



## Submission to Inquiry: The Feasibility of a National Horse Register

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Animal Liberation is the oldest animal rights organisation in Australia, formed in 1976 by Christine Townend. Our organisation's mission is to permanently improve the lives of animals through lobbying, consumer advocacy, action and education. We are a not-for-profit group (Charity No. CFN11637) based in Sydney.

Animal Liberation welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the *Inquiry into the Feasibility of a National Horse Register*. We consider a national approach to horse registration more appropriate than State or industry-based approaches and recommend the inclusion of all domesticated horses on a single registry.

### **(a) The existence or adequacy of State or industry-based registers.**

#### State Governments

Landholders with horses on their property should have a Property Identification Code (PIC) number, which is registered with the relevant State government department. There is no movement database for horses, and it is not compulsory to provide a PIC or other information before a horse can be sold.

#### Non-Racing Horses

There are numerous horse associations and societies in Australia, many of which aim to maintain the integrity of non-racing horse breeds (including Arabians, Stock Horses, Quarter Horses and many more). These organisations typically administer their own Stud Book and register of purebred horses, and consistently operate at a national level. There is no coordination of data between organisations and it is unclear how current the various databases are.

#### Racing Industry

It is compulsory for young horses bred for use in the racing industries to be registered with the relevant authority. Both codes of horse racing have established national organisations to play a central role in administering the Stud Book and ownership register, as well as maintaining breeding records and allocating or approving horse names. State racing authorities also have the ability to amend or update horse and ownership records for their jurisdiction in the national database.

There are a few national rules and regulations that seem to ensure the early registration of horses and their long-term care. However, on closer inspection, there are often 'loopholes' and it is also unclear what the penalties are for non-compliance. For example, notification of a live Thoroughbred foal should be provided within 30 days of birth (Stud Book Regulation 4.6, page 25); however, notifications are accepted up to 120 days after birth as long as they are accompanied by a late fee (Stud Book Regulation 4.7, page 25).

The Retirement of Racehorse or Death Notification Form was introduced in July 2014 through rule AR.64J.A. This form allows racing Thoroughbred owners to select one of four options for "retirement" (equestrian / pleasure, breeding, official retirement program, livestock sale). The form should 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 stated on the Form may still be euthanised or end up at a slaughterhouse shortly afterwards. In addition, many horses who are sent to livestock sales will be directly purchased by 'kill-buyers'. This important information does not seem to be collected by the racing industry.

Racing NSW have implemented local rules that make it an offence to send a Thoroughbred, directly or indirectly, to an abattoir or knackery. It is also a requirement that Thoroughbreds not be destroyed unless a registered veterinary surgeon has certified in writing that it is necessary on welfare or safety grounds. These are positive initiatives; however, they do not prevent Thoroughbreds from being sent to slaughter after they have officially exited the racing industry.

**(b) The benefits of a national register, including for animal welfare, biosecurity safety, backyard breeding and the integrity in trade of horses.**

From a horse welfare perspective, the key components of a national horse register and lifetime tracking system should include compulsory microchipping as a means of horse identification, reliable updating of ownership records, notification of deaths and a requirement for horses to have their microchip scanned and records updated upon entering a knackery or slaughterhouse.

It is widely understood that companion animals who are identifiable through microchips and linked to a register with up-to-date ownership details are more likely to be in situations that promote their wellbeing. In addition, these systems enable authorities and rehoming organisations to return animals to their homes if they are stolen or escape.

There may be one million (or more) domesticated horses living in Australia today<sup>1</sup>. The largest producer of horses in the country is believed to be the racing industry, which is responsible for breeding over 13,000 Thoroughbreds and 4,000 Standardbreds each year. It has been estimated that approximately one-third of the total racehorse population exits the industry each year (33% of Thoroughbreds and 28% of Standardbreds)<sup>2</sup>. The lifetime tracking of horses would enable collection of reliable statistics on breeding and wastage, which is a key consideration in whether the racing industry has a social licence to operate. The publication of these statistics and traceability of slaughtered horses to an owner is likely to also act as a deterrent to careless over-breeding.

During their natural lifespan of 25-30 years, many horses will be kept (aged or trained) in places that differ to their owners' residential address and many will be sold, relinquished or moved interstate. This complexity means that horses may be vulnerable at various stages in their lives. Reasons given for racehorses exiting the industry include poor performance, health issues (illness or injuries), retiring to breeding duties and unsuitable temperament or behaviour<sup>2</sup>. Interestingly, a US study found that owner-related issues were more likely to contribute to the relinquishment of a horse to a non-profit organisation than horse-related characteristics, for example financial hardship, the physical condition of the owner (ability to provide care for the horse) and death of the owner<sup>3</sup>.



**(d) Funding, enforcement and penalty implications.**

Animal Liberation suggests that gambling taxation revenue generated for State Governments could provide the funds necessary to at least create a national horse register, if not continue providing funds towards administration etc. It is important to note that any central register should support horse stakeholders as well as the horses; the benefits of this system should outweigh any necessary fees.

The penalties must be sufficient to deter non-compliance and increase with every successive breach of the regulations. Repeated failure to comply with the rules of the national register and/or evidence of wasteful breeding, should result in bans from future horse ownership.

**References**

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<sup>1</sup> GB Smyth & K Dagley (2016) Demographics of Australian horses: results from an internet-based survey. *Australian Veterinary Journal*, **94(3)**: 52-59.

<sup>2</sup> P Thomson, A Hayek, B Jones, D Evans & P McGreevy (2014). Number, causes and destinations of horses leaving the Australian Thoroughbred and Standardbred racing industries. *The Journal of the Australian Veterinarian Association Ltd*, **92(8)**: 303-311.

<sup>3</sup> K Holcomb, C Stull & P Kass (2010) Unwanted horses: The role of non-profit equine rescue and sanctuary organizations. *J. Anim. Sci.*, **88**: 4142-4250.