

## CHAPTER 3

### CONCERNS ABOUT CERTAIN ASPECTS OF RODEOS

#### Introduction

3.1 In the previous chapter, the Committee discussed the regulation and control of rodeos. In this chapter, the focus is on concerns raised in evidence about certain aspects of rodeos. These concerns relate to:

- training and handling of horses;
- use of flank straps;
- use of electric prods;
- use of spurs;
- transport;
- yarding;
- arena surfaces;
- horses used in events other than bucking; and
- other animals.

#### Training and Handling of Horses

3.2 Evidence presented during the inquiry suggests that there are animal welfare problems associated with the training and handling of bucking horses. For example, the Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies claims that horses are encouraged to buck by poor handling and breaking.<sup>1</sup> The Federation also maintains that horses achieve the requisite standard for competition merely by the "repeated success in ridding themselves of their riders".<sup>2</sup> According to this animal welfare organisation, training methods also include the use of goads.

3.3 This evidence was disputed by representatives of Rodeo Associations. The Committee was told that bucking horses are obtained from a variety of sources, including riding schools, pony clubs and rural properties. These horses have often been identified as having a propensity or an aptitude for bucking. Indeed, it was suggested that some horses have a natural bucking ability and that this will be developed with training.

3.4 Horses that display an aptitude to buck are encouraged in training sessions to continue bucking. According to Mr John Gill, Stock

Contractors' Representative with the Australian Professional Rodeo Association, the training involves riders being thrown from the horses. This process encourages the horses to buck.<sup>3</sup> It may take three years to train a horse to the standard required of a professional bucking horse.<sup>4</sup>

3.5 Representatives of Rodeo Associations maintain that undesirable training practices are not used.<sup>5</sup> Mr Gill told the Committee that cruel practices, such as the use of goads, would be counter-productive in the training of bucking stock.<sup>6</sup> Mr William Vivers, Director of the Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, confirmed this view. He observed:

Actually, cruelty to rodeo animals is self-defeating, I believe, because a horse that is frightened of what is going to happen to it will not perform.<sup>7</sup>

3.6 Mr Mervyn Button, who also appeared on behalf of the ABCRA, added that his Association had not received any complaints about the training methods used to prepare animals for rodeos.<sup>8</sup>

3.7 The Committee inspected the training of horses and cattle for the rodeo circuit on a property at Wagga Wagga, New South Wales. During these training sessions, the horses were relaxed prior to being led into the chutes and remained so while the flank straps were fitted. During these sessions no physical force was used, let alone goads or prods.

3.8 During informal discussions with members of the Committee, organisers, competitors, stock contractors and other personnel involved in the rodeos held in Tamworth and at the Sydney Royal Easter Show confirmed that considerable emphasis is placed on the proper training and preparation of stock. These views were reinforced at the Committee's public hearings.<sup>9</sup> The Committee, however, notes that this evidence related to stock owned and supplied by accredited stock contractors.

3.9 Evidence also suggests that riders need to be trained in the correct riding and handling techniques. Mr Gill of APRA told the Committee that "today's competitors are more informed about the bucking action of stock and the physiology and psychology of horses generally".<sup>10</sup> This knowledge is acquired through training and reinforced in competitions.

3.10 The Committee was advised that riders progress through an "apprenticeship system", involving novice and second division events. There are also rodeo schools conducted by professional competitors that provide training in the correct use of the rodeo equipment and riding techniques.<sup>11</sup>

3.11 Mr Vivers of ABCRA told the Committee that these skills are maintained in practice sessions. He commented:

A contractor is only too happy to have some of these young fellows come along to try his horses out.<sup>12</sup>

### Conclusions

3.12 The Committee is satisfied that the three major Rodeo Associations recognise the importance of the training and proper preparation of stock, particularly horses, for rodeo events. Nevertheless, the Committee affirms its view that the regulation and control of rodeos should extend to training and practice sessions and rodeo schools.

3.13 The Committee condemns any cruel or inhumane practices that may be used to train or prepare horses for rodeo events. In particular, the Committee is of the view that the use of goads and other similar instruments should not be used in the training or handling of rodeo stock. The Committee understands that the Rodeo Associations share these views and calls on them to impose the strongest possible sanctions against any member who trains, prepares or handles stock in a cruel or inhumane manner.

3.14 Given the need to safeguard the welfare of animals in rodeo events, the Committee calls on the Rodeo Associations to develop training and education programs that emphasise a humane approach to rodeo activities. The Committee considers that proper training of competitors will result in greater attention being given to the welfare of animals used in rodeo events.

### Use of Flank Straps

3.15 A flank strap is a belt fastened around the hind quarters of bucking horses and bulls. The strap is made of soft leather usually five centimetres wide and is covered by a sheepskin lining.

3.16 The strap is placed on a bucking horse slightly above the hip bone and encircles the animals flanks. It is fitted with a quick release mechanism for easy access and speedy removal. The aim of the flank strap is to encourage the horse to buck high and kick out with its hind legs.

3.17 During the inquiry, the Committee heard conflicting evidence on the purpose, effect and the need to use flank straps. The Committee reviews this evidence in the following section of the report.

#### Purpose of Flank Straps

3.18 Representatives of the Rodeo Associations emphasised that the flank strap should be seen as an important "control mechanism" that encourages the horse to kick out with its hind legs with a symmetry of motion. Mr Gill of APRA told the Committee that the flank strap determines the bucking action of the horse or bull. He explained that "the correct motion of a bucking horse is the jump and kick fashion, where the front feet come down and then the back legs [kick out]".<sup>13</sup>

3.19 Mr Button of the Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, also observed that the natural bucking motion of most horses is to kick sideways.<sup>14</sup> He stated:

One of the main reasons for the application of a flank strap ... is to make it kick its back legs out so that it is in its point of balance, whereas a horse's natural bucking habit is to kick sideways. If you can make it kick straight, it is a lot safer for the horse and eventually for the rider.<sup>15</sup>

3.20 According to the Campdraft Association, a bucking horse will risk injury if a flank strap is not used to co-ordinate its movements.<sup>16</sup>

3.21 The Committee asked several witnesses whether horses will buck without a flank strap. Mr Vivers and Mr Button<sup>17</sup> of the Campdraft Association, and Mr Gill<sup>18</sup> of the Australian Professional Rodeo Association, told the Committee that some horses will buck without a flank strap attached. Mr Gill stated:

Horses would buck; they will always buck. Most of them would be rearing at the front. They will always buck once they know that they can throw riders.<sup>19</sup>

3.22 In contrast, ANZFAS, in its submission, claimed that few animals would buck without the flank strap. Dr John Auty, a member of the Federation, informed the Committee that "some rare animals might do that but they tend to give it away over time".<sup>20</sup> He added:

The fact is that horses are made to buck by flank straps and encouraged to continue to buck by people falling off them.<sup>21</sup>

3.23 Ms Glenys Oogjes, Director of ANZFAS, also told the Committee that, even if horses and bulls bucked without a flank strap, "they would not buck in the dramatic way they do with the flank strap".<sup>22</sup>

#### Effect of Flank Straps

3.24 It was suggested to the Committee that the use of the flank strap caused considerable pain to the animals involved. For example, ANZFAS maintains that the application of the flank strap causes irritation and pain. The Federation argues that, at the very least, the flank strap is a "severe annoyance" because it applies pressure to sensitive areas of a horse's anatomy.<sup>23</sup>

3.25 Other evidence, however, disputed the harmful effect of the strap on horses and bulls in rodeo events. The Australian Equine Veterinary Association,<sup>24</sup> rodeo organisations, Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals and the NSW Animal Welfare Advisory Council,<sup>25</sup> maintain that the flank strap acts as a irritant to the animal. In its submission, AFWA stated:

There is no doubt that these devices are resented by both horses and bulls, but they cannot realistically be considered as painful.<sup>26</sup>

3.26 Mr Colin McCaskill, a member of the NSW Animal Welfare Advisory Council, advised the Committee of one view that maintains that "if a flank rope is properly put on and adjusted to a horse, there is no problem at all".<sup>27</sup>

3.27 The Rodeo Associations argue the heavy muscular structures situated around the flank area where the straps are placed protect the animal's internal organs.<sup>28</sup> However, Mr Vivers of the Campdraft Association, conceded that the flank area is a sensitive part of the animal's anatomy and that is why the flank strap is applied to that part of the body.<sup>29</sup>

3.28 The effect of the sheepskin lining of the flank strap was also called into question. ANZFAS suggested that these linings become hard after continuous contact with sweat from the animals.<sup>30</sup> The stiffened surface of the strap increases the irritation of the bucking animals.

3.29 Miss Lynette Chave, Special Veterinary Officer, Animal Welfare Branch, New South Wales Department of Local Government, however, provided the Committee with a different view on this matter. She advised that the lining of the flank strap prevented chafing and would cause some irritation only if it became sandy or dusty.<sup>31</sup> The harmful effects of the sheepskin lining was also disputed by representatives of the Rodeo Associations.<sup>32</sup>

#### Continuing Use of Flank Straps

3.30 Animal welfare organisations perceive flank straps as an integral part of rodeos. Dr Hugh Wirth, President of RSPCA Australia, told the Committee that the flank strap "is a well-known means of forcing a horse to [buck]" and that this "behavioural action of horses" is misused to achieve a result.<sup>33</sup> According to Dr Wirth, RSPCA Australia "cannot condone" the use of flank straps.<sup>34</sup>

3.31 This evidence was rejected by the Rodeo Associations. Mr Ramon Blanchard, Board Representative with the Australian Professional Rodeo Association, told the Committee that he has "never seen a proper flank strap injure a horse."<sup>35</sup> Mr Button of the Campdraft Association, indicated that the flank straps were specifically designed "to make sure there is no damage done to the animal".<sup>36</sup>

#### Conclusions

3.32 On the basis of evidence presented during the inquiry, the Committee's view is that flank straps are an irritant to bucking horses and bulls.

3.33 Members of the Committee inspected rodeo stock after events at the National Championships in Tamworth and at the Sydney Royal Easter Show. The Committee did not observe any injuries or detect any visible signs of irritation as a result of the use of flank straps. Indeed, at Tamworth, the Committee observed contractors brushing flank straps to remove sand and other material as well as applying talcum powder to soften the sheepskin lining.

### Use of Electric Prods

3.34 Electric prods are used to encourage bucking horses and bulls to clear the chute area.

3.35 Regulatory arrangements in New South Wales and Victoria address specifically the use of electric prods on horses and bulls involved in rodeo events. In New South Wales, the following regulation applies:

Standard electric prods shall be used as little as possible and may be powered by battery or dynamo only. Prods must be in accordance with the regulations under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and must not be used inside the arena.

Cattle may only be prodded in the shoulder or rump. A prod may only be used instantaneously on the shoulder of a bucking horse to clear it from the chute on opening of the gate, and may be used only by the contractor or his nominee. When non-contract bucking horses are used the prod may be used only by a person authorised by the chute boss.<sup>37</sup>

3.36 The relevant Victorian regulation provides that:

An electric charge must not be used in connection with the movement or herding of any animal other than by means of a battery-loaded device known as a 'Cattle Prodder'. The 'Cattle Prodder' must be used only on the hip or shoulder areas of the animal.<sup>38</sup>

3.37 The use of electric prods has been criticised by some animal welfare organisations. For example, ANZFAS recommends that the use of these prods should be banned immediately.<sup>39</sup> According to the

Federation, the use of electric prods causes pain and stress. While the use of prods is confined officially to the hip or shoulder areas of animals, the Federation maintains that they are often applied to sensitive areas of the anatomy. ANZFAS also claims that when an electric prod is applied, the horse or bull will often rear and sometimes attempt to climb out of the chute.<sup>40</sup> It was also suggested to the Committee that electric prods are often used to torment rodeo animals.

3.38 Rodeo organisations support the use of electric prods, arguing that they are an essential safety device that encourage an animal to clear the chute, thereby minimising the risk of injury.<sup>41</sup> Mr Gill of APRA advised the Committee on what would happen if a prod were used improperly:

A horse in a frightened state through the use of a prod will not buck, but will attempt to gallop away from the source of the pain.<sup>42</sup>

3.39 The Committee questioned the representatives from the Rodeo Associations concerning the severity of the charge given off by the prod. It was claimed the standard electric prods used in rodeos create no more than a mild electric shock because of their low voltage levels.<sup>43</sup> Mr Blanchard, a member of APRA, advised that the charge was "easily bearable" even if applied to a human.<sup>44</sup>

3.40 Miss Rosemary Harmer, an inspector with RSPCA (NSW), told the Committee that, based on her experience, the prod was not misused at rodeo events. She observed:

Certainly the potential is there for them to be misused but I have to say that, particularly with contract stock, because you either have the contractor or a nominated person then they are pretty well aware of each individual animal. That is the big thing, knowing how that particular animal will go out of a chute and knowing when to prod and where to prod to make it safe for the animal. ... Generally it is not abused.<sup>45</sup>

3.41 Mr McCaskill of the NSW Animal Welfare Advisory Council, however, expressed the view that prods were still used "excessively" on horses, particularly non-contract horses.<sup>46</sup>



## Conclusions

3.42 Persuasive evidence, including statements from some animal welfare groups, suggests that there are no major animal welfare problems associated with the use of electric prods on horses and bulls in bucking events at rodeos. Nevertheless, the Committee is concerned about excessive and unauthorised use of electric prods on rodeo stock while in the chute.

3.43 During inspections of rodeos in Tamworth and Sydney, members of the Committee gained the impression that too much reliance is placed on the use of the prod. In keeping with the New South Wales regulations on this matter, the Committee considers that the prod should be used as little as possible. In particular, the Committee considers that electric prods must not be applied to sensitive parts of the animal's anatomy.

3.44 The Committee also holds the view that an electric prod should only be used by authorised and responsible persons. Given the need for sound judgement and quick responses in the chute area, the Committee considers that it is inappropriate for an adolescent to use the prod, as was the case at one rodeo attended by the Committee.

*3.45 The Committee recommends that all State and Territory Governments develop appropriate regulations for the use of electric prods on horses and bulls in rodeos. In particular, the Committee considers that these arrangements should include specific limitations on the strength of the current in electric prods and clear instructions on the appropriate use of such prods.* The Committee has also addressed this issue in a forthcoming report on the transport of livestock within Australia.

## Use of Spurs

3.46 Spurs are worn by all riders in the bucking events. The spurs have blunt rowels, or star-shaped wheels, and are about 3mm thick. According to the Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals, spurs are designed so that they will not cut into an animal.<sup>47</sup>

3.47 In the saddle bronc event, the rider spurs his mount by sliding his feet along the sides of the horse to a point near the back of the saddle. The spurring style for bare back events is different with the rider adopting

an exaggerated forward leg motion which brings the spurs into contact with the horse in the shoulder region.<sup>48</sup>

### Regulations on Types of Spurs

3.48 The regulatory arrangements in New South Wales and Victoria address the types of spurs that may be used in bucking events. The following regulation applies in New South Wales:

Locked rowels, or rowels that will lock on spurs, or sharpened spurs shall not be used on horses or cattle under any circumstances. Semi-locked rowels may be used on cattle.<sup>49</sup>

3.49 Conditions for a rodeo permit in Victoria stipulate that:

Paddles, fully-locked rowels or rowels that are capable of being fully-locked on spurs must not be used on any horse.<sup>50</sup>

3.50 The rules of the Rodeo Associations also prohibit the use of sharpened spurs, locked rowels or rowels that will lock on spurs.<sup>51</sup> Riders found to be using these spurs are disqualified.<sup>52</sup> The Committee, however, understands that the riders' spurs are not always inspected before events to ensure that proper equipment is being used.

### Views on the Use of Spurs

3.51 Some animal welfare organisations are opposed to the use of spurs in rodeos. ANZFAS argues that their use should be banned. The Federation maintains that they cause intense pain to the horse. In particular, the action of the spur forward of the saddle in bucking events is painful whether spurs are blunt or rowelled.<sup>53</sup>

3.52 RSPCA Australia is also opposed to the use of spurs in rodeos. The Society advised the Committee that their use "cannot be condoned".<sup>54</sup> Although regulations such as those introduced into Victoria "are a major step in controlling the abuse of animals in rodeos", the Society considers that the sanctioning of the continued use of spurs is a deficiency.<sup>55</sup>

3.53 Miss Harmer of RSPCA (NSW) expressed the view that if used properly, spurs in bucking events are not a problem.<sup>56</sup> While not referring specifically to the use of spurs in these events, she stated:

Spurs are meant to be aids to enforce something if the horse has ignored you. They are not meant to punish the horse ... I have to agree that if they are used properly they are not a problem, but they can be used inappropriately.<sup>57</sup>

3.54 Incorrect spurring action may leave spur marks on an animal. Again, Miss Harmer explained:

It is possible to mark stock even if you do not have sharp spurs. It is the action that causes the damage. Time and time again particular riders in rodeos damage the animal by the way they spur.<sup>58</sup>

3.55 In other cases, there may be no marks left on the animal, even after vigorous spurring.

3.56 The Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals does not support calls to ban the use of spurs. This animal welfare organisation questions whether spurs inflict severe pain. In its submission, AFWA noted:

Having regard to the blunt surfaces of the rowels, the thickness of the animal's skin ... and the absence of any visible damage to the animals, it does not seem likely that significant pain is inflicted.<sup>59</sup>

3.57 Dr Ian Gollan, a member of AFWA, confirmed evidence from RSPCA (NSW) that even when visible spur marks were observed on animals, the wounds were relatively superficial.<sup>60</sup> AFWA also claimed that with the type of leg motion used in the saddle bronc events, the rowels made very little contact with the horse's skin, except during the "mark out" from the chute during the first buck.<sup>61</sup>

3.58 The Rodeo Associations claimed that spurs serve as a device to assist with the riding technique and do not injure the animals. Mr Blanchard of APRA explained to the Committee:

The spurs used are blunt, free rolling spurs which are standard equipment and policed very closely. If you were to observe any number of saddle bronc or bare back bronc rides you would clearly see that on a lot of occasions the spur is not even in contact with the animal. I notice this a lot ... just how few of the riders can actually maintain full spur contact with a horse. But even the good and accomplished riders that do maintain that full spur contact do not injure the horses. There is a severe penalty that would be handed out if it were to happen.<sup>62</sup>

## Conclusions

3.59 The Committee welcomes the regulations in New South Wales and Victoria on the type of spurs used in rodeo events. The Committee, however, is of the view that the Rodeo Associations must police these rules more stringently. In particular, the Committee considers that regular inspections of spurs should be conducted prior to events to ensure that only authorised spurs are used. The Committee expects that any injuries resulting from spurs will be included in reports recommended in paragraph 1.33. These injuries should be monitored and, if necessary, further restrictions should be introduced.

3.60 As proper spurring action can reduce injuries to rodeo animals, the Committee considers that the Rodeo Associations should give priority to the improvement of training of riders in this aspect of the sport.

## Reservations

3.61 Senators Burns and Bell wish to record their view that spurs should not be used in rodeo events. The Senators consider that spurs are cruel and inflict pain on animals. In particular, the use of spurs on the shoulders of a horse to make it "buck better" is unacceptable.

## Transport

3.62 The Australian Professional Rodeo Association emphasised to the Committee that contract stock are transported many times during a year and therefore are usually calm and relaxed while travelling.<sup>63</sup> Because bucking stock are transported regularly, they are more accustomed to

standing side-by-side, head-to-tail, across the width of the truck than domestic livestock.<sup>64</sup>

3.63 RSPCA (NSW) did not dispute this evidence. It advised the Committee that the transport of horses to and from rodeos is no better or worse than the transport of horses generally.<sup>65</sup> The Society did, however, indicate that contract stock being transported are better cared for than non-contract stock. Ms Amanda Large, Assistant Director of RSPCA (NSW), observed:

The good contract horses are also very valuable animals and the more valuable they are, the better the transport that will be provided for them.<sup>66</sup>

3.64 Miss Harmer of RSPCA (NSW), also noted that there were not "a lot of transport injuries on contract stock".<sup>67</sup>

3.65 ANZFAS, however, expressed concerns about the transport of rodeo animals. The Federation maintains that stock are frequently stressed by transport, especially when transported over long distances in extreme weather conditions.<sup>68</sup>

3.66 In order to safeguard the welfare of rodeo animals being transported, the Australian Equine Veterinary Association recommends that the transport of rodeo stock, like other livestock, should be undertaken in accordance with the Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals - Road Transport of Livestock endorsed by the Australian Agricultural Council.

## Conclusions

3.67 The evidence of RSPCA (NSW) and the Australian Professional Rodeo Association, that contract stock are well cared for when being transported is in keeping with the Committee's own observations of the loading and unloading of contract stock at rodeos. The Committee was impressed with the professionalism demonstrated during these operations. Furthermore, the Committee detected no signs of stress, trauma or injuries to the stock.

3.68 Nevertheless, the Committee considers the need to safeguard the welfare of animals being transported to and from rodeos must be

acknowledged. In the Committee's view, the Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals - Road Transport of Livestock should serve as a minimum set of standards for stock contractors. The Committee hopes that, where appropriate, the Rodeo Associations will develop more specific standards to be applied by its members who transport rodeo stock.

3.69 The Committee affirms the commonsense approach that only fit, compatible stock be transported, that the vehicles used should be soundly constructed and free of design features likely to cause injury, that there be adequate rest periods over long journeys and that only responsible drivers, knowledgeable in the handling of rodeo stock should be employed.

### Yarding

3.70 Injuries to rodeo stock can be minimised if yards and chutes are designed and constructed properly.

3.71 Yards may be wood or steel pipe based constructions. Miss Harmer, an inspector with RSPCA (NSW), told the Committee that wooden yards have advantages. She stated:

They are easy to pull apart if an animal is stuck. I have seen animals stuck, you can cut the wire and the wood. At Grafton rodeo eight years ago, I actually saw a chain saw being used to get a horse out of a yard. In steel yards there is a real problem.<sup>69</sup>

3.72 Miss Harmer, however, added that yards using a combination of wood and steel, if properly constructed, did not pose any particular problems.<sup>70</sup>

3.73 The Australian Professional Rodeo Association maintains that particular attention is given to the design of chutes in order to minimise injuries to animals. The Association advised the Committee that chutes should be small enough to prevent the penned animal from turning around. The walls of the chute should be high enough to discourage an animal from rearing over the sides. The lower section of the chute wall is solid so that the animal cannot get its legs caught. The slatted openings

of the upper walls are also small enough to ensure that the animal's legs are not able to be caught in the wall openings.<sup>71</sup>

3.74 During inspections of rodeo facilities at the National Rodeo Championships in Tamworth and at the Sydney Royal Easter Show, the Committee observed that the yards were adequate and that the movement of stock through the yards and chutes did not appear to pose any risk of injury to the animals. The Committee also noted that the new portable chutes at the Sydney Showground extend across the racetrack area, obviating the need for stock to traverse this area.

#### Conclusion

3.75 The Committee recognises that properly designed and constructed yarding facilities and chutes will reduce the incidence of injuries to stock.

#### Arena Surfaces

3.76 Several contributors to the inquiry noted that the quality of the arena surface is important when considering the welfare of animals in rodeo events.

3.77 Ideally, arena surfaces should be ploughed and worked to a minimum depth of 8 centimetres to provide a softer and more solid footing for rodeo stock.<sup>72</sup> Surfaces may also be formed from sand or loam. Hard surfaces, such as uncovered trotting tracks or grass surfaces are unsuitable.<sup>73</sup> Large arenas, such as showgrounds or sporting grounds, also pose risks for stock because the rodeo area is not usually ploughed. Mr Gill, a member of APRA, told the Committee that a rodeo was cancelled at Harold Park in Sydney because the surface area had not been loosened sufficiently. This posed an unacceptable risk to the welfare of the animals.<sup>74</sup>

3.78 Rain or other adverse weather conditions may also make surfaces unsuitable for rodeo events. This was the case when the Committee inspected the National Championships in Tamworth.

3.79 The Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association and the Australian Professional Rodeo Association, suggested that more attention needs to be given to improving arena surfaces.<sup>75</sup> Mr Gill of APRA stated:

I would say some of the surfaces are getting too loose. They are starting to put too much sand in them and I have had discussions on that. You can have horses pull a muscle if the sand is too loose.<sup>76</sup>

3.80 The Committee understands that the Rodeo Associations are pursuing these matters. For example, ABCRA is encouraging rodeo committees to reduce the size of the arenas used for rodeos and to ensure that the surfaces are soft.<sup>77</sup> APRA also provides an advisory service to each of its affiliates, including a complete kit of arena plans and specifications to suit the type of surface used by the respective committees.<sup>78</sup>

### Conclusions

3.81 The Committee welcomes the initiatives of Rodeo Associations to ensure that the surfaces of arenas used for rodeos do not pose risks to the welfare of animals. In particular, the Committee encourages the development of the rodeo advisory program, including information on arena surfaces.

### Horses Used in Events other than Bucking

3.82 Horses are ridden by competitors involved in calf roping and steer wrestling. Evidence presented to the Committee by animal welfare organisations indicate that there are fewer animal welfare problems with horses used in these events. RSPCA (NSW) noted that generally the Society "reports few problems with [these] horses... as they are valuable and highly trained animals".<sup>79</sup> ANZFAS noted that horses involved in these events must be trained to stop on their hocks and rein back on the rope and although these activities are "unnatural movements ... save for the nervous horse, are not as painful as the experiences of the bucking horse".<sup>80</sup>

3.83 Horses are also ridden in ladies events, including barrel racing. This event involves competitors negotiating a series of barrels which are placed around an arena. The Committee viewed this event at the Tamworth rodeo and observed an excessive use of the whip. ANZFAS notes that while this event need not be cruel *per se*, the event often involves excessive spurring and may lead to severe stress on a horse's joints.<sup>81</sup>



## Conclusions

3.84 On the basis of the evidence received, the Committee considers that there are no serious animal welfare implications for horses used in calf roping and steer wrestling events. The Committee does, however, consider that barrel racing may pose an animal welfare problem.

## Other Animals

3.85 Several rodeo events involve animals other than horses. These include calf roping and steer wrestling. Concerns were expressed during the inquiry about the welfare of animals involved in these events. The Committee addresses these concerns in the following section.

### Calf Roping

3.86 The practice of calf roping was criticised consistently during the inquiry. Most animal welfare groups, including those that favoured other rodeo events, expressed strong concerns about calf roping.<sup>82</sup> Representatives of some organisations, including ANZFAS, RSPCA Australia and RSPCA (NSW) consider that this event should be banned.<sup>83</sup> The Committee was advised that since 1989 calf roping has been banned in Rhode Island in the United States and that strict conditions apply to this event in Victoria.<sup>84</sup>

3.87 In evidence to the Committee, ANZFAS stated that calf roping often results in severe injuries to the animals. These injuries include broken legs, general injuries to the neck structure, severe bruising and haemorrhaging. According to the Federation, some of these injuries may result in death or may be so serious the animal has to be destroyed. According to ANZFAS, animals invariably are left in a terrified and distressed state following this event.<sup>85</sup>

3.88 Evidence from the Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals, was in general agreement with the views presented by ANZFAS. Dr Gollan, appearing on behalf of AFWA, stated:

I think calf roping is one of the more dangerous events. In some cases it is horrific, with the calf running to the end of the rope and flipping over. Only fools would suggest that the calves enjoy that.<sup>86</sup>

3.89 The Committee was told that the adverse animal welfare aspects of calf roping can be alleviated by roping devices and weight limits on calves. These are discussed below.

### *Roping Devices*

3.90 Jerking down of calves refers to the 180° flipping over of a calf onto its back when roped. Although this practice is prohibited under the rules of the Rodeo Associations<sup>87</sup> and under the NSW Code of Practice, the Committee was told that the practice still occurs.<sup>88</sup>

3.91 According to the Rodeo Associations, abrupt stopping and jerking down of calves has been reduced or eliminated by the introduction of roping devices. The Committee heard evidence on two devices that are used in calf roping. Mr Button of the Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, described one of the roping devices in the following terms:

It is a metal device and there are two rollers. With calf roping the end of the rope is tied to the horn of the saddle. At least six foot of that rope has to be behind the roller, which is also attached to the horn of the saddle. ... A tension is put on the rollers to suit the horse and also the weight of the calf, so that when the calf is roped and the rope goes out all the slack is pulled through in front of the rollers. It then goes slower like a break.<sup>89</sup>

3.92 Another device used is a round steel device with three bars. The rope is threaded through the bars. This slows the calf down in an action similar to a tension on the reel of a casting rod.<sup>90</sup>

3.93 Evidence suggests that roping devices have improved the welfare of calves involved in the event. For example, Miss Chave of the New South Wales Department of Local Government, observed that the use of roping devices have "improved the situation".<sup>91</sup> Several representatives of Rodeo Associations, including Mr Gill of APRA, also expressed the view that the roping devices are working satisfactorily.<sup>92</sup>

3.94 Other witnesses, however, expressed reservations about the capacity of roping devices to diminish or eliminate the whiplash effect on calves. Dr Auty, a member of ANZFAS, stated:

The running rope has always been a more gentle method even for roping steers. But it still does not take away from the fact that this is a speed event. The calf is released ... and it takes off as fast as it can go, as calves do, and it is brought to a sudden stop. Whether you reduce that deceleration from BMW-type brakes to Holden-type brakes is inconsequential. The cruelty is still there.<sup>93</sup>

3.95 Miss Harmer of RSPCA (NSW) expressed a similar view. She advised the Committee that the tension device has "improved calf roping to a degree but it certainly has not eliminated the abrupt stopping of calves".<sup>94</sup>

### *Weight Limits*

3.96 It was also suggested to the Committee that injuries in calf roping events could be avoided if calves of a particular weight are used. Regulations in New South Wales and Victoria prescribe weight limits for calves used in rodeos.

3.97 Currently, in Victoria, all animals, including calves for rodeo events must weigh more than 200 kilograms. In New South Wales, the minimum weight for calves in calf roping events is 100 kilograms. APRA rules also provide for a minimum weight of 90 kilograms.<sup>95</sup>

3.98 The Committee noted comments on the weight limits established by New South Wales. For example, Dr Wirth, President of RSPCA Australia, maintains that the minimum weight in New South Wales is "far too light". He added:

Frankly, there is no body weight you can enact that will stop the cruelty associated with calf roping.<sup>96</sup>

3.99 Miss Harmer, an animal welfare inspector with RSPCA (NSW), told the Committee that calf weights in New South Wales could be "slightly heavier".<sup>97</sup> She also observed, however, that there are problems associated with using heavy calves for roping events. She explained:

Just the sheer weight of the animals causes bigger problems. They hit the end of the rope a lot harder. It is not only very detrimental to the calves; it is also very detrimental to the

horses. That aside, there is the sheer physics of a calf hitting a rope. Also riders tend to rope bigger calves a lot harder. They have the problem of throwing the calves, so they try to knock as much wind out of them as they can. That is why there is intentional jerking down. This knocks the wind out of the animal. That ceased once jerking down became a real problem.<sup>98</sup>

3.100 If weight is the determining factor for use of calves in roping events, the associated issue of the age of calves becomes relevant. In particular, the Committee was concerned that with some breeds of cattle it may be possible for calves as young as two or three months to meet the minimum weight requirements. These animals could well be more prone to injury because of their less developed bone structure.<sup>99</sup>

3.101 The Committee questioned witnesses whether a minimum age limit should be set for calves used in rodeo events. Some witnesses argued that age is not a practical criteria for protecting the welfare of animals in these events.<sup>100</sup> In this regard, Dr Wirth of RSPCA Australia, observed that it is difficult to determine accurately the age of cattle.<sup>101</sup> Miss Harmer of RSPCA (NSW), also suggested that weight is "probably the only criteria" that is practical.<sup>102</sup>

3.102 The Committee received evidence that the current weight limits established in Victoria are adequate and effective. For example, Dr Colin Bassett, President of the Australian Equine Veterinary Association, made the following statement:

At 200 kilos I think they still have got enough age. The thing is, of course, that the riders are not very keen on them because a 200 kilogram animal is pretty hard to stop. An animal with 200 kilos has got a fair bit of momentum and so that gives it the protection.<sup>103</sup>

3.103 Mr Vivers of ABCRA advised the Committee that calves will be more difficult to obtain if weight and age limits are imposed.<sup>104</sup>

### *Conclusions*

3.104 The Committee is of the view that there are serious implications for the welfare of calves used in roping events at rodeos. The Committee

cannot ignore the fact that Victoria, one of the three States with regulatory arrangements for rodeos, has put in place strict conditions for calf roping. Additionally, the Committee finds it significant that animal welfare organisations, including those that support other rodeo events, have serious reservations about calf roping.

3.105 Although roping devices may reduce abrupt stopping and jerking down of calves, the Committee is not convinced that these devices eliminate problems associated with roping of calves.

3.106 The Committee is also concerned that weight limitations prescribed in the New South Wales Code of Practice and the Rules of the Australian Professional Rodeo Association are too light. Yet the Committee finds the evidence on the possible benefits of slightly heavier weight limitations inconsistent and in some cases conflicting. Nevertheless, the Committee considers that the conditions applying to calf roping in Victoria go a long way to safeguard the welfare of the animals. The Committee expects that any injuries and/or fatalities resulting from calf roping will be included in reports recommended in paragraph 1.33. These injuries and fatalities should be monitored and, if necessary, further restrictions should be introduced.

*3.107 The Committee recommends that State and Territory Governments introduce weight limitations, similar to those that apply in Victoria to animals used in rodeos and, in particular, calves.*

#### *Reservations*

3.108 Senators Burns and Bell accept that the Committee's conclusion on calf roping will improve the welfare of animals in these events. Nevertheless, the Senators consider that calf roping should be banned from rodeo events as weight limitations or improved roping devices do not overcome the inherent animal welfare problems associated with this event.

#### Steer Wrestling

3.109 Some welfare problems were identified with steer wrestling. ANZFAS argued that because of the nature of this event, steer wrestling should be banned.<sup>105</sup> The Federation argued that cattle used in this event often suffer from broken and splintered horns. In addition, the

twisting of the neck often causes pain and may result in spinal injuries.<sup>106</sup> ANZFAS noted that this event has been banned in Texas because of the danger to the steer.

3.110 Dr Gollan, a member of AFWA, however, argued the experience was not unduly stressful for cattle. He noted:

I think cattle which have been handled a little probably do not enjoy it, but are not unduly upset by it.<sup>107</sup>

3.111 Dr Gollan based this view on the animals' behaviour after the event when "virtually all of these animals, after they have been wrestled down, get up and trot away".<sup>108</sup>

### *Conclusion*

3.112 Although some animal welfare problems were expressed in relation to steer wrestling, the Committee did not receive sufficient evidence to draw conclusions in regard to this event.

## ENDNOTES

1. *Evidence*, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p. 157.
2. *ibid.*
3. *Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, p. 221.
4. *ibid.*, p. 218.
5. *ibid.*
6. *ibid.*
7. *Evidence*, Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, p. 106.
8. *ibid.*
9. *Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, p. 217; p. 221.
10. *ibid.*, p. 235.
11. *ibid.*, pp. 236-7.
12. *Evidence*, Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, p. 106.
13. *Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, p. 219.
14. *Evidence*, Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, p. 106.
15. *ibid.*, p. 104.
16. *Submission*, Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, (1984), p. 20.
17. *Evidence*, Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, pp. 106-107.
18. *Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, p. 221.

19. *ibid.*
20. *Evidence*, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p. 174.
21. *ibid.*
22. *ibid.*
23. *ibid.*, p. 159.
24. *Evidence*, Australian Equine Veterinary Association, p. 30.
25. *Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, p. 240.  
*Evidence*, Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals, p. 381.  
*Evidence*, New South Wales Animal Welfare Advisory Council, p. 303.
26. *Evidence*, Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals, p. 381.
27. *Evidence*, New South Wales Animal Welfare Advisory Council, p. 303.
28. *Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, pp. 188-89.  
*Submission*, Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, (1984), p. 20.
29. *Evidence*, Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, p. 104.
30. *Evidence*, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p. 159.
31. *Evidence*, New South Wales Department of Local Government, p. 303.
32. *Evidence*, Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, p. 104.
33. *Evidence*, RSPCA Australia, pp. 139-140.
34. *ibid.*, p. 140.
35. *Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, p. 223.



36. *Evidence*, Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, p. 105.
37. *New South Wales Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals Used in Rodeo Events, Clause 3.11.*
38. *Victorian Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 1986.*
39. *Evidence*, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p. 150.
40. *ibid.*, p. 159.
41. *Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, p. 224; p. 230.
42. *ibid.*, p. 222.
43. *Submission*, Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, (1984), p. 21.
44. *Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, p. 224.
45. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 345.
46. *ibid.*, p. 299.
47. *Evidence*, Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals, p. 381.
48. *ibid.*, pp. 381-2.
49. *New South Wales Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals Used in Rodeo Events, Clause 4.18.*
50. *Victorian Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 1986.*
51. Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, *Rule Book*, November 1990, p. 36.  
*Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, p. 193.
52. Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, *Rule Book*, November 1990, p. 33.  
*Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, p. 189.
53. *Evidence*, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p. 158.

54. *Evidence*, RSPCA Australia, p. 130.
55. *ibid.*
56. Personal communication with the Secretariat, 10 July 1991.
57. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 372.
58. *ibid.*, p. 371.
59. *Evidence*, Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals, p. 382.
60. *ibid.*, p. 399.
61. *ibid.*, p. 381.
62. *Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, pp. 223-4.
63. *ibid.*, pp. 191-2.
64. *ibid.*
65. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 317.
66. *ibid.*, p. 355.
67. *ibid.*
68. *Evidence*, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p. 160.
69. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 370.
70. *ibid.*
71. *Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, p. 193.
72. *ibid.*, p. 192.
73. *Submission*, Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, (1984), p. 30.
74. *Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, p. 227.
75. *ibid.*  
Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, *Rule Book*, November 1990, p. 30.

76. *Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, p. 227.
77. *Submission*, Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, (1984), p. 30.
78. *Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, p. 192.
79. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 323.
80. *Evidence*, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p. 157.
81. *ibid.*, p. 158.
82. *Evidence*, Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals, p. 396.
83. *Evidence*, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p. 150.  
*Evidence*, RSPCA Australia, p. 129.  
*Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 351.
84. *Evidence*, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p. 156.
85. *ibid.*
86. *Evidence*, Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals, p. 396.
87. *Evidence*, National Rodeo Association, p. 494.
88. *Evidence*, New South Wales Animal Welfare Advisory Council, p. 302.
89. *Evidence*, Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, p. 100.
90. *ibid.*
91. *Evidence*, New South Wales Department of Local Government, p. 302.
92. *Evidence*, Australian Professional Rodeo Association, p. 238.
93. *Evidence*, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, pp. 175-6.

94. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 352.
95. *Evidence*, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p. 155.
96. *Evidence*, RSPCA Australia, p. 138.
97. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 353.
98. *ibid.*
99. *Evidence*, Australian Equine Veterinary Association, p. 32.  
*Evidence*, Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, p. 102.
100. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 353.
101. *Evidence*, RSPCA Australia, p. 139.
102. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 354.
103. *Evidence*, Australian Equine Veterinary Association, p. 32.
104. *Evidence*, Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association, pp. 102-3.
105. *Evidence*, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p. 157.
106. *ibid.*
107. *Evidence*, Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals, p. 395.
108. *ibid.*, p. 396.