



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**

Appendix A

Proposal brief for the Compulsory Registration of Horses in Australia

In order to protect horses in Australia from reckless breeding practices, abuse and neglect, the Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses proposes the compulsory registration and tracing of horses at a national level.

Objectives of National Register

- Ensure owners are accountable for their horses.
- Enable collection of statistics on horse breeding, ownership and wastage in Australia.
- Minimize or manage the risks associated with horse movements across the country and transfers of ownership.
- To ultimately improve the welfare outcomes for horses.

Overview of Current Situation

- Horses are long-lived animals with a natural lifespan of 25-30 years, and they are frequently moved and sold interstate (to a greater degree than other domesticated animals).
- There are minimal enforceable regulations for people wishing to breed horses in Australia and there is no legal requirement for horses to be registered or traceable across their entire lives.
- The racing industry is responsible for the breeding of over 13,000 Thoroughbreds and 4,000 Standardbreds each year, making it the largest producer of horses in the country.
- There are numerous associations dedicated to maintaining the integrity of non-racing breeds in Australia, which typically administer their own stud book and register of purebred horses.
- A lack of regulatory oversight has resulted in overbreeding and many unwanted horses of all ages being sent to slaughter. There are approximately 33 licensed knackerries (producing pet meat) and two abattoirs (export for human consumption) in Australia.

Proposal Brief

1. A national database or registry for all horses.

- This should be an independent statutory body that collects data on every horse.
- Its primary purpose is to be a central register for all horses, *it would not replace existing breed stud books.*

2. Microchipping and registration

- A microchip should be inserted into the horse's neck by a trained veterinarian or other authorised individual by 30 days of age. The microchip serves as a unique identifier for every horse in Australia.

- Once microchipped, vets must register the horse with the national database. Registration of horses could be done through an online or mailed form that states a live foal has been born, and at least provides the breed, microchip number, the name, address and driver's licence of the owner(s) and the location of the foal.

3. Transfer of ownership

- Changes in ownership of a horse should be reported to the national database.
- Details for each owner across a horse's life should be retained in the database for safety and biosecurity reasons.
- The current owners' would be responsible for ensuring new owners' details are forwarded to the national registry, which could be achieved by a form that both parties need to complete at the point of sale/adoption in duplicate. The form is to include identifying details such as a driver's licence or passport.
- Disclosure of a horse's identification (and therefore history) at the point of sale should be mandatory. This will enable a potential buyer to make an informed decision about the suitability of a horse.
- Saleyards must not auction horses without microchips and proof of registration.
- Saleyards and anywhere else horses are sold must disclose the identification of the horse including the microchip number in any advertising or enquiries.

4. Location of horse

- Agistment: Horses are frequently kept in facilities that differ to their owners' residential address, for example with a contracted trainer or riding school. Both the owners address and the location the horse is kept must be included in the registration details.
- If a horse is moved from his/her registered location for more than 7 days, a change of location form should be filled out by the owner.
- Facilities with more than 15-20 horses may require a different system, such as the racing industry's 'stable returns', to enable simple reporting of frequent movements.

5. Death

- Owners must inform the national registry if their horse is deceased, and declare a reason, for example died (natural causes or accident), euthanised or slaughtered at an abattoir/knackery.
- All slaughterhouses must scan the microchip of each horse entering the facility and report this to the national registry on a regular basis.

6. Penalties

- Sufficient penalties must apply to deter non-compliance and increase with every successive breach of the regulations.
- A single repeat failure to comply with the rules should result in bans from future horse ownership, and bans from operating livestock sales, knackeries and slaughterhouses.