

Horse Welfare Officer

Awareness level information for appointed volunteer horse event Horse Welfare Officers



Introduction

Horse welfare is about considering the positive wellness or well-being of horses associated with your organisation.

Often people think of horse welfare as concerning only what is commonly described as a “welfare case” - a horse which has very poor body condition or treated very badly. There is in fact, much more to welfare than extreme cases of neglect.

Welfare includes

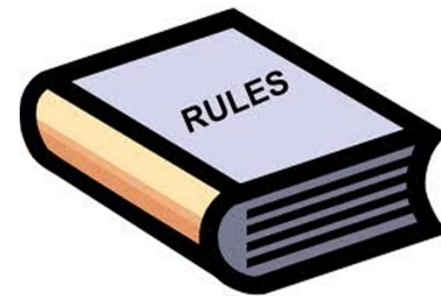
- ✓ Event conditions & infrastructure
- ✓ Horse tack and competition equipment
- ✓ Fitness programs to suit the event
- ✓ Horse organisation policies, procedures & education programs

Introduction

Society is changing its attitude towards the care and well-being of domestic animals. Horse event organisers must be aware of expectations around how horses are to be cared for and treated as valued members of our wider community.

Introduction

- Welfare includes seeing to the care and well-being of the horse in relation to all of its physical, mental, social and physiological needs both on and off the sport or recreation “playing field”.
- Horse organisations will be familiar with welfare requirements as found in their rulebook; however, equally important for a balanced approach are the range of educational , role model & mentoring approaches employed by the club and organisational leaders for their members.



Legislation and Codes relating to Horse Welfare

- Each state has an animal welfare Act
- The Australian Horse Industry Council has prepared the **Australian Horse Welfare Protocol** which is linked to the **Australian Animal Welfare Strategy**
- Some Australian states have a specific Horse Welfare Code attached to the relevant state Animal Welfare Act.
- The AAWS has completed the “Land Transport of Livestock” standards, which includes a section for horses



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Organisation Horse Welfare Policies

Horse Welfare policies prepared by organisations are valuable, as it is a policy prepared by the members, for the members.

For a policy to be effective, it should be:

- ✓ reviewed and updated at least annually, to take into account new research findings;
- ✓ cross-checked with any State or National Codes from sporting bodies or government;

Organisation Horse Welfare Policies

- ✓ evaluated by an independent third-party from time to time;
- ✓ have a written procedure outlining on how the policy will be implemented;
- ✓ clearly explained as to how it will be enforced.
- ✓ easily found on the organisation website;
- ✓ promoted through newsletters, being clearly posted on websites, event programs, noticeboards or signage;

Horse Welfare Officers

Horse organisations & event managers are continuously seeking ways to improve how horses are cared for.

Many organisations will have welfare & well being included as part of the stated role of an official with further information included in the official program.

Consideration should be given to appointing horse welfare officer even if a veterinarian is present. It is a clear and separate role to any judges, officials or coaches working on the day.

Horse Welfare Officers

The advantages of creating the Officer role may include:

- welfare & well being of horses seen as a high priority by the committee;
- promotion of an organisation's horse welfare policies may help attract sponsors;
- supports implementing a continuous improvement program for an organisation or event

Horse Welfare Officers

- one person can provide information on solutions to current non-clinical problems that may compromise horse welfare, freeing any veterinary personnel to focus on clinical incidents;
- one person can liaise with veterinarians from one event to the next and provide continuity over time on the most likely need for intervention; and
- record keeping of incidents that accrue over time and other indicators of how horse welfare policy, procedures or practices are measured in the organisation.

Continuous Improvement

Continuous Improvement for horse organisations, clubs and events is described as;

- an ongoing effort to improve horse welfare
- taking into account changing needs and expectations of all stakeholders including riders, members and those who service the organisation e.g. veterinarians, farriers

Continuous Improvement

- incremental changes, taking small steps at a time
- relying on an active feedback process and self-reflection matched against the goals and aims of the organisation
- having measureable in outcomes or outputs
- fostering an overall management & member welfare ethos
- confidence to undergo validation by a third party if required.

In other words, continuous improvement is simply a matter of an organisation aiming to do things better and documenting the process. Many clubs are doing this already but quite informally with little or no record keeping or promotion of positive benefits.

Continuous Improvement

- The Five Minute Checklist is a suggested starting point for a continuous improvement register or checklist for your horse organisation. By starting with some of the headings and working through a few items at a time until in the future, your organisation can undertake an annual assessment against a whole-of-organisation checklist.

Five Minute Checklist

Organisation Governance

- A **horse welfare statement** is included in key organisational documents including Constitution, Mission Statement and membership form.
- **State & Federal laws** or Codes relating to horse welfare are known and promoted.
- **Standing item** on Agendas for horse welfare in board meetings, activity and event sub-committees.
- **Policy & Procedures Library** includes horse welfare code of practice, policies on specific issues identified for the organisation which may include heat stress, travel and sporting effort recovery. Clear procedures for each policy are written down and promoted.

Five Minute Checklist

- **Rule book** is regularly reviewed from a horse welfare aspect, including updating wording, implementing new requirements as a result of research findings or member feedback and clarifying enforcement procedures & penalties.
- **Event programming** considers total hours or total courses. Event planners consider flexibility in programming & travel options for weather or other condition extremes.
- **Staff & volunteers** have job descriptions which include a horse welfare statement.
- **Involve members** in organisational governance, policy review and implementation of procedures. This will ensure a higher level of ownership and adoption.
- **Appoint a Horse Welfare Officer** as part of a clear line of authority.

Benchmarking & Good Practice

- **Benchmark** organisation governance, procedures and recreation & sporting conduct against international best practice. Identify where improvement can be made.
- **Promote good practice options** amongst members where a choice is provided.
- **Assess** horse event venue infrastructure design & sporting surfaces to evaluate components such as shade & shelter, water supply & performance surface. Plan for improvements.

Benchmarking & Good Practice

- **Invest in Research & Community Education:** Look at different ways your horse organisation or members can become involved in research and look at how different ways new information learned through research, that has impact on your horse activity, can be shared e.g. through seminars, newsletter articles or demonstrations at events.
- **Engage** with other horse organisations in discussing welfare. Join or network with organisations & industry leaders who can add value to your organisation.

Event / Activity

- **The Horse Welfare/Well –being/Wellness Officer** appointed for the day is made known.
- **An Equine Emergency Incident Plan** is written down, with easily accessible contact details.
- **Training** is provided to volunteers on responding to an equine emergency incident.
- **Equipment** is ready for responding to an equine emergency incident.
- **Promote best practice horse welfare, care & training options** amongst members where a choice is provided.
- **Pre & post career** programs in place or promoted for members' horses.

Education & Training

- **Share information** with members about organisational statements, codes of practice, rules relating to welfare and information about horse care & training. Utilise a range of communication methods including website, newsletters, noticeboard, and speakers.
- **Education programs** are promoted or provided for coaches, officials, office bearers and members both formal and informal. Encourage recording of training received.
- **Reward and Recognise** members or affiliate clubs who have demonstrated their contribution to horse welfare awareness or improvement within your organisation.

Sample Officer Job Description

- A Horse Welfare Officer may be paid or voluntary. The job can be shared or more than one position appointed. Organisations are encouraged to prepare a standard job description which includes any remuneration and/or reimbursements, expected work hours, to whom and how reporting should take place.
- Required skill sets will also need to be identified which may include above average personal communication skills, strong industry networks and an ability to write reports.

Sample Officer Job Description

Key Tasks:

- Implement and coordinate the horse welfare & well being program for the relevant organization
- Through effective coordination, protect and enhance the health and welfare of all horses involved
- Collection of information and data on issues such as horse activity related injuries, accidents or deaths
- Provide advice to the organisation committee to assist in developing a position on equine welfare issues to various stakeholders
- Ensure all horse welfare documentation and policies are appropriately managed and coordinated

Sample Officer Job Description

- Liaison with peak research bodies, stakeholders and other organisations, to develop and share information concerning horse welfare & well being
- Through the achievement of effective implementation and coordination, build public awareness concerning horse welfare strategies and developments
- Report the emerging scientific evidence to the organisation committee and membership
- Coordinate regular reviews of the organisation horse welfare policy in the light of the emerging science and organisational data collected

Sample Officer Job Description

Some organisations may also require this position to work directly with Chief Steward, Ground Jury or equivalent to report or refer cases where breaches of organisational rules may have taken place, attend equine incidents or accidents at an event as part of a trained response team, or other duties.