

The National Horse Traceability Register (NHTR)

In January 2019, Senator Mehreen Faruqi proposed an Inquiry into the Feasibility of a National Horse Traceability Register (NHTR). The proposal aimed to provide several benefits, but particularly focused on horse welfare, safety, and biosecurity. Whilst there are many benefits of such a register, Senator Faruqi's main objective was improving horse welfare, particularly for racehorses, as well as rider safety, stating that:

By properly tracking horses we can improve safety and biosecurity and stop racing horses being discarded at knackeries when they're no longer profitable. ([Hunter Valley News, Ref 1](#)).

In October 2019, the ABC 7:30 Report, aired "[The Final Race - The Dark Side of the Australian Horse Racing Industry](#)". The Australian public was outraged as scenes of extreme and systemic suffering of racehorses being slaughtered at a Queensland abattoir and knackeries, were shown across the country's television screens. The demand for change was reflected in the subsequent Martin Inquiry (commissioned by the Queensland Government), which found:

The racing industry in Australia, in general, has fundamentally failed to intervene at industry level to effectively protect retired racing horses. The public's disapproval is deafening (Martin & Reid, 2020, p. 5).

The Thoroughbred Aftercare Welfare Working Group, presented its report in 2021 (TAWWG, 2021), noting "TAWWG is convinced that complete lifetime traceability and a national horse traceability register are fundamental to assuring horse welfare", and that without such a register, "it is almost impossible for the horse industry to demonstrate that horses are being cared for in retirement" (TAWWG, 2021, p. 54). They recommended: "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" (TAWWG, 2021, p. 18).

On 12 February 2019, welfare, safety, and biosecurity were the three main objectives for a Feasibility study of a NHTR, that was referred to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee. In September 2020, the Australian Government accepted the Committee's recommendations and again, stressed welfare and safety as the driving reasons for the NHTR. This was then reflected in the Terms of Reference set by Government Ministers for the National Horse Traceability Working Group (NHTWG), which was established that same month to "provide advice on matters relating to the design and introduction of a traceability system for horses, donkeys and mules in Australia".

By 2022, however, all needs except for biosecurity had been removed from the reports. The Victorian Government had engaged Marsden Jacob to conduct the 'National Horse Traceability Project' study, and their report was released on 13 January 2022. The Terms

of Reference listed in the Working Group's Final Report (October, 2022) specifically states that the proposal will "Not have a defined focus on welfare outcomes and welfare activities related to horses or be deliberating on the end-of-life options for horses."

Ironically, the Final Report (2022, p. 46), states that "other horse welfare and traceability related obligations are contained within the Australian Rules of Racing, the Local Rules of Racing and the Rules of the Australian Stud Book." To date, despite the graphic evidence of cruelty to retired racehorses, provided by the 7.30 report, and the promises made to the horrified Australian public to remedy the situation, little if any changes have been made to protect racehorses.

Let's make it perfectly clear - The various Rules of Racing have been established to regulate racing and not the welfare of racehorses. The racing industry has an inherent conflict of interest, which ought to disqualify it from regulating horse welfare. As the findings of the Martin Inquiry found, it was the self-regulating operation of the racing industry that resulted in the horrors of the 7.30 Report.

Just recently in April 2024, an estimated 500 horse carcasses were found on a property in Wagga Wagga NSW. Police investigators reported this to be a part of what appeared to be an illegal knacker operation. To our knowledge, the identity of these horses is still to be determined. A NHTR would have made the operation of an illegal knacker much less likely to have occurred in the first place.

Questions

Would the Minister please explain how and why the NHTR working group removed the original main objectives of the NHTR regarding improvements of horse welfare and rider safety, when the Victorian Government conducted their report in January 2022?

Given that rider safety and horse welfare have been removed from the NHTR, and that no other solutions to these issues, to our knowledge, appear to have been proposed or implemented, can the Minister please detail how horse welfare and rider safety will now be addressed?

Can the Minister please explain to the Australian public, when horse welfare has been removed from the NHTR, how incidents involving large-scale and systematic cruelty and abuse to racehorses will be prevented in future?

Will the Minister please explain how and when he will take action to bring the NHTR back to its original purpose of ensuring horse welfare throughout their lives?