

Submission
No 57

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP ROSEHILL RACECOURSE

Organisation: RSPCA NSW

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**INQUIRY INTO THE PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP ROSEHILL RACECOURSE
RSPCA NSW SUBMISSION**

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The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals New South Wales (RSPCA NSW) is dedicated to improving the welfare of animals across the state. We appreciate the opportunity to make this submission to the Select Committee on the Proposal to Develop Rosehill Racecourse.

The RSPCA's history in Australia dates back to 1871, when a public meeting to discuss the ill-treatment of horses in Victoria led to the formation of Australia's first Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Following the establishment of a Society in Victoria, other states soon followed.

Our concerns are centred on the proposal's impact on animal welfare, particularly in the racing industry. We advocate for a portion of the significant funds generated by this development to be allocated to animal welfare outcomes, including horse rehoming programs and the application of strict animal welfare design guidelines for any new track. The proposal to develop Rosehill Racecourse has generated significant public interest.

The RSPCA NSW's submission focuses on the following key areas:

1. Animal welfare concerns related to the racing industry.
2. A portion of the development funds being used to support animal welfare initiatives.
3. Incorporating animal welfare design guidelines and approvals as part of developing the new racecourse.

1. Animal Welfare Concerns in the Racing Industry

Thoroughbred horse racing poses several significant animal welfare issues, spanning the entire lifecycle of the horses involved. These issues include oversupply and wastage, the use of painful devices, and an increased risk of injury and death.

1.1 Oversupply and Wastage

Thousands of horses are bred by the racing industry every year, with many never even making it to the racetrack. Horses may leave the industry at any stage of their lives, from foal right through to post career (typically only lasts 2-3 short years), and these horses are labelled as 'wastage' as they are considered excess to industry requirements. The fate of thousands of horses leaving the industry every year raises serious concerns for their welfare, with many sold on again and again with continuing concerns that some are sent to slaughter to be used for pet food, despite requirements by the NSW racing industry that this does not occur. Once they leave the industry, except for those relatively small numbers who are taken into industry rehoming programs, there is virtually no tracking of how they are cared for or what happens to them. Information on the exact

destination and number of horses leaving the racing industry is unknown due to a lack of publicly available data.

The Thoroughbred Aftercare Welfare Working Group Report is a pivotal document that provides over 40 recommendations to help improve outcomes for horses leaving the racing industry (TAWWG 2021). The Report took over 18 months to prepare and is the most comprehensive animal welfare document produced by and for thoroughbred racing in Australia. An independent panel, the TAWWG, was formed consisting of four members and chaired by veterinarian and former Victorian premier Denis Napthine. Funding was provided by AgriFutures, Tabcorp, Sportsbet, the Australian Trainers' Association, the Australian Jockeys' Association, the Victoria Racing Club, the Brisbane Turf Club, and Thoroughbred Breeders Australia. The following key recommendation from the TAWWG Report highlights the importance of the industry addressing the issue of breeding to enable appropriate rehoming of all racehorses who exit the industry.

Recommendation 24: As a priority, Racing Australia should work with industry stakeholders to develop a well-researched, medium- to long-term sustainable national thoroughbred breeding and racing plan. This should aim to align the size of the foal crop with the current and future requirements of the racing industry, and of the export and non-racing thoroughbred markets, while providing appropriately for the aftercare needs of all horses the industry produces.

To date, there is no evidence of any racing jurisdiction establishing a plan to implement any of these recommendations. This is extremely disappointing, given that the racing industry initiated and facilitated the work. Developing an action plan underpinned by this report would greatly assist the racing industry to effectively address the most pressing and important issue affecting current and future social license – clearly demonstrating that every horse born to race has a good life for their whole life.

1.2 Painful Devices

Whips are routinely used in horse racing, and they inflict pain, localised trauma and tissue damage. In the last 100 metres of a race, there is no limit to how many times a horse can be whipped, even though this is when they are most fatigued and have the least capacity to respond. There's no evidence that whipping a horse improves its performance, which makes using these devices and the suffering they cause completely unjustifiable (see RSPCA Information paper: The use of whips in Thoroughbred racing).

Tongue ties and spurs are two common types of equipment used on racehorses that cause discomfort and pain. Tongue ties are large leather/rubber or lycra/neoprene bands wrapped tightly around the horse's tongue and tied to their lower jaw to keep their tongue from moving during a race. They can lead to lacerations, swelling and bruising of the tongue (Franklin & McGreevy, 2018). A recent study questions the effectiveness of using tongue ties (Barton et al. 2022), thereby challenging the justification for their use, especially as they cause pain and discomfort, resulting in stress responses (Latimer-Marsh et al. 2017).

1.3 Increased Risk of Injury and Death

Racehorses are at risk of harm during races, training and trials with the main types of injuries involving muscle, bones, tendons and ligaments. Serious injuries such as fractures and ruptured ligaments or tendons that cause pain or distress and cannot be treated should result in immediate euthanasia. Racehorses may also die suddenly during or after a race, which may be due to heart failure or other causes. They may also suffer from the condition known as Exercise Induced Pulmonary Haemorrhage (EIPH), where bleeding into the lungs occurs. This has been related to over-exertion, where horses may be pushed too hard to win.

Two studies highlight the risks associated with excessively rigorous training programs, including high speed and long distances. One study surveyed 66 Victorian racehorse trainers and found that more than half employed training programs involving high volumes of galloping, which exceeded the reported risk levels for muscle and bone injuries [Morris-West et al. 2019]. The other study found that the risk of muscle and bone injuries increased as the total distance of high-speed exercise (training and racing combined) increased [Crawford et al. 2020].

A study of Australian racing thoroughbreds found a very high prevalence of bone injury and fatigue, especially in older horses with a long history of racing and training [[Bani Hassan et al. 2017](#)]. The authors concluded that this evidence suggests that horses require longer rest periods than what is currently practised in the racing industry to allow bone healing and recovery.

2. Allocation of Development Funds for Animal Welfare

Given the substantial financial gains expected from the development of Rosehill Racecourse, estimated between \$5 billion and \$10 billion, a portion of these funds must be directed towards animal welfare initiatives. We propose the following measures:

2.1 Horse Rehoming Programs

A significant portion of the funds should be allocated to establish and support comprehensive horse rehoming programs. These programs would provide retired racehorses with suitable homes post-racing, ensuring their welfare beyond their racing careers. For many horses the most suitable homes are retirement to paddock. This initiative aligns with the RSPCA's advocacy for responsible breeding practices and lifetime care for racehorses.

2.2 Funding for Welfare Research and Monitoring

Investing in research to develop better welfare practices and monitoring systems within the racing industry is crucial. This includes tracking horses from birth to death, improving recovery regimes when injured, and ensuring transparency and accountability in their care. Such measures would help address the current lack of data and improve overall welfare standards.

2.3 Development of National Thoroughbred Horse Welfare Standards and Guidelines

The NSW racing industry and government have an opportunity to lead the development of national Thoroughbred Horse Welfare Standards and Guidelines. By developing such standards, the industry can not only demonstrate a strong commitment to animal welfare but also, through effective education and enforcement, achieve tangible improvements in racehorse welfare.

3. Animal Welfare Design Guidelines for New Track Development

Developing a new racecourse at another location presents an opportunity to set a benchmark for animal welfare standards. Where possible, these recommendations should also be considered for existing racetracks. We recommend incorporating strict animal welfare design guidelines into the planning and approval processes. These guidelines should cover the following aspects:

3.1 Safe Track Surfaces

The track surface design and maintenance should prioritise the horses' safety and well-being. This includes using materials and construction methods that minimise the risk of injuries.

3.2 Training and Rest Facilities

The racecourse should include state-of-the-art training and rest facilities that cater to the horses' physical and psychological needs. Adequate rest periods and safe training environments are essential for reducing stress and injury risks.

3.3 Veterinary Care

On-site veterinary care facilities should be mandatory, ensuring immediate and effective treatment for any injuries or health issues that arise during training or racing.

3.4 Regulation and Enforcement

Strict regulations governing the use of whips, tongue ties, spurs, and other devices should be enforced, with severe penalties for non-compliance. Continuous monitoring and regular inspections should be part of the operational framework to ensure adherence to welfare standards.

Summary

The RSPCA would like to see measures put in place to resolve the welfare issues inherent to the industry. While horse racing continues, first and foremost, there is no justification for whips, tongue ties or spurs in racing, and as they cause pain and stress to horses, their use should stop.

The RSPCA advocates strongly for the racing industry to adopt responsible breeding practices by reducing the number of racehorses bred, minimising the risk of injury, for every horse to be provided with a suitable home on retirement and methods in place to allow every racehorse to be traceable from birth to death. Whilst horse racing continues, the racing industry is responsible for caring for and providing for the horses they breed, and ensuring their welfare for their lifetime, not just during their racing career.

Conclusion

RSPCA NSW strongly believes that the proposed development of Rosehill Racecourse must include comprehensive measures to address the significant animal welfare issues associated with the racing industry. By allocating a portion of the substantial funds generated by this development towards animal welfare initiatives and incorporating stringent welfare design guidelines into the new track's planning, the NSW Government and racing industry can demonstrate a genuine commitment to improving the welfare of racehorses.

We urge the Select Committee to consider these recommendations and work towards creating a more humane and responsible racing industry. Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

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