

## HORSE WELFARE OFFICER POLICY (Voluntary Position)

### Introduction

Horse welfare is related to the general care and well-being of horses and is not limited to extreme cases of neglect. Event organisers need to be aware of the wider community expectations in relation to how horses are generally cared for and treated. It is important that event organisers consider the general well-being of horses when attending Australian Stock Horse events. Concerns in relation to horse welfare, includes:

- The physical, mental, social and physiological needs of horses
- Ground and weather conditions and infrastructure
- Horse tack, competition equipment and arena safety
- Horse feed, drinking water and exercise
- Horses are treated with respect and dignity at all times
- Horse organisational procedures and policies

The Society generally benefits from the appointment of Horse Welfare Officers and after event reports on welfare, including:

- Feedback by Horse Welfare Officers may improve future event management.
- Horse owners feel assured, knowing they are attending an event where the committee is interested in the welfare of their animals.
- Competitors and horse owners feel confident knowing that the Society has good practices in place and events will be safer as a result.

### Key Responsibilities

Horse Welfare Officers and the Organising Committee must be fully conversant with the Australian Horse Industry Council's Australian Animal Welfare Strategy and the Australian Horse Welfare Protocol as adopted by The Australian Stock Horse Society. The Australian Stock Horse Society is committed to ensuring that horses attending ASH events are afforded the appropriate care and attention, both during competition and rest.

#### **AUSTRALIAN HORSE INDUSTRY COUNCIL'S AUSTRALIAN HORSE WELFARE & WELL-BEING TOOLKIT:**

<http://www.horsecouncil.org.au/ahic/index.cfm/horse-welfare/australian-horse-welfare-well-being-toolkit/>

#### **AUSTRALIAN HORSE WELFARE PROTOCOL:**

[http://www.ashs.com.au/downloads/Horse\\_Welfare\\_Protocol.pdf](http://www.ashs.com.au/downloads/Horse_Welfare_Protocol.pdf)

Horse Welfare Officers will be responsible for the welfare of all horses on the grounds and/or participating in an event. During the event, the Horse Welfare Officers should be regularly over viewing the general care of horses on the grounds and/or competing in an event or activity.

Horse Welfare Officers will be initially required to discuss and report any horse welfare concerns with ASH Officials of the committee conducting the event. After discussion with the committee, the Horse Welfare Officer may need to liaise with owners and/or riders in a diplomatic way to ensure that perceived issues are resolved. Any discussed or reported issues needs to be documented on a horse welfare report, outlining the issue and resolution, then submit the form to the Society's Head Office within 14 days of the event.

In the event of a disease outbreak or other emergency that may affect horses, the Horse Welfare Officer would be expected to work in coordination with the relevant officials to manage the emergency.

Welfare should be a primary consideration for all ASH participants and ASH event organisers. At competition or training days, a Horse Welfare Officer may be required to publically address participants on relevant horse health and welfare issues in conjunction with a Branch Official.

## Appointment of Horse Welfare Officers

When planning any event organised by a Branch, Management Council or the Society, the organising committee must include the appointment of a person or persons as a Horse Welfare Officer. At all times during the event, a Horse Welfare Officer should be in attendance at the grounds. One person may be responsible for the role, or a group of persons can be rostered for duty at various times, in which case, a signed Horse Welfare Duty Register of attendance and times attending should be recorded by the organising committee.

## Role of Horse Welfare Officers

Whether horses are in the competition ring, in warm up areas outside the ring, tethered or tied to trucks or floats, accommodated in yards or stables, the Society requires horses to be treated in a humanely manner, in line with good horsemanship practices.

The person elected as a Horse Welfare Officer should be a very well respected horse person whose knowledge will be readily sought by fellow members. They should be good communicators who can liaise with members in relation to what needs to be done to improve the welfare of their horse. The horse welfare officer should always set a good example in relation to horse welfare with their own horses.

The welfare of horses must not be unreasonably compromised in any way. Any practices which are not considered humane or good horsemanship should not be tolerated. In which case, the Horse Welfare Officer and a Branch Official need to address the issue on the day. Good horsemanship and/or humane treatment may include:

- **Unreasonable Treatment** - Riding and/or handling a horse in such a way, which unreasonably influence the normal behaviour of horses, should not be used. Improper, unnecessary or excessive use of a whip, excessive spurring forcefully jerking and/or fiery actions that cause a horse to be injured or bleed would be considered to be unreasonable. Horses should be limited to activities which are suited to their physical capabilities and level of training.
- **Safe Travel** - The risk of injury or disease should be minimised when horses are transported. Vehicles should be safe, clean, well ventilated, regularly maintained and disinfected. During long journeys, rest periods should be carefully planned and horses allowed regular rest periods and access to water. Respiratory problems can often be reduced if horses are able to lower their heads to ground level during rest periods. It is recommended periods of travel should not exceed 4 hours without a rest period where horses are unloaded and allowed to lower their heads and have access to water.
- **Healthy Condition** - Horses should be suitably conditioned and healthy before entering a competition arena. Owners should ensure that Veterinary inspections are undertaken in the event of any horse showing signs of disease, acute lameness or other serious ailment. Horses with severe or recurrent clinical conditions should, on veterinary advice, be temporarily or permanently excluded from competition. Horse hooves should be suitably trimmed and/or shoes fitted and should be designed to minimise the risk of injury.
- **Broodmares** - Mares within the last six weeks of pregnancy should not be competing in strenuous events. Mares with a foal under 45days should not be competing in strenuous events. Heavily pregnant and/or lactating mares should have a veterinary certificated issued within 21 days of the event to certify that the mare is safe to compete in the said event/s and competition or travel is not prejudice to the welfare of the mare and/or unborn foal. In the event of any foal at foot, adequate arrangements would be made to safely accommodate the foal at all times.
- **Veterinary Assistance** - Any Horse Welfare Officer concerned with a horse's condition, fitness, lameness, disease, pregnancy and the like; after discussion with the committee, the owner may be asked to call a veterinary practitioner to inspect and/or treat a horse at the cost of the owner. Depending on the situation, the Horse Welfare Officer may require the owner to remove the horse from the grounds for veterinary attention.
- **Injuries** - When a horse is injured during an event, the rider should be asked to dismount. Veterinary advice should be sort immediately. Injured horses should be given supportive treatment and pain relief as directed by a Veterinarian at the owner's expense. The Horse Welfare Officers must have contact details for veterinarian assistance 24 hours a day.
- **Risk** - A record of horse injuries sustained at an event should be monitored by the Horse Welfare Officer wherever possible. Should injuries occur due to a specific risk, the Horse Welfare Officer should address these risks with the committee and carefully review the risk and resolve a way to minimise further injuries at the event.

- **Competition Surface** - Competition surfaces should be suitable prepared to reduce risk factors which may lead to injuries. Consideration should include uneven surfaces, extremely heavy, boggy and/or hard surfaces. The Horse Welfare Officer must raise any issues of concern with the event organisers.
- **Extreme Weather** - In the event of extreme weather, lightning, humidity, flood, heat, hail, snow, torrential rain, cyclones and the like; due care and attention should be paid to the welfare of horses on the grounds. The Horse Welfare Officer should raise such issues with the event organisers and if conditions are extreme, the impact on the welfare of a horse should be considered. Events may need to be suspended or postponed until conditions improve.
- **Temperature** - In the event of extreme humidity, the potential for a horse to overheat in strenuous events needs to be considered and during winter months when extreme cold is likely, horses should be adequately rugged, particularly of a night.
- **Overnight Housing** - When horses remain at the grounds overnight, horses should be suitably housed so that they can walk around, lay down, be feed and watered. Stabling and yards used to accommodation horses should be safe, hygienic, comfortable, well-ventilated and free of toxic weeds. The chance of the horse escaping the enclosure should be unlikely. Clean drinking water must be available on the grounds and all horses, whether housed in a yard or stable, tethered or tied to a truck or float must have regular access to water.
- **Euthanasia** - If any horse's injuries are sufficiently severe the horse may need to be euthanized. Euthanasia should be undertaken as soon as possible with the sole aim of minimising suffering. The Horse Welfare Officer should have a suitable plan and assistance from the committee to screen a severely injured horse from the public and removing the horse from the grounds.

It is imperative that the committee support their Horse Welfare Officers, so that decisions are a combined decision with the support of the committee. The Horse Welfare Officer, the organising committee, owners, rider and handlers should consider animal welfare to be a matter of pride when attending ASH events, with horses being in good condition, properly presented, well cared for and treated.

The official judge of ASH event shall be authorised to take any immediate action in relation to issues within the event they are judging when issues relate to the welfare of a horse or horses in the event they are judging. In such case, the judge shall immediately call for the Horse Welfare Officer and representatives from Organising Committee to review the issues.

Any member of the public concerned with the welfare of a horse or horses at an ASH event must lodge their concerns with the organising committee. The organising committee should discuss the reported issue with the Horse Welfare Officer as soon as possible.

### **Powers and Actions of Horse Welfare Officers**

All members need to know the roles and responsibilities of horse welfare officers. Most problems that will occur will be because of ignorance and should be easily solved by tactful negotiation. However, if a problem does occur, that the member is unwilling to address, then the member may be reported to the Board for potential consideration by the disciplinary committee. The disciplinary committee may suspend, disqualify or penalise a member and/or horse from attending future ASH events. A Horse Welfare Officer may apply to the Society's Board of Directors if they feel that they are not gaining support by the organising committee.

At times, the Horse Welfare Officer may need to initially consider the severity of the situation, in some cases general advice is all that is needed, whilst in other cases, immediate action will be essential. When approaching people to discuss issues, the Horse Welfare Officer should be accompanied by another representative from the committee conducting the event.

### **Recommended Checklist for Horse Welfare Officers and Organising Committee**

- Horse float and towing vehicle for serious injured horse
- Veterinarian contact numbers
- Screens or tarpaulins
- Equine First Aid Kit –bandages, gloves, cotton wool, antiseptic solution, scissors, ice pack, dressings, clean water, elastoplaste, thermometer and the like.
- Availability of assistance in case of emergencies, like: driver, horse wrangler and the like.