

Submission supplied by Mrs Judith Leeson AM

The feasibility of a National Traceability Register for all horses.

I have over 40 years of ownership of and involvement with horses for recreational use and live on a small property in a regional area where there are many equine businesses and equestrian activities. I offer services in career development and transition to the SA Jockey Association, have significant interests in the welfare of horses and the influence on the Social Licence to Operate (SLO), respect the historic role of horses in nation building, and also their value in recreation, tourism and community engagement. I understand the multiple benefits for young people learning to ride and care for horses, more experienced riders striving for mastery, and the role of horses in therapeutic interventions. I am a member of the Management Committee of Horse SA, and strongly support its separate submission.

I will address the criteria as an individual and provide personal reflections and considerations of issues that will reference global trends, climate change, sustainability and land use, equine welfare, and the sector's SLO.

I support a national investigation into the feasibility of a National Horse Traceability Register for all horses, with particular reference to:

The existence and adequacy of State or industry-based registers

At present three States – South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria - have implemented a register of Property Identification Codes, but this does not relate to identification of individual animals kept on the property.

The PIC primarily relates to animals that are kept in a herd for much of their lives and used for the benefit of humans. It does not track the life of an individual animal, nor does it confer legal responsibility to anyone for its welfare from birth to death. The PIC tag is removeable and does not convey the history of the individual animal, although Stud Books would be a source of record. On the whole the animals rarely leave the property unless sold or on death.

Horses used for sport and recreation are not usually kept in large herds, and private ownership may not be for life. Horses frequently transition between owners as often as seven to ten times during their lives, as the needs and circumstances of owners change. Factors influencing these transitions include

young riders out-growing their ponies or horses, rider ability levels increasing, higher levels of competition requiring better educated horses, loss of owner interest, diminished financial circumstances, accidents or injuries, agistment properties sold for housing development, and lack of feed and water, usually as a result of drought or serious flooding. This last factor may have increasing significance in the face of climate change. Identification and traceability of all horses would be enabling to all stakeholders, and ultimately contribute to all welfare issues, and bring an increased economic benefit through positive public perception and participation.

The benefits of a national register

Animal welfare would be enhanced, as legal responsibility would be transferred to a designated person on each change of ownership, and horses could not be rendered invisible as is possible now over their lifetime. Welfare advocacy and management strategies could be communicated from a central register on a need-to-know basis, regarding optimal conditions for nutrition, environment, health, behaviour and the affective experience domain, based on scientific evidence.

Climate changes have already impacted on horse welfare as food and water sources have been compromised, and more sustainable land management practices need to be introduced to mitigate these adverse conditions for equine welfare and to preserve the ecology of diverse regions.

Catastrophic events including fires and floods require a national response, as do other national emergencies, where horse owners/keepers would benefit from immediate advice through a National Register.

In an increasingly globalised and connected world people and horses move between states and countries now with increasing frequency, and a National Register would enable owners to comply with national and international policies and regulations regarding the welfare, health and safety of equine participants.

Biosecurity safety (including for the prevention and management of Emergency Animal Diseases) needs a National Register where medical status, including data of regular vaccinations, can be recorded and accessed by vets, owners/keepers, transporters, abattoirs, and event

organisers to trace the potential transmission of disease through contact with other horses at equine sporting and leisure events. These digital health checks can be organised to pre-register animals for events, and also to notify owners/keepers of any outbreak of disease.

Backyard breeding may lead to horses never having any formal registration through organisations or studbooks, nor may owners/keepers be aware of current research or evidence of good practice to ensure horse welfare. A National Register could lead to further education and enhanced compliance with government regulations related to animal breeding.

Integrity of trade in horses could be further protected if each horse is able to be tracked from birth to death, and fraudulent practices of substituting one record for another, false claims of ownership, and theft could be minimised over time. It also controls food-chain safety and minimises the possibility of horses being sent to slaughter because of neglect or abandonment.

Overseas models of national tracking systems for horses

The UK National Horse Register has recently designed and implemented a National Horse Register which is an enabling platform at the forefront of international and national identification and traceability schemes. It contains a central equine database of over 1.3 million horses and has a 'digital stable' of stakeholders connecting data exchange between governments, border regulators, policy makers, vets, studbooks, owners/keepers, welfare agencies, transporters, dealers, and the general public. It is not coercive, but using real-time data is able to identify trends, provide targeted information and advice, pre-event registration, notify owners/keepers of any outbreak of disease, and enable research for longitudinal large cohort studies.

The following two links are from recent presentations given in the UK at National Conferences, and clearly explain the processes and the benefits of the National Register.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZA2PAo5B7PI> UK

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3nwwDXKJzY&t=300s> UK

Related matters address the critical importance of an Australian National Register for Identification and Traceability of Horses. Australia may have

been built on the sheep's back, but the work-horses that helped to build our nation have an honoured tradition in our history and as part of our culture. The role of horses and their continuing presence in our landscape must be preserved, and the impetus now rests in equestrian activities and racing, both of which have an economic and social benefit to our nation.

In our globalised world, fed by social and print media, any industry's or organisation's **Social Licence to Operate (SLO)** is strongly influenced by public perception of the right to continue to undertake its activity (operations). Animal welfare issues are often highlighted by on-the-spot photos and videos, which gain instant world-wide coverage and often provoke outrage and virtue-signalling without recourse to hard evidence or contemporary research. Ethical issues about the use of animals in sport are highlighted, emotional responses proliferate, and the sense that there is considerable injustice or failure in the duty of care invokes public support, which may then be withdrawn without any collaborative attempts to find constructive solutions. As the general public becomes more aware of animal welfare issues through instant and graphic reporting, animal owners/keepers need to become more sensitive themselves to issues of welfare and become better informed about evidence-based practice. Community perceptions and support are vital to the equine industry and need to have access to independent and objective information about welfare issues.

A National Register for Traceability for the national herd could be a powerful, positive influence in further educating all stakeholders, and the general public, that horse welfare needs to be central to all equine activities. All horse owners/keepers would be able to have confidence in such a system, as stakeholders in the UK have already expressed a high level of satisfaction in the data sharing capabilities of their platform. Australian owners/keepers could better plan their individual progress and business venture with confidence that they were meeting international standards.