



THE COALITION FOR THE PROTECTION OF RACEHORSES Inc.

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The Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

Via email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee

RE: Submission in support of a *National Horse Traceability Register*

Thank you for the opportunity to present our views on this very important topic. Our organisation, the Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses focuses upon the welfare of thoroughbred racehorses. We are also interested in the welfare of all horses, especially given that racehorses can end up in a range of non-racing homes. The introduction of a scheme for the life-time traceability of all horses would be relatively simple to establish, with relatively low set up and running costs. We believe it is in the best interests of all horses that they can be traced for their entire lives, and therefore welcome the Committee's initiative in this inquiry.

Introduction

Horses have held a highly valued position in Australian culture since the arrival of the first fleet. They have been used as war horses in the desert campaigns of the Great War, in the exploration of the country and as objects for our entertainment, pleasure and profit in riding, equestrian, racing and gambling pursuits.

Horses are generally bred to fulfil an expectation assigned to them. This could be for equestrian, racing/gambling, or pleasure riding pursuits or simply as companion animals. As a result, when horses do not fit their intended purpose, or when owners no longer want them for that purpose, they can be and are often discarded (despite being healthy), or neglected. The horse may be destroyed at an abattoir or knackery, an outcome to which many Australians are sensitive. Once a horse is devalued, they enter a downward spiral of transfers and sales, and it is almost certain the horse will eventually find him/herself in a knackery pen awaiting slaughter. In other cases, it may mean a horse is left alone in a back paddock almost forgotten, where they are likely to suffer health issues as a result of the neglect.

The Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses (CPR) finds this disposable attitude towards horses unacceptable. Owners should be held responsible for ensuring the individuals in their care are well looked after their entire lives. A National Horse Traceability Register is an essential part of a larger picture of working towards better welfare outcomes for all horses through providing data, a level of transparency and accountability.

The existence and adequacy of State-based or industry-based registers

The Retirement of Racehorse or Death Notification Form

Introduced in July 2014 through rule AR.64J.A, this form allowed thoroughbred racehorse owners to select one of the following options for “retirement”: (a) Equestrian / pleasure / working companion horse; (b) Breeding purposes; (c) Official Principal Racing Authority retirement program; or (d) Sent to livestock sale. This form is required to be lodged with Racing Australia within one month of retirement, or as soon as is practicable if the horse is deceased.

A ‘deregistration process’ for Standardbreds exiting the harness racing industry was implemented in 2017 through rule HRA 96A.(3). The notification form is largely consistent with that of the Thoroughbred racing industry, except it is lodged with the relevant State Controlling Body within one month of retirement or within 28 days if the horse is deceased.

Unfortunately, horses who are officially retired by their owners into each category may still be killed directly or end up at a slaughterhouse shortly afterwards. In addition, many horses who are sent to livestock sales will be directly purchased by so-called ‘kill buyers’. This important information is not collected by the racing industry.

In other words, although schemes have been set up by the racing industry to attempt to track the animals they use, once the animals’ are no longer wanted by the racing industry, their welfare, and their whereabouts are not recorded at all.

Benefits of a National Register

- All horses can be accounted for and any reported abuse or neglect of any horse could be traced back to the owner;
- Reduce indiscriminate breeding that is especially rife in the racing industry; (eg. Approximately one third of horses bred for the racing industry do not make it to the track and are unaccounted for)
- The data collected would provide accurate statistics on the numbers of horses that are bred and disposed of every year
- Traceability would aid with controlling outbreaks of disease and assist with research
- Greater knowledge of a horse’s background will make it much easier for new owners to find suitable horses especially concerning safety
- Vet and vaccination history could also be uploaded to the horse’s profile
- Aid in the recovery of missing horses;
- Deter the theft of horses
- Save horses from slaughter where they may otherwise have inadvertently ended up at a knackery or slaughterhouse.

Funding

With today’s technology, a national scheme would not be difficult to implement as many horse associations already have their own registration systems that could be integrated into the national scheme. Software has already been developed in the United Kingdom that could be adapted for an Australian scheme. (for more information, go to equineregister.co.uk)

Funding for the scheme should come from the breeders who are ultimately responsible for the horses' existence. A foal registration levy should be applied to cover a significant portion of the scheme though a token administration levy should also apply to cover the transfer of ownership costs.

Fees could be waived for horses who fall under the category of being rescued and adopted by charity accredited horse rescue organisations. It is important to note that rescue groups play an important part in saving the lives of thousands of horses each year and if anything, this scheme should allow for some financial support for these organisations.

Further funding could also come from the racing industry which is the biggest breeder of horses in the country. This could come from unclaimed winnings on horse races. Penalties from breaches could also provide financial support, as well as act as a deterrent.

Enforcement

Key to the success of the scheme is adequate monitoring and enforcement - without this, the scheme will falter. This will require random audits by enforcement officers and a dedicated hotline for the reporting of breaches that need to be acted upon promptly. Fines need to be substantial enough to deter owners from non-compliance.

Summary

The large number of horses that are routinely disposed of every year necessitates the need for a National Equine Registration Scheme.

We find it absolutely unacceptable to be treating them like disposable objects. It is important to know where and who is responsible for every horse at anytime for the purpose of making owners accountable but equally important for it to act as a deterrent to unscrupulous owners and breeders.

Horses have been part of the fabric of Australia since they were brought here on the first fleet. We now need to provide them with the protection they require to prevent them from routine neglect and abuse that they have been subjected to for the last 200 years.

In addition to answering the specific questions of the Committee, CPR has herewith submitted a proposal for how such a scheme could work (Appendix A).

Kind regards,

Elio Celotto

**President
Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses**