being sent to a knackery or abattoir. Racing NSW has also announced its End of Life Welfare Plan that includes provision for funding euthanasia of at-risk horses.

Given that it is relatively common for retired thoroughbreds to be rehomed several times, including across state borders where Rule 114 does not apply, it is difficult to fully evaluate the impact of this rule on thoroughbred welfare. Rule 114 is a relatively new initiative and its impact on horse welfare should now be assessed.

Stakeholder views

There is a wide range of stakeholder views about the challenges of managing end-of-life decisions for thoroughbreds.

The Martin report stated: “The grim reality is that, even with the introduction of a Queensland racing industry rehoming program to complement the current and hugely commendable rehoming work of individuals and organisations from within the racing community and broader community, a significant number of healthy retired racing horses will have an early death. The only options then are euthanasia or the slaughter establishments.”⁴

Euthanasia should always be allowed and carried out when an animal is terminally suffering and has a poor quality of life. Euthanasia should also be considered in a situation where a horse cannot be rehomed because it is unsuited for rehoming.

The Victoria Racing Club cautions that there is a difference between an ethical consideration of euthanasia in an individual animal’s case, and society’s tolerance for widespread humane killing as a solution to population management of excess numbers of unwanted horses.

New Zealand animal welfare specialist Professor Natalie Waran says humane killing can be justified on welfare grounds based on a thoroughbred having a higher quality of life during the time it is interacting with humans, as opposed to a poor quality of life, and a long quantity of life.

Veterinarian Brett Warren’s submission expressed a common view in the TAWWG’s consultation: “Why is it OK to put down a pet dog that is homeless, but not a thoroughbred that can’t be rehomed after many efforts?”

A number of submissions noted the lack of an agreed end-of-life decision-making framework to guide owners. The absence of such a document has several implications. Thoroughbreds may be killed unnecessarily, but equally, there is the potential for poor welfare outcomes due to delayed humane killing where injury or temperament means a horse cannot be retrained or rehomed.

An example of such a document is the UK Horse Welfare Board's euthanasia guidelines, which are directed at the owners of all thoroughbreds, even those that have left the industry. It provides 11 areas to consider in deciding whether to end a horse's life. They include: ⁴³

- Young stock of all ages with severe deformity, conformational or developmental disorders should not be exposed to prolonged life where their welfare is continually compromised.
- Euthanasia should be considered in cases of an owner's financial hardship that is likely to cause a lack of appropriate care and attention and in circumstances when all responsible rehoming efforts have been exhausted.

One consistent view was that a humane death was preferable to an extended life of poor welfare.

RSPCA Australia's submission addressed this issue: "All horses will, at some point, reach the end of their life, whether that is because they are unwell, injured, no longer wanted, or can no longer be appropriately cared for. In these circumstances a humane death is preferable to horses being left alive but neglected."

Whether or when it is acceptable for a healthy horse to be humanely killed to avoid potential future suffering is a complex ethical question. Such questions are particularly difficult to resolve where financial considerations are in play.

The TAWWG sought a wide range of perspectives from within and beyond the industry about the best ways to reconcile these tensions and address this key issue.

On balance, the panel found there were some circumstances, beyond relieving immediate pain and suffering, where ending the life of a healthy horse might be regarded as in its best interests because its future welfare was at risk. Reasons for being "at risk" may include behavioural issues that preclude rehoming, safety, chronic non-life-threatening issues, old age, or when a horse clearly has no prospect of being rehomed and the available resources to support its continued care have been exhausted.

To ensure good welfare outcomes and provide practical pathways for owners, there is a real need to develop an "end of life decision tree" to guide horse owners facing decisions about the future of their animals.

Welfare issues associated with slaughter of horses

Many people find the slaughter of horses for meat production confronting and totally unacceptable. Others view it as a practical and appropriate response to deal with horses that have no viable home and no prospect of being rehomed.

While people will have different views on the ethics of slaughtering horses for meat production, from a strictly horse welfare perspective, the real issues relate to the way the horses are managed and transported to the abattoir or knackery and how they are managed and slaughtered at these facilities.

In the past, the racing and breeding industry has largely tolerated the slaughter of thoroughbreds as an undesirable but inevitable outcome of the breeding, racing and retirement cycle.

Trainer Peter Moody was one of a number of participants who stated that the most effective way of ensuring the highest standards of welfare were practised at facilities processing horses would be for the thoroughbred industry to directly control the facility.

He wrote: “If we accept that not all horses can be rehomed or re-educated, and all of them at some point come to the end of their life, then why not take charge of the process ourselves.

“I believe the racing industry can play a bigger part in aftercare and welfare of thoroughbreds and one way of doing that is to establish our own processing works and take responsibility for what happens to them.”

Others believe it is impossible to slaughter thoroughbreds humanely at abattoirs. According to Animals Australia’s submission, the welfare aspects of handling, transport, yarding with unfamiliar others and the fear engendered by abattoir practices are totally unacceptable.

While abattoirs accept only live horses, many knackeries will collect and process the carcasses of horses killed on-farm, especially if the knackery is warned or part of these arrangements. This on-farm humane killing with the knackery immediately collecting the carcass offers many benefits, especially that the live horse does not need to be transported before slaughter.

Abattoirs

Much of the recent debate about horse welfare was triggered by images of the animals being treated cruelly at Meramist abattoir in Queensland. The images sickened most of the industry and public alike, and highlighted that in extreme cases, horses were treated cruelly, and considered an expendable commercial commodity. The welfare issues related not only to what happened at the abattoir but also to transporting the thoroughbreds to the facility.⁵⁰

An abattoir is a facility that kills and processes animals for human consumption. The concept of eating horsemeat is anathema to most Australians, who generally do not consider the horse a food animal. Therefore, there are no abattoirs in Australia registered to produce horsemeat for domestic human consumption.

In its submission, the Equine Science Group at Charles Sturt University said Australia had operated a horsemeat export industry for more than 50 years. It further states that horsemeat is an excellent protein source, with less fat, cholesterol and sodium than ground beef. It makes the point that more than 1 billion people (16% of the world’s population) eat horsemeat and it is commonly consumed in many European and Asian countries, with yearly consumption likely increasing.

For several decades, two abattoirs have been authorised to produce horsemeat for export: Meramist in Caboolture, Queensland, and Samex in Peterborough, South Australia. These facilities are primarily regulated by the Australian government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE). Samex stopped processing horses in 2019 and would need permission from DAWE to resume the practice.

Meramist managers told the TAWWG the facility slaughtered and processed about 5,000 horses in the 2019-20 financial year, from a total of nearly 60,000 animals, mostly cattle, killed at the facility. When it slaughters horses, no other species is killed on the same day, and its daily capacity is 260 animals. This suggests horses are slaughtered at Meramist about 20 times a year, approximately fortnightly.

Government statistics indicate a drop in the number of horses slaughtered for meat export since 2019. This coincides with the 7.30 program. The total value of horsemeat exports in 2019 was a little less than \$10 million, with Belgium, Russia and Switzerland the biggest markets.

Meramist managers did not estimate the proportion of horses that were thoroughbreds, but said few wild horses were included in the number. A University of Queensland study estimated 40% of horses slaughtered at Meramist were thoroughbreds. However, that study was conducted between late 2007 and early 2008 and relied on three days of counting. The exact number of thoroughbreds killed in abattoirs (or knackeries) is unknown.⁵¹

The facility is not specifically designed for slaughtering horses, but Meramist managers say it is appropriate, and that its staff have been trained in handling horses. They say horses do not see other horses being killed. They are stunned using a captive bolt operated by a trained person, before exsanguination. Meramist managers advised six audits were conducted over four months in 2020 by agribusiness certifier AUS-MEAT, monitoring the processing of 120 horses, all of which were stunned effectively at the first attempt before slaughter.

Regulatory regime

To supply export markets, Meramist is required to comply with the federal Export Control Act 1982 and its subordinate regulations, regulated by DAWE. This legislation focuses on food safety and market integrity rather than animal welfare but does require compliance with the 2007 Australian standard for the hygienic production and transportation of meat and meat products for human consumption which includes some general animal welfare provisions.⁵²

DAWE requires all export abattoirs to enter an approved arrangement, which includes a requirement for an on-plant veterinarian, employed by DAWE. The abattoir must have procedures to “ensure the humane and considerate treatment of livestock”. The on-plant veterinarian documents animal welfare compliance against the approved arrangement during daily inspections of live animals and monthly verification of animal-handling practices and slaughter procedures. In the case of non-compliance, a corrective action request may be issued, directing management to immediately alleviate an animal’s pain and suffering and address the factors that led to the non-compliance.

Export abattoirs must also comply with state or territory animal welfare legislation. These laws may also reference standards and guidelines or codes of practice. The Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Livestock at Slaughtering Establishments provides more detail about animal welfare than the Australian standard but it dates from 2001 and does not contain detailed standards specific to horses.⁵³ Furthermore, in Queensland, compliance with this code is only voluntary.

DAWE staff are not authorised to enforce state legislation so must report major animal welfare breaches to state or territory authorities. Following 7.30’s revelation in 2019 about cruelty to horses at Meramist, no federal charges were brought against the company, but one staff member and two men involved in transporting horses to the facility were prosecuted under the Queensland Animal Care and Protection Act 2001. All pleaded guilty and the three were punished with fines totalling \$6,700.

It is clear that general requirements to ensure the humane treatment of livestock are not the same as national or state species-specific standards for slaughtering horses. These standards do not exist in Australia, nor seemingly, in other countries.

Roly Owers, from UK charity World Horse Welfare, described in a 2019 article the importance of detailed standards to reflect the welfare needs of horses: “As sensitive flight animals, horses have specific needs at slaughter – loud noises, unusual smells and threatening behaviour can make them especially anxious and liable to panic”. He cited design of equine-specific abattoirs in Europe that included noise dampening and non-slip flooring.⁵⁴

Transport

Most thoroughbreds live in the southern states of Australia, meaning that transportation to Meramist often involves a journey of several hundred and, in some cases, more than a thousand kilometres. At stops along the way, they may be penned with unfamiliar horses and managed by unfamiliar handlers. This is inevitably stressful for horses.

Thoroughbreds have even more challenging transportation needs than other horses, for example requiring separation to prevent them injuring other horses and/or being injured by them.

The requirements relating to horses in the Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Land Transport of Livestock do not reflect the specific needs of thoroughbreds. This problem was recognised in the Martin report and, as a result, the standards are under review.

Future policy

The development of new Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Livestock at Processing Establishments has been in train since 2012, undergoing numerous delays since that time. In February 2020, the Agriculture Ministers' Forum (AGMIN) announced the work would resume, led by the Queensland government. It has been agreed that the standards should cover all processing establishments including knackeries and mobile facilities.

The TAWWG was advised that a consultant is undertaking a scientific literature review, usually the first step in the development process. The review was expected to be completed in October 2021. A stakeholder advisory group will be convened to review draft standards and guidelines and the outcomes of the literature review. Regulatory impact analysis will also be undertaken as part of the process. It is expected that the drafting of the standards and guidelines will start in early 2022.

While this is a welcome development, the TAWWG notes that the process to develop these standards has already taken nine years and is likely to take several more. In addition, as horses make up a small proportion of slaughtered livestock, they are unlikely to be considered a priority species.

Minimal scientific literature on the welfare of horses during slaughter, and a lack of existing horse-specific standards in other countries to draw from, may also delay this process.

To better inform those developing slaughter standards and to ensure this work is conducted promptly, research should be undertaken to investigate best-practice options for horses at abattoirs and knackeries.

The Martin report set out a list of provisions for a proposed compulsory Code of Practice for Horses Processed at Slaughtering Establishments (including knackeries) in Queensland: ⁴

- design of establishments to prevent horses awaiting slaughter from seeing, hearing or smelling other horses being stunned, shot and exsanguinated
- hazard-free paddocks and yards immediately following unloading and pending slaughter, with suitable feed and clean water
- CCTV at all critical welfare points to record clear surveillance of the movement of horses from arrival to exsanguination
- proper management of handled horses and unbroken horses by competent personnel, from unloading to slaughter, to minimise stress
- proper management oversight to prevent animal welfare incidents by personnel, through regular training, continuous monitoring and appropriate corrective action
- stunning of horses to be undertaken only by a competent, well-trained operator (for handled horses, a head collar to be placed on the horse and the horse restrained by an assistant)
- penetrating captive bolt pistol of appropriate calibre and charge to be maintained in good working order at all times, with at least one spare available
- shooting of horses in the slaughter process to be undertaken by a competent shooter, well trained to deliver a correctly aimed gunshot, using a rifle of appropriate calibre with appropriate ammunition.

The TAWWG considers that adoption of these provisions would be beneficial, but to date no such code has been developed.

In summary, the TAWWG considers that there are very real issues with current arrangements for the slaughter of thoroughbred horses at Meramist abattoir. Firstly, the transport requirements for them to travel to Caboolture are inappropriate and dangerous for thoroughbreds. Secondly, there are no specific Australian standards for the slaughter of horses and, finally, the current standards are not adequate to ensure the welfare of thoroughbred horses processed at that facility.

It is TAWWG's view that unless governments prioritise this matter and the above approach is adopted, it is unlikely that the transport and processing of thoroughbreds will meet acceptable welfare standards or community expectations in the foreseeable future.

Consequences of changing slaughter practice

Government statistics indicate a precipitous drop in the number of horses slaughtered at abattoirs for meat export in the past two years, falling from a peak of 12,312 horses in 2018 to 8,926 in 2019 and 2,826 in the first nine months of 2020 (equivalent to 3,768 extrapolated to the full year).

There is no available data on the number of thoroughbreds being slaughtered at abattoirs, nor any recent research on the subject. However, given the overall drop in the number of horses being killed at Meramist, it is likely that a significant number of thoroughbreds that would previously have been slaughtered will now need alternative end-of-life options, or opportunities to be rehomed.

Knackeries

A knackery, also known as a pet meat processor, processes meat and related animal products for pet food and purposes other than human consumption.

The term knackery includes diverse types of businesses. It may slaughter animals at the site, kill animals where they live and take away the carcass, or collect dead animals from farms and process them at the knackery.

Unlike most modern abattoirs, knackeries are typically small-scale independent facilities that process relatively few animals at a time. Others are part of larger, networked enterprises operating in multiple locations. Australia-wide, there are estimated to be about 30 knackeries, most of which are in Victoria and NSW. There are 10 in NSW, eight in Victoria – with two processing live animals – one in Queensland, one in South Australia and two in Tasmania. Western Australia has three. One accepts live animals and the others are pet food processors that kill on farm. There is no public reporting of the number of animals processed by knackeries.

Because of the broader geographic spread of knackeries, transportation of a live horse to a knackery does not raise the same concerns as the journey from southern states to the Meramist abattoir in Queensland. In addition, it is more likely that in cases where thoroughbreds are transported while alive, they would be sent to a knackery individually, or in small groups of familiar horses, potentially offsetting another significant source of stress that they may experience in the presence of unfamiliar animals.

However, much less is known about the slaughter practices and welfare provisions of knackeries.

Regulatory regime

Knackeries are not required to comply with relevant state or territory food legislation or associated regulations because they produce pet food rather than food for human consumption. The pet food industry

is self-regulated and the industry operates to a voluntary industry standard. However, as for abattoirs, knackeries must comply with state and territory animal welfare legislation that may reference the Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Livestock at Slaughtering Establishments. The model code covers handling, stunning and slaughtering of animals in knackeries, but in most jurisdictions compliance is voluntary.

According to RSPCA Australia's 2021 regulatory scorecard, compared with export abattoirs, knackeries are subject to fewer standards and audits, lower requirements for auditor training, oversight, company training and transparency, and no requirement for an on-plant veterinarian.⁵⁵

One racing authority has established a relationship with knackeries that allows for greater oversight of the number of horses processed.

In November 2020, Racing and Wagering WA (RWWA) introduced Local Rule 225 (Euthanasia of Horses) to prohibit the transport of horses outside of WA for the purpose of euthanasia. Under this rule, horses may be transported only within WA to a veterinary clinic or to one registered knackery for euthanasia. In this definition, euthanasia includes the humane killing of at-risk horses.⁵⁶

In addition, RWWA has entered into an enforceable memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the only WA knackery that accepts live animals. The agreement references traceability, welfare standards and "the provision of relevant data in respect to the euthanasia of thoroughbred and standardbred horses". The knackery is required to register with the Department of Primary Industry and Regional Development (DPIPWE), so livestock compliance unit inspectors can perform inspections and monitor animal welfare.

The TAWWG believes there is an enormous diversity in the size, quality and regulation of knackeries across Australia, but all knackeries would benefit from more involvement and supervision from their respective state or territory government. In particular, development and implementation of appropriate standards, including the welfare of live animals processed at the knackery, should be a minimum.

There is a real opportunity for a well-managed knackery service to play an important role in the safe, humane killing of horses, and the effective disposal and, where appropriate, use of the carcass. These knackeries could offer an on-farm service that allows for humane killing in situ, together with effective carcass disposal.

The model being developed by Racing and Wagering WA is certainly worth considering by other jurisdictions that can work productively and confidently with knackery operators in their state or territory.

Findings

The TAWWG has been asked to make recommendations to ensure thoroughbred horses not only have a good life but a humane death. Its recommendations have been developed in a government policy vacuum and within eight different industry systems.

In Australia there are no consistent animal welfare laws, no national animal welfare standards for horses, no national industry welfare standards for thoroughbreds, no horse-specific welfare standards for abattoirs or knackeries, and no effective welfare standards for transporting horses.

The absence of an enforceable welfare framework adds to the challenge of making the best end-of-life decisions which, in the thoroughbred industry, rarely involve ideal options. Typically, these decisions seek to balance a horse's welfare with practical and financial considerations, which are sometimes in conflict.

The recommendations made throughout this report – including the creation of a national safety net, as well as further investment in rehoming and retraining and the development of enforceable welfare standards – are designed to address these policy gaps and ensure fewer horses end up in vulnerable

situations. If implemented they would ensure that fewer horses were killed because they were unwanted or at risk of mistreatment.

On balance, the TAWWG found there are some circumstances, beyond relieving immediate pain and suffering, where ending the life of a healthy horse may be regarded as in its best interests because its future welfare is at risk.

There is a need for the industry to provide consistent guidance for those making end-of-life decisions to protect the welfare of thoroughbreds. This guidance should also be consistent with the ethical obligations of veterinarians.

Such a framework may include activity- and time-based thresholds – for example, if a horse cannot be found a suitable home within 12 months, or after two unsuccessful attempts at rehoming – as well as welfare and behavioural issues.

From an animal welfare perspective, the least stressful and most humane option is for a horse to be humanely killed in familiar surroundings by a registered veterinarian.

The TAWWG believes a growing proportion of thoroughbreds is likely to be euthanised or killed on farms because of changing commercial and welfare considerations. The industry needs to plan for this change, to minimise stress on horses by promoting, as far as possible, humane killing in familiar surroundings, while ensuring the obligations of owners and veterinarians are clearly articulated.

However, for a number of reasons on-farm humane killing may not be available or appropriate in all circumstances and suitable alternatives should be a part of the end-of-life options.

From the evidence presented to the panel, and the work of the Martin report, there are significant issues with thoroughbreds being sent for processing at the Meramist abattoir.

The lack of species-specific standards for horses and the multi-species design of the facilities have created unacceptable risks that horses will suffer, and the need for many horses to travel long distances to get to the facility exposes them to the danger of injury and stress.

The TAWWG notes that the federal, state and territory governments are reviewing livestock transport standards and the regulation of meat processing facilities. However, the process has been cumbersome and, without a changed approach, new standards will not be finalised for some time.

The TAWWG believes this work should be streamlined to ensure it is completed in a timely fashion, and that it delivers acceptable welfare standards and meets community expectations.

However, until there are species-specific national enforceable standards for the processing of horses at abattoirs that adequately protect horse welfare, racing authorities should introduce rules to prevent horses being sent to abattoirs. While such rules may be enforceable only for horses in the care of industry participants, it would be an important step.

On the evidence presented to TAWWG, the use of knackeries presents fewer concerns and several racing authorities have included knackeries in their strategies to manage thoroughbred horse numbers post-racing.

Where thoroughbreds are to be slaughtered at a knackery, the welfare concern about transportation is typically far less problematic than for slaughter at an abattoir, because distance and duration are much shorter.

However, a lack of consistent national standards and oversight of the process of slaughter means slaughter at knackeries remains a welfare concern.

In some jurisdictions there are large-scale knackeries that kill horses on site and operate more like an abattoir, raising a range of welfare issues.

Therefore, TAWWG suggests that PRAs develop local arrangements with knackeries to protect the welfare of thoroughbreds.

The approach in WA with an MoU between RWWA and a knackery operator may provide a model for other PRAs.

Some knackery business models allow for slaughter to take place on a farm in a horse's familiar environment, eliminating welfare concerns providing that the death (almost invariably by firearm) is instantaneous and the horse is unaware of it. An accreditation program to ensure those operating firearms are suitably trained would help ensure these deaths were humane.

This model is positive in welfare terms and deserves support from the thoroughbred industry. However, it is also highly dependent on regional geography, with successful operation most likely in smaller jurisdictions with shorter travel distances, and those with highly concentrated thoroughbred populations.

The suggestion by some participants that the industry either own or regulate humane killing facilities has a worthy objective in trying to ensure all thoroughbred deaths are humane. However, the TAWWG does not believe this is a feasible solution to end-of-life issues for thoroughbreds. The reasons for this include the practical limitations of establishing purpose-built facilities close to major horse centres, and the public perception of creating a direct supply chain for the killing of retired thoroughbreds, which could potentially compete with rehoming strategies.

The development of a quality assurance scheme by TWA for knackeries handling thoroughbreds would encourage these facilities to continually improve their welfare practices. This would involve developing standards to protect welfare and having knackeries audited against those standards. While such a scheme would be voluntary for businesses to engage in, the TAWWG believes some would want to be accredited because of the legitimacy that participation would confer.

This does not diminish TAWWG's belief that state and territory governments are in the best position to properly regulate processing facilities to ensure all horses are killed humanely. TAWWG notes, though, that the process for developing those national standards has only recently begun. The thoroughbred industry should strongly encourage state and territory governments to expedite this process, and ensure that the needs of thoroughbreds are taken into account when standards for processing horses are developed.

Recommendations

- 35.** TWA, in consultation with the thoroughbred industry, the Australian Veterinary Association and RSPCA, should develop a national decision-making framework to provide guidance on end-of-life decisions for thoroughbreds, that protects the welfare of horses, is consistent with the ethical obligations of veterinarians and includes relevant activity and time-based thresholds.
- 36.** TWA, in consultation with the thoroughbred industry, the Australian Veterinary Association and RSPCA, should develop national protocols with respect to the humane killing of thoroughbred horses based on the following principles:
 - a) From an animal welfare perspective, the least stressful and most humane option is for a horse to be humanely killed in familiar surroundings by a registered veterinarian.
 - b) Where attendance by a veterinarian is not feasible, shooting with an appropriate calibre firearm, carried out according to best practice by a trained and competent operator, is also a humane option.

c) Where on-farm humane killing is not an option, appropriate transport to a nearby knackery where shooting is carried out according to best practice by a trained and competent operator can also be acceptable.

- 37.** The industry should develop and support measures to improve national access to on-farm humane killing where a decision has been made to end a horse's life, including by providing access to veterinarians and other persons trained in the above protocols to conduct humane killing.
- 38.** TWA should develop an industry accreditation program to recognise trained and competent firearm operators that meets best practice standards for on-farm humane killing.
- 39.** The racing and breeding industries should engage with state and territory governments to expedite the development and implementation of the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Livestock at Processing Establishments and ensure these standards include species-specific requirements for the handling, management and humane killing of horses.
- 40.** Racing Australia should implement national rules to prevent thoroughbred horses being sold or transported for the purpose of slaughter at an abattoir. These should remain in place unless and until mandatory national species-specific standards are developed and implemented that guarantee thoroughbred welfare during transport to and at abattoirs.
- 41.** State and territory regulators should act to increase the level of oversight and auditing of animal welfare at knackeries where horses are killed. This should include requirements for animal welfare training of auditors and knackery staff, increased audit frequency and direct auditing of the handling and killing of horses.
- 42.** TWA should develop a quality assurance framework for knackeries that handle live thoroughbreds to ensure these horses are managed in accordance with best practice welfare standards, particularly at their end of life.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

Research, Education and Communication

Introduction

A thoroughbred welfare model that sets out world's best practice must be built on sound scientific principles, informed by research, and must meet contemporary community standards that are both enforceable and practicable.

To address existing or emerging problems and benefit from scientific advances, a welfare model must also be underpinned by a comprehensive research agenda, spanning disciplines including animal behaviour, veterinary science and genetics.

This approach has the potential to enhance welfare outcomes by progressing research that seeks to:

- increase the proportion of foals that enter racing, and extend racing careers as this allows racing to be sustained with fewer thoroughbreds, which in turn may reduce the number that later require alternative homes
- increase understanding of horses' responses to handling and training approaches, and how these influence success in racing and subsequent rehoming opportunities
- increase knowledge of horse cognition, memory, behaviour and social structures, assisting the industry to minimise negative experiences and promote positive experiences
- reduce the impact of injury and illness on thoroughbred horses to improve their wellbeing and also safely help extend the racing careers of racehorses.

To ensure research findings and emerging knowledge about the management of thoroughbred horses are widely applied in practice, the industry also needs a strategy that ensures consistent foundation knowledge across all professions and occupational groups that handle or care for horses.

While the TAWWG has made many recommendations relating to research earlier in the report, this chapter focuses on how those suggestions can be effectively achieved.

It is clear that there are many opportunities for the industry to improve in the area of research and education, not least through better collaboration and consultation.

While there are many individual organisations commissioning and conducting research, there is only one program, operated through AgriFutures, that is commissioning and funding projects at a national level and in consultation with industry stakeholders.

As well as research and its application, education and skills training are also important. Every individual who handles thoroughbreds should have an understanding of horse behaviour and welfare.

Many workers in the industry play a key role in horse development and behaviour. Often many have had little formal training. Improving the skills of the workforce will improve welfare outcomes.

Many submissions to TAWWG, and its consultations, highlighted the need for significantly improved communication with stakeholders and the broader community, about the care and welfare of thoroughbred horses. In particular, there is a need for effective and open communication of the work being done to protect and enhance the welfare of thoroughbreds participating in breeding and racing, as well as their transition into alternate careers through to their end of life.

Racing Queensland told the TAWWG: “A national research, development and education advisory panel would be best placed to decide on research priorities and make investment decisions each year.”

Racing Victoria also stated: “A national coordinated approach will avoid duplication of efforts.”

As part of the research on attitudes towards the industry conducted to support the TAWWG’s work, it was evident there is a lack of data on welfare available to the public. In fact, this research highlighted the lack of clear messaging to the broader community from the industry on welfare issues.

It is clear the industry needs to provide transparent information on its welfare standards and programs, and also communicate reliable information on actions taken against those who breach those standards. Put simply, the thoroughbred industry needs to provide credible information to the Australian public on how it is seeking to ensure the care and welfare of thoroughbreds meets the community’s expectations.

Current research programs

There is a raft of research programs under way across the nation, aiming to achieve better outcomes for thoroughbreds.

AgriFutures Australia is the former Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) and is partly funded by the federal government. It oversees research, development and capacity-building programs in 12 rural industries, of which the thoroughbred industry is one.

The AgriFutures thoroughbred program was established in 2017 after lobbying from TBA. The program is funded by a mandatory levy on mare and stallion owners that nets more than \$400,000 a year, which is matched dollar-for-dollar by the government. TBA remains the levy’s nominated body.

In 2018-19, the income for the program as a whole was \$1.12 million, of which more than \$900,000 was invested in research. In addition to the breeders’ levy, voluntary contributions from industry groups or participants are accepted and matched by federal funds. RA has contributed \$150,000 in each of the past four years.

AgriFutures’ Interim Thoroughbred Horses RD&E Five Year Plan 2017-2022 included the welfare of horses as a subset of a broader objective: “Improve the safety of industry participants and the welfare of horses and enhance the sustainability of the industry”.⁵⁶

In 2020, following a mid-term review, the priorities of the plan were updated, with the first listed being: “Enhanced welfare and safety of thoroughbred horses, those who work with them and the sustainability of the industry”. This priority sits alongside a parallel focus on improving breeding outcomes, reducing disease, preventing injury, promoting uptake of research findings, and industry planning and economic analysis. These research streams are framed within a broader goal of increasing the profitability and sustainability of the thoroughbred industry.

The thoroughbred levy has funded a number of welfare-related projects, including a significant contribution to support the work of the TAWWG. Other projects that have been funded include:

wellbeing from pregnancy to racing - horse demographics

- principal investigator: Meredith Flash
- research organisation: The University of Melbourne

wellbeing - racing demographics, reasons for retirement and post-racing destinations

- principal investigator: Meredith Flash
- research organisation: The University of Melbourne

maintaining welfare and integrity in Australian racing

- principal investigator: Glenys Noble
- research organisation: Charles Sturt University

The levy also is used to fund projects targeting improving the health and safety of thoroughbreds, which have clear welfare benefits.

As well as funding through the AgriFutures levy, the breeding industry in the Hunter Valley supports research through the Hunter Valley Equine Research Centre. The centre has run educational programs for staff in the industry, supported research projects and also contributed to the work of the TAWWG.

A number of PRAs also fund research projects. One of the biggest projects by funding is the research into equine limb injury prevention – jointly funded by Racing Victoria, the University of Melbourne and the Victorian government – which received \$5.25 million over three years.

In its submission RV highlighted four areas as priorities for further research: chronic limb injuries, why thoroughbreds become unwanted, the horse-human relationship, and an evaluation of PRA post-racing programs.

Racing Queensland told the TAWWG that research was extremely important in identifying welfare issues for horses before, during and after racing careers. It suggested prevention of injuries in racehorses, efforts to improve mortality rates in young horses, and technology to improve traceability as areas for research.

While the research funded through the PRAs is valuable, it lacks a nationally coordinated and prioritised approach that focuses on welfare and could be provided through AgriFutures. Also, funding research through AgriFutures can attract matched federal government funding, hence increasing the total research funding pool.

Post-racing research

As detailed in Chapter 7, one of the key challenges facing the industry is to successfully transition horses out of racing and breeding and into a second career or retirement.

In Chapter 7, using research by Dr Meredith Flash and supported by data from Arion, the TAWWG estimated that around 8,500 thoroughbred horses leave the racing and breeding industries each year and require new opportunities. Unfortunately, the TAWWG and the broader public cannot readily access official industry data that shows the exact number of horses. It is unclear whether accurate data even exists.

Nor is there any information or data that provides a reasonable estimate of the number of new opportunities available each year for thoroughbreds leaving racing and breeding in the wider equestrian, recreational riding and broader horse community.

The TAWWG is strongly of the view that a priority of a renewed research agenda should be a comprehensive study of the risks and opportunities for thoroughbred horses leaving racing or breeding.

Application of research findings

One of the key challenges of all research is adoption, transferring it from the “lab to the field”. Application of research, particularly if outcomes do not fit with current practices, is often complex and slow. It requires dissemination of information, case studies and leadership.

The industry has a strong record of changing practices as better techniques and programs become available. This has ranged from improving nutrition and foal handling, through to foundation training and preparing horses for racing.

Encouraging and supporting thoroughbred industry participants to undertake skills training and education programs, built on up-to-date research, proven knowledge and industry experience, is one of the most effective methods of transferring new research findings into industry practices.

The TAWWG notes that AgriFutures has commissioned a project titled Thoroughbred Horses Stakeholder Mapping and Communication Preferences, which aims to find the most effective ways for the findings of its research projects to be disseminated to the industry. This is likely to be a valuable project as improved communications will lead to the adoption of improved practices.

Skills training and education

Within the thoroughbred industry, both breeding and racing, there has been a strong reliance on “on the job” training.

In fact, it is only in recent times that more structured formal educational opportunities have been available for most industry roles and participants.

There are benefits of learning skills and building knowledge while in the workforce, but there is an increasing awareness in the industry of the needs and benefits of more formal training and education.

However, the vocational education and training (VET) sector, which provides training programs and nationally recognised qualifications to stablehands, jockeys and track-work riders, race-day stewards and others, is still in its relative infancy. The training programs all have some units of competency on horse welfare, including:

- relate animal welfare to track and environmental conditions⁵⁷
- manage horse health and welfare⁵⁸
- provide emergency animal assistance.⁵⁹

But these units are not presented within a cohesive framework of current understanding about animal welfare, such as the Five Domains approach, and are not mandatory.

There are also limited opportunities for participants, or those hoping to join the thoroughbred workforce, to study related courses. For example, the TAWWG is aware of only two TAFE institutions in Australia that offer a Certificate III in horse breeding.

Skills training and education for industry participants is important for the industry to both develop, and sustain, better welfare outcomes for thoroughbreds. While developing such courses is not the remit of the TAWWG, the panel believes there is opportunity for the TWA to work with the VET sector to create such courses.

The TAWWG notes that Racing Victoria developed a digital education platform in 2020 and that all licensed participants were required to take an online welfare course before they could renew their licence for the 2021/22 season. This positive initiative is something that could be replicated nationally.

Communication

A common theme in many submissions to the TAWWG was criticism of how the industry communicates with the public on welfare issues.

To many outside of racing and breeding, there is a view that regulatory bodies lack transparency and there is a need for accurate and reliable data to be provided on welfare and the industry's compliance with its standards.

Among many participants in the industry, there is frustration that its leaders have failed to explain the measures in place to improve welfare, and that the industry has lacked a coordinated national plan to put relevant information in the public domain.

“It is important we take responsibility for putting accurate information in the public domain, with the proper context, so that people can make up their own mind on our industry.” TBA submission

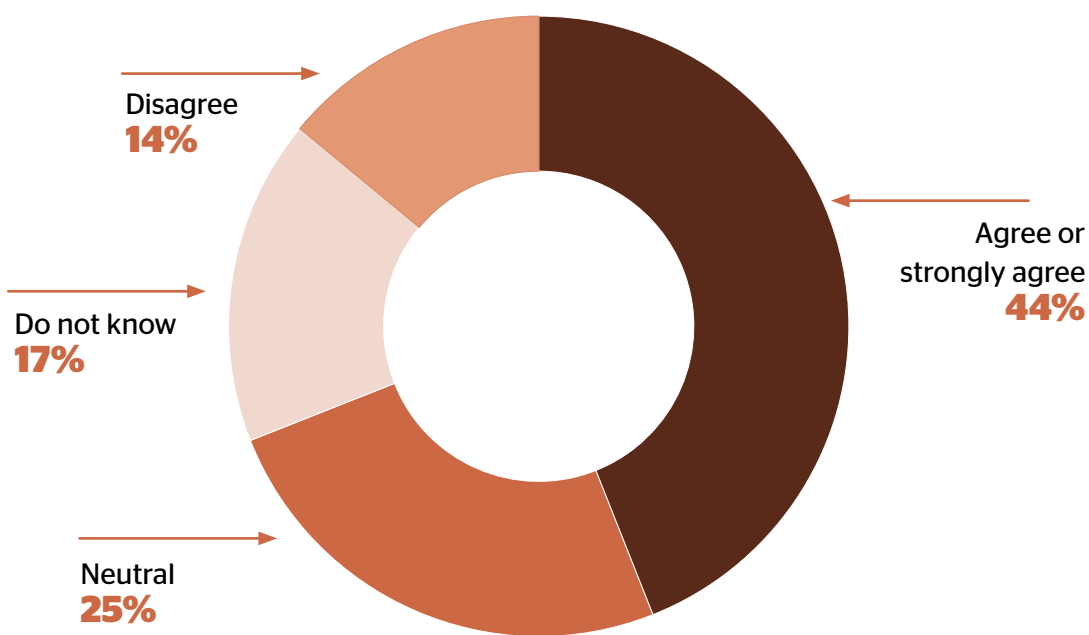
A number of submissions from people in the industry also stated their frustration that even as participants they could not access information on welfare initiatives.

The results from the public insights research also showed the thoroughbred industry had significant issues with trust.

Those taking part were asked to respond to the statement: “The thoroughbred racing and breeding industry is not transparent to the community”. In response, 44% of people agreed or strongly agreed, only 14% disagreed, 25% were neutral and 17% said they didn't know.

Industry perception

“The thoroughbred racing and breeding industry is not transparent to the community”



Source: Instinct & Reason 2020

In another question, participants were asked whether the industry was “trustworthy”. Some 30% agreed, while 27% disagreed.

The submission from TBA criticised the industry’s defensive mindset, stating: “Too often, ours is an industry that is inward looking: its default position to any questioning or scrutiny is defensive and dismissive.”

It added: “It is important we take responsibility for putting accurate information in the public domain, with the proper context, so that people can make up their own mind on our industry. There may be areas where this is uncomfortable for the industry: mortality rates of young horses, fatalities on the racecourse, the number of horses that are unsuitable for a second career and euthanised, but such issues need to be addressed.”

The TAWWG sees strengthening community confidence in thoroughbred welfare standards and practices as a first-order issue that should be treated accordingly by the industry.

As stated in Chapter 2, the TAWWG is proposing that a national thoroughbred information service be established within TWA to provide community access to scientifically sound and independent advice on thoroughbred welfare, and transparency about compliance with equine welfare standards.

Findings

The TAWWG believes there is a need for a national and more collaborative approach to animal welfare-related research, training and communication.

At present, the only national program to fund and coordinate research is through a levy applied on breeders, the AgriFutures Thoroughbred Horses Program.

This program has funded a number of welfare-related projects and it is clear to the TAWWG from meeting members of the panel overseeing the levy that welfare is a clear priority area for future research. Separating horse welfare from human welfare and the sustainability of the industry would help ensure that future projects improve outcomes for horses. The inclusion of an independent animal welfare expert on the Thoroughbred Advisory Panel would also assist in ensuring that research projects reflect contemporary equine welfare science and practices.

The AgriFutures program also offers the potential for the industry to achieve more with its funding in research.

The TAWWG heard that contributions to the AgriFutures levy would be matched by federal funds. Although there is a limit on the amount that could be matched, at present there is capacity for the federal government to match an additional \$20 million each year.

This means if PRAs or other organisations identify key areas to research, they could contribute funding to AgriFutures, have it oversee the project, and get the federal government to share the cost of research. This would greatly increase the industry’s capacity to conduct research.

There was also agreement among many stakeholders, including PRAs, that a national approach to commissioning and funding research would help make sure these projects were well targeted and minimise the chances of duplication.

This would ensure that significant resources are made available for key areas of research, such as reducing injury rates and improving career suitability post-racing, reducing instances of mortality in early life, better understanding equine behaviour and the relationship between horse and human.

In training and education, the TAWWG believes more can be done to develop relevant courses with

material based on the latest scientific principles, for participants in all sectors of the industry, from breeders, foundation trainers, through racing and to retraining.

The industry needs to work with equitation scientists, veterinary experts and highly skilled participants to develop best practice welfare guidelines for all industry sectors. These guidelines should then be supported by training modules to ensure all industry participants understand the principles of welfare and the impact of care and handling on a horse's behaviour.

Again, the TAWWG sees a role for TWA to provide leadership and direction in developing guidelines and teaching materials in conjunction with VET and other education providers.

There is also a clear need for the racing and breeding industries to inform the broader community of the welfare standards it sets and its performance against those standards. A lack of transparency erodes community trust.

In a consultation meeting, RSPCA Australia explained how publishing sensitive information could enable an industry to demonstrate improvements.

Citing the example of the Victorian greyhound industry, Mhairi Roberts, the policy and advocacy manager of RSPCA Victoria, said: "A few years ago they started publishing their euthanasia rates in their annual report. And that meant that every year they could show how they were reducing those rates over time.

"So that also helps build confidence as well, because not only are you being transparent, but you're also showing improvements that you're making over time."

Another challenge for the thoroughbred industry is communicating what it is doing to improve welfare.

The PRAs have developed a wide range of welfare programs and policies but their effectiveness is variable with a lack of funding influencing the outcomes, especially in the smaller jurisdictions.

Without national coordination, or at least a consolidation of information about these programs, communicating the thoroughbred industry's welfare strategy, and its performance, to the community is challenging.

For example, the TAWWG heard many complaints from those within the industry that they were unaware of the programs being introduced to improve welfare in their state.

The evidence presented to the TAWWG confirmed its view that the industry should establish a national thoroughbred information welfare service to:

- provide community access to scientifically sound and independent advice on thoroughbred welfare
- provide transparency around the industry's compliance with equine welfare standards
- inform the community about industry welfare programs.

Recommendations

- 43.** TWA, Racing Australia, the principal racing authorities, and the breeding and racing industries, should work with AgriFutures to develop and implement a nationally agreed thoroughbred horse welfare research program.
- 44.** TWA should work with Racing Australia, the principal racing authorities, and the breeding and racing industries to facilitate and encourage all workers involved in handling thoroughbred horses

to undertake appropriate skills training and education. This should include workers involved in early foal management, yearling preparation, foundation training and training for the racetrack.

- 45.** TWA should work with Skills Australia, the national body that sets the curriculum/course content for VET courses, to ensure that all national VET courses for students undertaking equine studies – such as Certificate III in equine studies, Certificate III in horse breeding, Certificate III in performance horse – include in their curriculum up-to-date modules or course content on horse welfare.
- 46.** TWA should establish a publicly available national thoroughbred welfare information portal that is regularly updated with key data to ensure the public is fully informed with accurate information on the welfare of thoroughbred horses in Australia.

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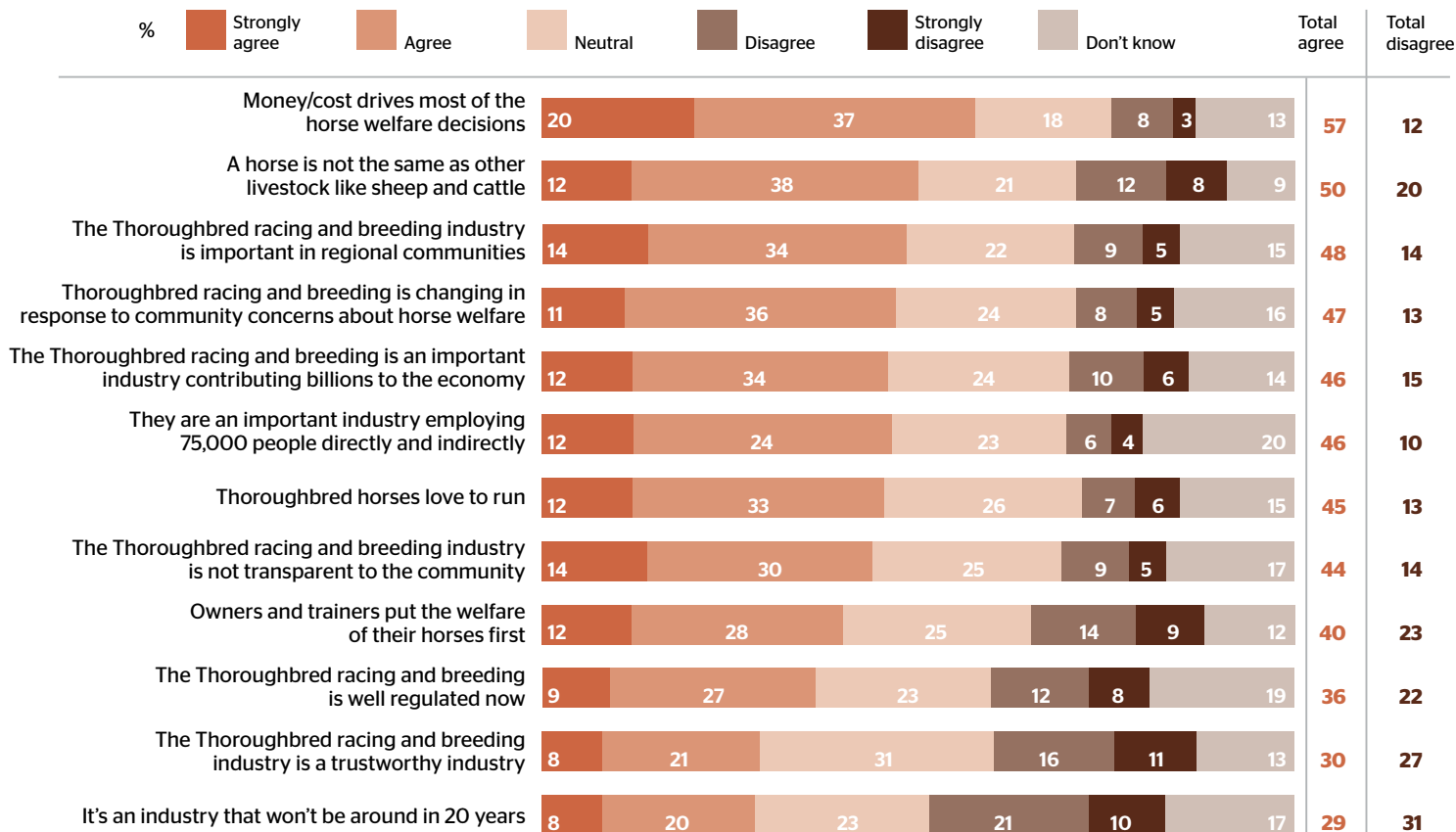
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APPENDIX 1

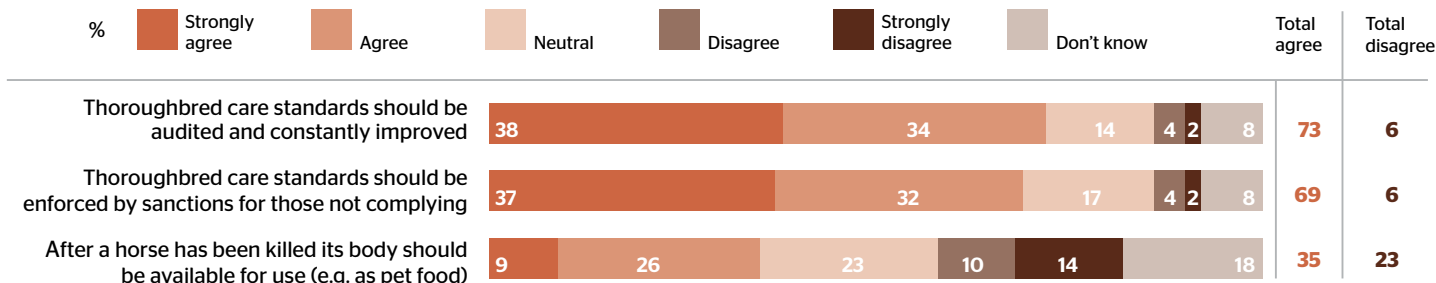
Perceptions of the thoroughbred racing & breeding industry

A significant piece of research was commissioned to inform the TAWWG about community attitudes to the thoroughbred industry, conducted by Instinct and Reason. A snapshot of results from that work is provided below.



as stated by the Australian community - total national sample n=1,016

Perceptions regarding the treatment of horses



as stated by the Australian community - total national sample n=1,016

APPENDIX 2

State and Territory Animal Welfare Legislation and Regulation

State/Territory	Animal Welfare Act	Animal Welfare Regulation	Department
ACT	Animal Welfare Act 1992	Animal Welfare Regulation 2001	Transport Canberra and City Services
NSW	Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979	Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulation 2012	Department of Primary Industries
NT	Animal Protection Act 2018	Animal Welfare Regulations 2000	Biosecurity & Animal Welfare Group – Department of Primary Industries and Resources
QLD	Animal Care and Protection Act 2001	Animal Care and Protection Regulation 2012	Biosecurity Queensland, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
SA	Animal Welfare Act 1985	Animal Welfare Regulations 2012	Department of Environment and Water
TAS	Animal Welfare Act 1993	Animal Welfare (General) Regulations 2013	Animal Biosecurity and Welfare, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment
VIC	Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986	Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 2019	Agriculture Victoria
WA	Animal Welfare Act 2002	Animal Welfare (General) Regulations 2003	Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

Source: RSPCA Australia

Reporting obligations under the Rules of the Australian Stud Book

BREEDING HORSES (broodmares and stallions)	
PARTICIPANT	OBLIGATION
Breeder/owner of breeding horse	Registration: If your horse has not previously been returned, you must apply to register your horse to breed within seven days of a decision to use it for breeding. If your horse has previously been returned, you must register your horse to breed when a return is next lodged. Registration applications must disclose the name of each owner/lessee and their share in the horse.
	Change of ownership: If there is any change in your horse's ownership, you must lodge a transfer of ownership with the Australian Stud Book within seven days of the transfer occurring.
	Change of location: If your horse changes location, you must notify the Australian Stud Book within three days. Exemptions may apply where your horse is being covered or foaling (seven days), receiving veterinary care (30 days) or attending a public auction (seven days).
	Retirement: If you decide to retire your horse from breeding, you must notify the Australian Stud Book within seven days of that decision.
	Death: If your horse dies, you must notify the Australian Stud Book within 48 hours of death.
	Status update: If your horse hasn't had any activity recorded with the Australian Stud Book in 12 consecutive months, you must update your horse's status/location and lodge any outstanding forms within seven days. This obligation will be satisfied if you lodge a mare return each year. The Australian Stud Book will send reminders to you before the 12-month mark.
Breeder (broodmares)	Live foal: If your broodmare produces a live foal, you must lodge a mare return and foal ownership declaration (FOD) with the Australian Stud Book within 30 days of birth. Non-compliance may result in your horse not being permitted to be registered to race in the future.
	No covering: If your broodmare is not covered during a covering season, you must lodge a mare return by 15 March of that season with the Australian Stud Book.
	No live foal: If your broodmare is covered but does not produce a live foal, you must lodge a mare return with the Australia Stud Book within 12 months of when she was last covered.
Breeder (stallions)	Standing: You must lodge a stallion return with the Australian Stud Book by 30 June before the upcoming covering season.
	Service: If your stallion is standing, you must lodge a declaration of service with the Australian Stud Book by the 15th day of the following month for every month during the covering season, even if he does not cover a broodmare in a particular month.

RETIRED HORSES	
PARTICIPANT	OBLIGATION
Industry participant (e.g. owner, breeder, trainer, rider, stable staff)	<p>Retirement update: If you are an industry participant responsible for the care of a horse that won't be registered to race or has been retired from racing or breeding, you must notify Racing Australian within seven days if your horse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is transferred to another person • changes location (exemptions may apply where your horse is receiving veterinary care (30 days) or attending a public auction (seven days)) • retires from its current career (e.g. equestrian) • dies.

UNNAMED HORSES (not registered to race)	
PARTICIPANT	OBLIGATION
Owner of unnamed horse (not registered to race)	Foal ownership: If you own a foal you must lodge a foal ownership declaration (FOD) within 30 days of birth. Non-compliance must be disclosed to any potential buyers of your horse.
	Change of ownership: If there is any change in your horse's ownership, you must lodge a transfer of ownership within seven days of the transfer. This applies to both incoming and outgoing owners.
	Change of location: If your horse is not in a trainer's stable and it changes location, the managing owner must notify Racing Australia within 3 days. Exemptions may apply where your horse is receiving veterinary care (30 days) or attending a public auction (seven days).
	Decision not to race: If you decide not to register your horse to race, the managing owner must notify Racing Australia within seven days of that decision.
	Death: If your horse dies, the managing owner must notify Racing Australia within 48 hours of death.
Trainer of unnamed horse (not registered to race)	Status update: If your horse hasn't had any activity recorded with Racing Australia or a Principal Racing Authority in six consecutive months, the managing owner must update the horse's status/location and lodge any outstanding forms within seven days. Racing Australia will send reminders to the managing owner before the six-month mark.
	Change of location: You must lodge a stable return immediately upon a horse entering or leaving your stable, if any particulars on the stable return have changed, or when travelling for racing.
	Retirement: If the owners of a horse in your stable decide to retire it from racing, you must notify Racing Australia within seven days of that decision.
	Death: If a horse in your stable dies, you must notify Racing Australia within 24 hours of death.
	Status update: If a horse in your stable hasn't had any activity recorded with Racing Australia or a Principal Racing Authority in six consecutive months, you must update the horse's status/location and lodge any outstanding forms within seven days. Racing Australia will send reminders to you and the managing owner before the six-month mark.

NAMED HORSES (registered to race)	
PARTICIPANT	OBLIGATION
Owner of named horse (registered to race)	Registration/naming: You must apply to register your horse with Racing Australia to race at least five business days before it is entered in a race or trial.
	Change of ownership: If there is any change in your horse's ownership, you must lodge a transfer of ownership within seven days of the transfer and at least 24 hours before your horse is entered in a race or trial. This applies to both incoming and outgoing owners.
	Retirement: If you decide to retire your horse from racing, the managing owner must notify Racing Australia within seven days of that decision. Alternatively, your trainer may provide that notification with your authority.
	Death: If your horse dies, the managing owner must notify Racing Australia within 24 hours of death. Alternatively, your trainer may provide that notification with your authority.
	Status update: If your horse hasn't had any activity recorded with Racing Australia or a Principal Racing Authority in six consecutive months, the managing owner must update your horse's status/location and lodge any outstanding forms within seven days. Alternatively, your trainer may complete that update with your authority. Racing Australia will send reminders to the managing owner and trainer before the six-month mark.
Trainer of named horse (registered to race)	Change of location: You must lodge a stable return immediately upon a horse entering or leaving your stable, if any particulars on the stable return have changed, or when travelling for racing.
	Retirement: If the owners of a horse in your stable decide to retire it from racing, you must notify Racing Australia within seven days of that decision.
	Death: If a horse in your stable dies, you must notify Racing Australia within 24 hours of death.
	Status update: If a horse in your stable hasn't had any activity recorded with Racing Australia or a Principal Racing Authority in six consecutive months, you must update the horse's status/location and lodge any outstanding forms within seven days. Racing Australia will send reminders to you and the managing owner before the six-month mark.

Estimating the size of the aftercare challenge

The table below presents a detailed working of the TAWWG's estimate that 8500 thoroughbred horses each year require a positive aftercare opportunity. (p82)

The figures are derived from a University of Melbourne study that described outcomes in 2018 for a representative sample of the 2010 Victorian foal crop, cross-referenced where relevant with foal crop analysis data commissioned from Arion Pedigrees.

The TAWWG has then extrapolated the research findings to the entire Victorian foal crop in that year, and to the average annual Australian foal crop between 2014 and 2019, to reach its conclusion.

	Survey sample from the 2010 Victorian foal crop (Flash 2020)*	Survey results extrapolated to entire Victorian 2010 Foal crop (TAWWG analysis)	Survey results extrapolated to average Australian foal crop 2014-2019 (TAWWG analysis)	Notes
Sample size/cohort	2005 (100%) (2005 survey responses received from a total study cohort of 3167 horses = 63%)	3546 (100%)	12,932 (100%)	The Flash 2020 study cohort was 3167 as it excluded 379 horses. The TAWWG has added these back in, to ensure the entire foal crop is considered. This changes the percentages in all categories
Exported	-	146 (4.1%)		146 horses were excluded from the study cohort as 'exported'
Actively racing	-	233 (6.6%)		233 horses were excluded from the study cohort as 'actively racing'
Participating in racing	73 (3.6%)	115 (3.2%)		Arion data reports 5.0% of horses as participating in racing at 8 years old
Deceased	322 (16.1%)	510 (14.4%)		
Breeding	349 (17.4%)	551 (15.5%)		Arion data reports a similar proportion of 16.2% of the 2010 foal crop in breeding at 8 years old.
Remainder	1,261 (63%)	1,991 (56%)	7,242 (56%)	This figure represents all horses retiring by 8 years old which have not moved into breeding
Aftercare challenge		2,339 (66%)	8,535 (66%)	This includes the above figure, plus horses listed as 'actively racing' or 'participating in racing' at 8 years old, represents all horses that require rehoming immediately or in the very near future

*Flash ML, Renwick M, Gilkerson JR, Stevenson MA (2020) Descriptive analysis of Thoroughbred horses born in Victoria, Australia, in 2010; barriers to entering training and outcomes on exiting training and racing. PLoS ONE 15(10): e0241273.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0241273>

PRA welfare and rehoming commitments

State and territory Principal Racing Authorities have made significant commitments to thoroughbred welfare, primarily through retraining and rehoming programs.

While many of these have been established relatively recently, their early successes provide templates for industry investment in positive long-term welfare outcomes, while creating an expectation that thoroughbreds can and should have meaningful lives after they leave the industry.

This appendix summarises key welfare, retraining and rehoming programs of the PRAs.

Racing Victoria

In late 2019, Racing Victoria (RV) announced a commitment to expand its equine welfare strategic plan, with new initiatives introduced to complement its existing Off The Track (OTT) program.

The minimum \$25 million expenditure over three years is funded by an increased investment from RV, a contribution from the Victorian Racing Industry Fund and a rise from 1% to 2% in the prize money levy directed to equine welfare initiatives across the state.

The OTT program, which began in 2012, is supported by 56 “acknowledged re-trainers” who specialise in re-educating retired racehorses for equestrian disciplines. In the 2019-20 season, this network of retrainers facilitated the transition of more than 500 thoroughbreds.

To increase demand for thoroughbreds in equestrianism, RV sponsors several OTT events and recently announced the first dressage series for OTT horses at an official Equestrian Australia competition.

Providing a pathway for thoroughbreds that have yet to be rehomed, and to prevent poor welfare outcomes, RV also launched the RESET (Racehorse, Evaluation, Support, Education and Transition) program. In effect, this acts as a safety net for thoroughbreds that are unlikely to become equestrian horses but are still suitable for other post-racing pursuits.

Horses are assessed for their suitability to be rehomed and are placed into one of five categories to determine the appropriate pathway for each horse.

In its first year of operation, 13 thoroughbreds were rehomed after graduating from RESET. Seven others were continuing their re-education, which lasts a maximum of 24 weeks.

A formal partnership between RV and the Riding for the Disabled Association of Victoria (RDAV) offers another pathway for retired racehorses, including RESET graduates. An initial pledge of \$50,000 enabled RDAV to expand its riding programs and accommodate more horses at its 34 centres in Victoria.

Additional programs begun in 2021 include:

- **SmartyGrants offers business grants of up to \$10,000 to non-profit and for-profit equine businesses - including trail-riding operators, equine therapy centres and pony clubs - to encourage the use of off-the-track thoroughbreds.**
- **A foster program supports horses that no longer have a responsible owner and require short- to medium-term care but have good prospects of being rehomed long term.**
- **The Full Circle program provides a mechanism for owners, former owners and other interested parties to list themselves as an emergency contact for a retired racehorse, which would allow an equine welfare delegate to contact them should the horse need help.**
- **An online post-racing platform, Off The Track (OTT) Community, improves data collection about the ownership and location of former racehorses.**

Case study: Piemonte

Piemonte, a five-year-old trained in Victoria by Robbie Griffiths, was one of the 30 retired racehorses included in the pilot phase of RV's recently launched RESET program.

Now known as Pie, the gelding showed early promise during his brief racing career, winning \$88,000 in prize money, thanks mainly to two wins and one minor placing.

But he suffered ongoing tendon issues and, despite spending almost a year off the track while the stable tried to nurse him back to full fitness, the decision was made to retire him after his sixth start at Pakenham in February 2020.

After several unsuccessful attempts to rehome him, Pie's owners turned to RV for help. He was enrolled in the RESET program, which provides direct support for horses that have good prospects but have not been able to transition to a career outside of racing.

The son of 2013 Melbourne Cup winner Fiorente was sent to Spring Creek Equine for rest and rehabilitation and, after building up his strength and condition with the help of the farm's water treadmill, Pie will soon have a saddle on his back for the first time since leaving the Griffiths Racing Stable.

Once he has completed his retraining, the aim is to find Pie and the other horses in the RESET program a suitable home to pursue their post-racing careers.

Racing NSW

Racing NSW has established a program to support horses that are unable to be rehomed by their owners for any reason, and has also put in place a regulatory framework to deter and prosecute any licensed participants who fail to ensure the ongoing welfare of their horses.

Team Thoroughbred NSW is funded mainly through the 1% prize money levy, totalling more than \$2.8 million a year, which was introduced by Racing NSW in 2016. In addition, Racing NSW has spent \$33 million from its capital reserves to buy and upgrade four properties – Bandanora, Bart's Farm, The Grange, and Glenferrie Farm –specifically to care for, retrain and rehome retired NSW racehorses.

Racing NSW's other equine welfare initiatives include:

- the introduction in 2016 of a policy of taking in, seizing or buying NSW thoroughbred horses whose welfare is deemed to be at risk
- the introduction in 2017 of Local Rule of Racing 114, which makes it an offence to send any NSW thoroughbred to an abattoir or knackery
- the creation in May 2020 of an excluded persons list featuring any person, irrespective of their connection to the thoroughbred racing industry, whom Racing NSW considers unsuitable to care for retired thoroughbred racehorses
- the introduction in September 2020 of an End Of Life Welfare Program, which ensures that every NSW thoroughbred has access to a free, humane euthanasia service in circumstances where a vet determines it is in its best interest and necessary on welfare or safety grounds
- the appointment of two full-time equine welfare veterinarians who, together with Racing NSW stewards, conduct audits and inspections of retired racehorses across the state to ensure they are receiving appropriate levels of care in their new homes
- sponsorship of thoroughbred classes and categories at equestrian events across the state, which has proved successful in promoting the breed and in incentivising equestrian riders of all levels to own and compete on thoroughbreds.

Case study: Penheights

Like So You Think, Penheights was trained by Bart Cummings and raced in Tan China Nam's famous black and white silks with gold sleeves, but that is where the similarities between the two end.

After winning on debut at Kembla Grange in June 2012, his later runs were at best moderate and when he came ninth of 10 at the same track in May 2013 – finishing 18 lengths behind the winner – the game was up for Penheights.

Having called time on his racing career, Cummings sent Penheights to the recently formed NSW Thoroughbred Rehabilitation Trust (now Team Thoroughbred NSW), where the four-year-old was retrained to become an eventer.

He was later adopted by equestrian rider Jessica Green, and the pair spent seven years competing in events across the country before he was donated in 2020 to the NSW Police Force, where Jess's mother Lisa is a sergeant.

Having completed his training, Duke (as he is now known) is enjoying his third career as a member of the NSW Mounted Police Unit and, once his time with the force has come to an end, he will live in retirement with the Green family.

Racing Queensland

On 1 January 2020, Racing Queensland (RQ) introduced a 1% prize money levy to support equine welfare and build better futures for retired racehorses. The funds – now amounting to about \$1.5 million a year – are supporting the Queensland Off-The-Track (QOTT) program. It was developed in response to the Queensland government's independent inquiry into the management of retired racehorses in Queensland (the Martin inquiry).

The QOTT program is underpinned by the principles of aftercare, as set by the International Forum for the Aftercare of Racehorses, to support a high-quality first transition for thoroughbred and standardbred horses that were bred for the racing industry and lived in Queensland at the time of retirement. Its initiatives include:

- supporting the placement of retired racehorses into second careers
- promoting the care of thoroughbred and standardbred horses during their lifetime
- providing for the care and wellbeing of vulnerable former racehorses
- promoting the suitability, adaptability and versatility of thoroughbred and standardbred horses for a variety of post-racing careers and retirement pathways
- improving access to advice and guidance for anyone who owns or cares for a retired thoroughbred or standardbred racehorse
- supporting lifelong thoroughbred and standardbred traceability.

Responsibility for the QOTT Program is shared between RQ and the Queensland Racing Integrity Commission (QRIC), with governance through an independent Queensland Off-The-Track board.

Racing and Wagering Western Australia

Racing and Wagering Western Australia (RWWA) expanded its Off The Track WA (OTTWA) program in 2019, announcing initiatives to increase its commitment to the aftercare of retired racehorses, including an updated Racehorse Welfare Plan.

The OTTWA program offers sponsored and educational events, supports trainers and owners with information to transition horses to successful secondary careers, and promotes WA retrainers of retired racehorses.

In September 2020, RWWA opened its racehorse welfare facility, the OTTWA Estate, which provides emergency care for WA racehorses and facilitates the retraining of retired racehorses through the OTTWA Retraining Program, as well as hosting clinics and events to support owners transitioning their racehorses to equestrian and pleasure pursuits.

Horses accepted into the program undergo an evaluation upon arrival at the estate, which can accommodate 40 horses at any time. They are then allocated to an offsite official retrainer whose task is to give each horse the skills to transition from the racetrack to being a pleasure or performance horse, before being rehomed.

Preference is given to horses that might prove challenging to rehome, such as those in remote areas. OTTWA also supports owners of retired racehorses in regional areas through a partnership with Equestrian WA to deliver an expanded series of educational clinics across the state.

To further support the Racehorse Welfare Plan, in August 2020 RWWA implemented the OTTWA Passport, which is designed to address traceability and provide more information about the location and welfare of retired racehorses once they have left the industry.

Owners of retired racehorses who register for an OTTWA Passport receive exclusive benefits, including educational material and, as of 1 January 2021 only horses with a valid passport are eligible to attend OTTWA clinics and events.

A new Off the Track WA website was launched in 2020 with information about pathways for retirement of racehorses, upcoming clinics and events, educational material and a buy-and-sell platform for retired racehorses.

Racing SA (South Australia)

Racing SA facilitates the transition of retired racehorses to post-racing careers by increasing and incentivising demand for Off The Track (OTT) thoroughbreds across the state.

To that end, Racing SA has partnered with several equestrian organisations and events to showcase the versatility of retired racehorses, including the Australian International Three Day Event; the Racehorse to Showhorse categories at the Royal Adelaide Show; the Equestrian SA Show Horse of the Year, and the SA State Jumping Championships.

These partnerships are facilitated through the redistribution of a minimum of 1% of prize money per annum towards equine welfare initiatives, which was implemented by Racing SA on 1 July 2020.

Other initiatives include:

- **introduction of Racing SA's full-time equine welfare officer (EWO). In a first for Australia, the EWO will have the same powers as an RSPCA inspector under the Animal Welfare Act, enabling Racing SA to act more quickly and achieve better welfare outcomes for vulnerable horses.**

- development of a welfare reporting hotline email so concerns can be raised directly with the industry
- establishment of strategic research partnerships to analyse equine welfare issues and assist in the rehoming of behaviourally challenged horses
- creation of formal partnerships with state equestrian bodies, including Equestrian SA and Pony Clubs SA, to improve the traceability of retired racehorses
- provision of assistance packs to new owners of retired racehorses
- provision of financial support for two recognised equine welfare properties, Windamere Horse Haven and Lincoln Park
- establishing an equine welfare-specific sub-brand of Racing SA, Thorough Care SA
- acquiring three state-of-the-art horse ambulances for injured racehorses.

Thoroughbred Racing Northern Territory

From 1 January 2021, Thoroughbred Racing Northern Territory (TRNT) introduced a 1% prize money levy to support equine welfare initiatives. These include:

- assisting with advertising for retraining services
- creating an online portal where trainers and owners can list retired racehorses for rehoming
- supporting the Off The Track program and the territory's equestrian associations via sponsorship of events
- hosting training sessions for new owners to instil best practice when caring for retired racehorses
- granting a \$250 travel contribution for transporting retired horses to their new home or retrainer interstate.

In addition, TRNT Off The Track and Hygain Australia offer a rehoming pack to any owners taking on a retired thoroughbred. If a horse has been rehomed straight off the track in the NT, Hygain provides an initial supply of free feed for its new owner and TRNT Off The Track gives a voucher to assist with club membership and/or training clinics.

As well as the dedicated website, information on clinics and events and available horses is provided on TRNT's Off The Track Facebook page, which has an active and engaged following.

Tasracing

Tasracing facilitates an Off the Track (OTT) program to help with the transition of retired thoroughbreds and standardbreds in Tasmania to new homes. The program is jointly funded by the thoroughbred and harness codes, each of which contributes 1% of their annual prize money, and by an extra contribution of \$100,000 from Tasracing. The budget for the OTT program in the 2020-21 financial year is \$277,000.

Because horses that are rehomed multiple times are at greater risk of negative welfare outcomes, the program has historically focused on providing support to new owners of OTT horses, to ensure that these horses remain in their first post-racing home for as long as possible.

This support was previously provided through clinics hosted by Tasracing but, after a 2020 review, the OTT program is now delivered in a new format that includes:

- a subsidised lessons program that gives eligible owners 10 individual lessons of up to 60 minutes with a Tasracing-approved coach; the program, which operates through a voucher system, offers tailored support in horse care and husbandry, nutrition, behaviour, groundwork and riding
- a nutritional support initiative to help new owners understand and manage their horse's transition from a full, race-feeding regime to a new diet; eligible owners receive vouchers for Hygain and Mitavite products after a consultation with a Hygain equine nutritionist

- better promotion of OTT horses through the sponsorship of show and equestrian events
- a targeted marketing campaign to get good news stories into the wider community
- opportunities for owners and trainers to advertise their retired racehorses through the OTT website and social media platforms.

Tasracing is also investigating the feasibility of an official retraining program for the state.



THOROUGHBRED WELFARE INITIATIVE

**The most
important
participant**
**A Framework for
Thoroughbred
Welfare**

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