

EQUINE WELFARE - SHOW EVENTS

CHAPTER 6

SHOW EVENTS

Introduction

6.1 Show societies provide a venue for the conduct of many competitive equine events. These events include led stud classes, hack and riding events, showjumping and, to a lesser extent, dressage, rodeo and campdrafting competitions.

6.2 All exhibitors of animals involved with competition, display or demonstration are subject to the rules and regulations of their respective governing bodies. For example, showjumping and dressage events at shows are governed by the rules of the Equestrian Federation of Australia, rodeo and campdrafting by the rules of the Rodeo Associations and hack-riding, harness classes and led-classes by the regulations of their respective governing bodies.¹

Views on Shows

6.3 The Committee is in agreement with the views expressed by both animal welfare organisations and show societies that there are no major animal welfare problems with equine events at shows.

6.4 For example, the show societies argue that they maintain a high level of supervision and control to ensure that animal welfare concerns are adequately addressed. The Royal National Capital Agricultural Society (RNCAS), argued that "no extra controls are considered necessary to maintain the existing level of animal welfare".² The Society noted:

From general experience in the conduct of Agricultural Shows, and observation by Officers of the RNCAS, it can be stated that animals presented during the Royal Canberra Show are the healthiest, most cared for and contented animals that can be found.³

6.5 The animal welfare organisations also did not raise major animal welfare issues in relation to the conduct of equine events at shows. RSPCA Australia stated that the Society has "no objection in principle" to

the use of horses in such events as long as no action by competitors led to instances of cruelty.⁴

6.6 Reflecting the general views of animal welfare organisations, RSPCA (NSW) stated:

The RSPCA has no first-hand experience of regularly occurring animal welfare problems with horses at shows.⁵

Animal Welfare Concerns

6.7 While the Committee accepts the views noted above, it considers that the evidence on some animal welfare matters should be reviewed briefly for the public record. These relate to drug use, showjumping, the enforcement of animal welfare rules and the use of chains on horses.

Drug Use

6.8 The Committee received some evidence that prohibited drugs are used at shows. Mr Samuel Johnston, Committee Member of the Agricultural Societies Council of New South Wales, stated:

I would be naive, having spent a lifetime in the show industry and in rings as a ringmaster, if I said that drugs are not being used. As a layman you can see them but you cannot do anything about them.⁶

6.9 Dr Hugh Wirth, President of RSPCA Australia, explained that in the past the high level of prohibited drug use at shows was a "scandal".⁷ He noted that when the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria first started drug testing there were many positive swabs.⁸

6.10 The Committee was told the main drugs used at shows are tranquillisers and performance enhancing drugs.⁹

Drug Testing

6.11 Mr Hugh Duncan, Chief Executive Officer of the Royal National Capital Agricultural Society, told the Committee that his Society does not test extensively for drugs. He noted:

We do it on an ad hoc basis, and with the two or three tests that we have done over the shows we have not shown up anything. But we are well aware that drugs are used in the horse world.¹⁰

6.12 The Agricultural Societies Council of NSW stated that it is attempting to discourage prohibited drug use by a program of random testing or swabbing. This is being implemented through show groups in the State.¹¹

6.13 Mr Johnston of the Agricultural Societies Council noted that the high cost of swabbing is a problem for show societies. He commented that the Council is looking at ways to best implement the drug testing policy at local shows. He stated:

Again, our problem is that we are dealing with show societies running in a town of a population of 300 to 500, and 70 per cent of our shows have a gate of under 10,000. So you are looking at a lot of horses appearing at a place where there is a lack of capital organisation.¹²

6.14 Mr Duncan noted that an additional problem associated with drug testing is the legal situation. He explained:

One of the problems that has bugged both Sydney and Melbourne is the legal side. They have been sued on a number of occasions. They have volunteered, on all of the Royals' behalf, to research ways to tighten this side of it up. We are conscious of it, and we aim to stop it; it is just a matter of now ensuring that the societies do not find themselves in a legal hassle.¹³

6.15 Dr Wirth of RSPCA Australia told the Committee that where drug testing programs are undertaken they are effective. He cited as an example the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria's success in its drug testing program. He explained:

We had three prosecutions in the 1989 show that were very successfully upheld, and last year we tested over 80 horses and we got only a trace of a 'probable', which we could never prove what it was. Only one tested that way out of 80 horses.

That meant that in all those arena events at that Royal Agricultural Show, as far as we were concerned, the horses were competing on their merits.¹⁴

Banning of Competitors

6.16 The Committee received evidence from the Agricultural Societies Council of New South Wales that the Society does not have the authority to ban competitors on a State-wide basis for using prohibited substances.

6.17 Mr Johnston conceded that the system was "inefficient".¹⁵ He added:

I agree this is a major problem within our system at this stage. Years ago it was not. Twenty years ago if we banned a competitor on, for argument's sake, Conoble Showground, we then informed the local group and informed the neighbouring shows, if we felt it serious enough. We gave the other shows the option of banning that competitor. If we felt it was serious enough, we then brought it back to the Agricultural Societies Council.¹⁶

6.18 Mr Johnston noted that show societies need legal authority to enforce their rulings in this regard.¹⁷

Conclusions

6.19 The Committee considers that all horses at equine events at shows should compete free of prohibited drugs. The Committee understands that only a small number of drug tests are undertaken at present compared with the number of horses competing. The Committee encourages show societies to increase their random testing for drugs at these events. The Committee also considers that where a show society bans a competitor for prohibited drug use that ban should be applied by other shows.

Showjumping

6.20 Showjumping at agricultural shows is governed by the Equestrian Federation of Australia through the area steward scheme. Under this

scheme EFA officials are present at official events. These officials assist the show societies in the running of the events, watch for any maltreatment of horses and either report or charge offenders through EFA. Most show societies also use EFA recommended judges and course designers.

6.21 The Committee questioned several witnesses about the construction of showjumping courses.

6.22 Mr Johnston of the Agricultural Societies Council of New South Wales told the Committee that course builders construct courses in a proper and professional manner and while the style of course may vary, its object is to test the horse in a proper way without endangering its welfare.¹⁸ Mr Johnston also told the Committee that events are cancelled if weather or other conditions are considered unsafe for the horses.¹⁹

6.23 Mr Duncan of the Royal National Capital Agricultural Society also noted that "with the updating of jumps, there is very little cruelty if a jump is knocked down".²⁰ He noted that the Society had recently installed collapsible-type jumps, designed so that if knocked down they fall flat. The jumps also have no projections that can injure a horse.²¹ He also told the Committee that there had been no reported injuries in showjumping events at the Royal Canberra Show in all the time he had been Director.²²

Rapping and other Practices

6.24 The Committee directed questions to witnesses on rapping, hypersensitisation and other unacceptable practices.

6.25 Rapping refers to the use of certain artificial techniques to induce a horse to jump higher or more carefully. Rapping may involve practices such as hitting the legs of a horse manually or by deliberately causing the horse to hit objects such as fences that have been built too large or too wide.²³

6.26 Dr Patricia Ellis, appearing on behalf of the Australian Equine Veterinary Association, elaborated on the practices involved in rapping in the following terms:

It is used in showjumping to obtain better performance out of horses and it can involve a variety of methods basically designed to inflict pain on the horse as it goes over the jump to lift its legs higher and not knock jumps in the future. It can be a light cane held in front of the jump; it can be a metal bar; it can even have spikes on it. Sometimes it is held by two people and deliberately lifted as the animal approaches the jump.²⁴

6.27 Dr Ellis confirmed that rapping may also involve putting sharp objects under the leg bandages of a horse in order to condition it to jump higher. This practice is also known as hypersensitisation. The Committee also understands that other unacceptable practices include the application of creams that will burn. Ms Pamela Walker, Secretary-General of the Equestrian Federation of Australia, told the Committee that this has occurred in Australia and that procedures have been established to discourage the practice. She stated:

As part of the veterinary inspection for top level show jumping competitions they actually make them take the bandages off so that they can ensure that there is nothing underneath the bandages.²⁵

6.28 The Rules of the Federation prohibit the practice of rapping. In a case of rapping, the competitor and the horse concerned is "disqualified from all competition for the succeeding 24 hours". Authorities may also take further action if deemed appropriate to the particular circumstances.²⁶

6.29 According to the Australian Equine Veterinary Association, the practice of rapping is not widespread in Australia.²⁷ Ms Walker, representing the Equestrian Federation, confirmed that there were few reported cases of rapping in this country.²⁸

6.30 Witnesses, however, conceded that these practices may be used in training where it is difficult to detect and prevent.²⁹ Ms Walker indicated that the Equestrian Federation of Australia only has jurisdiction over competitors on showgrounds and that it is impossible to legislate against what people do on their private properties.

6.31 Dr Colin Basset, President of AEVA, expressed a similar view. He told the Committee that if these practices occur during training all that can be done is to "educate the industry" that they are unacceptable.³⁰ Ms Walker stressed that only a "small percentage" are involved in these unacceptable training practices.³¹

Conclusions

6.32 The Committee considers that rapping and other such practices are unacceptable. The Committee holds the strong view that the Equestrian Federation of Australia should make every effort to eliminate these practices from competition and training.

Other Issues

6.33 The Committee wishes to comment on two other issues which were raised in evidence during the inquiry. These issues are the enforcement of animal welfare rules and the use of chains on horses.

Enforcement of Animal Welfare Rules

6.34 An issue raised during the inquiry was the adequacy of show societies' rules regarding animal welfare matters. The RNCAS in its submission noted that the Society intended to give greater emphasis to the rule applying to mistreatment of animals presented at the show. Penalties are being considered against any person in breach of the rule.³²

6.35 Mr Duncan of RNCAS explained the reasons for this action. He stated:

I do not think in the past our views were properly expressed in the penalties so whilst everybody had no doubt that they would be dealt with, I do not think that our by-laws reflected that concern.³³

6.36 The Committee is of the view that the effective implementation of show societies' rules on animal welfare requires the consistent application of appropriate penalties.

Use of Chains

6.37 RSPCA (NSW) noted in its submission that extremely heavy chains are often left on carriage horses for extended periods to encourage a high-stepping gait.³⁴

6.38 The Committee questioned Miss Rosemary Harmer, a Regional Inspector with RSPCA (NSW), regarding this evidence. She told the Committee that the allegation was based on anecdotal evidence and conceded that a judgement on this matter was subjective and that "what one person will call a heavy chain another will call light, depending on your perspective."³⁵ Miss Harmer added that the heaviness or lightness of the chains also depends on the size of the horse and the length of time the horse has to bear it.³⁶

6.39 The Committee inspected examples of these chains on horses at the Sydney Royal Easter Show and observed that the chains used were light chains. The Committee did not consider they posed an animal welfare problem. This is not to say that heavier chains are not used. Such a practice is unacceptable.

ENDNOTES

1. *Evidence*, Agricultural Societies Council of New South Wales, p. 50.
2. *Evidence*, Royal National Capital Agricultural Society, p. 251.
3. *ibid.*
4. *Evidence*, RSPCA Australia, pp. 126-7.
5. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 328.
6. *Evidence*, Agricultural Societies Council of New South Wales, p. 52.
7. *Evidence*, RSPCA Australia, p. 135.
8. *ibid.*
9. *Evidence*, Agricultural Societies Council of New South Wales, p. 53.
10. *Evidence*, Royal National Capital Agricultural Society, p. 254.
11. *Evidence*, Agricultural Societies Council of New South Wales, p. 52.
12. *ibid.*
13. *Evidence*, Royal National Capital Agricultural Society, p. 254.
14. *Evidence*, RSPCA Australia, p. 135.
15. *Evidence*, Agricultural Societies Council of New South Wales, p. 58.
16. *ibid.*, p. 60.
17. *ibid.*
18. *ibid.*, p. 62.
19. *ibid.*, p. 63.
20. *Evidence*, Royal National Capital Agricultural Society, p. 253.
21. *ibid.*, pp. 253-4.
22. *ibid.*, pp. 259.

23. Equestrian Federation of Australia, *Rules for Showjumping Events*, July 1989, p. 39.
24. *Evidence*, Australian Equine Veterinary Association, p. 18.
25. *Evidence*, Equestrian Federation of Australia, p. 432.
26. Equestrian Federation of Australia, *Rules for Showjumping Events*, July 1989, p. 40.
27. *Evidence*, Australian Equine Veterinary Association, p. 8.
28. *Evidence*, Equestrian Federation of Australia, p. 431.
29. *ibid.*, p. 432.
30. *Evidence*, Australian Equine Veterinary Association, pp. 18-19.
31. *Evidence*, Equestrian Federation of Australia, p. 432.
32. *Evidence*, Royal National Capital Agricultural Society, p. 249.
33. *ibid.*, p. 258.
34. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 329.
35. *ibid.*, p. 356; p. 358.
36. *ibid.*, p. 356.