

Interim Report

Interim report into matters of alleged team driving and/or race fixing, and animal welfare concerns relating to the harness racing industry and management of those issues by the Office of Racing Integrity.



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A. TERMS OF REFERENCE (ToR)

The independent investigation and review into alleged team driving, race fixing and animal welfare concerns, and the management of those issues by the Office of Racing Integrity (ORI), was announced by the Tasmanian Government on 27 March 2023. It followed reports of these issues in the media, as well as concern across the wider community.

My full ToR in this independent review are as follows:

1. Conduct an investigation of all circumstances surrounding the races referred to in the ABC media report of 26 March 2023 to determine compliance with the Australian Harness Racing Rules.
2. Conduct an investigation into any other harness races from the past three years that may demonstrate team driving and/or race fixing that have not previously been subject to a decision by the Tasmanian Racing Appeals Board or other independent assessment (e.g. the Tasmanian Ombudsman or Tasmanian Integrity Commission) to determine compliance with the Australian Harness Racing Rules.
3. Conduct an investigation into animal welfare conditions at the Yole Sidmouth racing stables to determine compliance with the Australian Harness Racing Rules.
4. Review the adequacy of the Office of Racing Integrity's management of allegations by industry participants (such as drivers, stable hands and trainers) and a casual steward in 2022 concerning team racing and/or race fixing and any other matters in the ABC media report of 26 March 2023 as the investigator sees fit and make any relevant recommendations.
5. Review the adequacy of complaints management by the Office of Racing Integrity relating to allegations of team driving and/or race fixing in the harness racing industry in the past three years and make any relevant recommendations.
6. Advise on any matters that could be included in the proposed Tasracing Code of Practice for equine welfare and management, and any other opportunities to improve horse welfare. The independent reviewer is to consult with the RSPCA Tasmania, the Chief Veterinary and Animal Welfare Officer at Tasracing and the Chief Veterinary Officer in the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania in undertaking this review.
7. Advise on any other matter relating to animal welfare, team driving and/or race fixing in the Tasmanian harness racing industry that the independent reviewer determines relevant.

For the reasons set out below, at this point in time I am only able to express views on ToR 6 and 7, and make observations on the Monteith Review and its recommendations, which has some overlap with the remaining ToRs.



B. ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

AHRR: Australian Harness Racing Rule

ARR: Australian Rules of Racing

Code of Practice: Tasracing's enforceable draft code for equine welfare and management

NR: National Rating

ORI: Office of Racing Integrity

PRA: Principal Racing Authority

RSPCA: Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Tasmania)

The Sykes Review: *Tasracing Animal Welfare Review 2022*

Tasracing: Tasracing Pty Ltd, state owned entity and Principal Racing Authority for three racing codes

TasRIC: Tasmanian Racing Integrity Commissioner

The Monteith Review: *Review of the Racing Regulation Act 2004: Securing the Integrity of the Tasmanian Racing Industry*



C. BACKGROUND

The independent investigation and review into alleged team driving, race fixing and animal welfare concerns, and the management of those issues by the Office of Racing Integrity (ORI), was announced by the Tasmanian Government on 27 March 2023. It followed reports of these issues in the media, as well as concern across the wider community.

Public submissions were sought between 4 April and 2 May 2023, and could be lodged via confidential email and postal addresses within the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE Tas). While anonymity was guaranteed to those who requested, every submitter was individually contacted. In total, information was obtained from close to 100 submissions and interviews.

My investigations into the ToRs for this inquiry are ongoing. Importantly, I am yet to make specific findings about individuals and organisations, where that is required by particular ToRs. However the following recommendations are being put forward with the view that they can be considered for inclusion in the draft Code of Practice for equine welfare and management, which is currently being progressed by Tasracing and is due to be out for public consultation in coming weeks. Further, that the recommendations from that body of work may be considered as part of any future review by Government of regulations under the *Animal Welfare Act 1993*.

This interim report is also being delivered so that the Government may consider my recommendations against those made in the Monteith Report, as they traverse similar ground. The Monteith Report and its recommendations have formed the basis of a draft Bill that is currently out for consultation. I fully support the Monteith Review and the Government's proposed reforms to implement a new Tasmanian Racing Integrity framework.

I have had to delay the making of a final report with respect to all ToRs due to the availability of witnesses, the volume of information that I have received and the need to afford those affected by the investigation procedural fairness.

This interim report and recommendations were provided to Government by Thursday 31 August 2023. I note that any conclusions expressed in this report are, however, subject to my final report, which I expect to be in a position to finalise by late 2023.



D. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One of the primary areas of focus for this interim review is to provide advice on matters that could be included in the proposed Tasracing Code of Practice for equine welfare and management, as well as other opportunities to improve horse welfare (ToR 6). I advise that I have had the opportunity of conferring with the Chief Executive Officer of RSPCA Tasmania, the Chief Veterinary Officer for Tasmania, and Tasracing's Chief Veterinary and Animal Welfare Officer. I have also had the opportunity to study the *Tasracing Animal Welfare Review 2022*, authored on behalf of Tasracing by Dr David Sykes. A number of Dr Sykes's 83 welfare recommendations have already been implemented.

From the outset, it is important to note that with regard to the governance of welfare conditions at Tasmanian harness racing establishments, the current situation is that:

- the Rules of Racing prohibit the mistreatment of horses, however they are deficient in that they do not prescribe what is considered a minimum standard for horses and facilities at training establishments;
- the *Animal Welfare Act 1993* currently has no regulations to prescribe what welfare standards are required to be met for a horse training property; and
- the Tasmanian Equine Welfare Guidelines 2008, which detail the humane treatment and welfare of horses, are not enforceable because they are guidelines and not supported by the force of the Rules of Racing.

Tasracing's Chief Veterinary and Animal Welfare Officer has been commissioned with the task of developing the Code of Practice for the care of thoroughbred and harness racehorses. My recommendations for prescribed minimum welfare standards for racing and training are intended to support and complement the progress already being made in respect to the preparation of this draft code, to which I already have taken the opportunity to make contributions. I see this Code of Practice as a pivotal document that will set minimum standards for the care, management and training of horses in Tasmania. Importantly, however, I recommend that this Code of Practice must be linked to the Rules of Racing, thus making the minimum standards fully enforceable.

The next very obvious welfare area requiring immediate attention is in the rehoming of retired race horses. The social licence to conduct harness racing is brought into question by the treatment of horses beyond their racing careers. Images in the media of the slaughter of harness horses are quite properly regarded as abhorrent by most fair-minded community members. Whilst some significant steps forward have been taken, rehoming provisions in Tasmania are behind those being progressed in other racing codes in mainland states. Whilst the vast majority of harness horses post racing career are well cared for by their owners, there is no provision in the Rules of Racing to compel the owner or the person responsible to take full responsibility for rehoming a horse. This report makes a series of recommendations aimed at introducing rehoming rules that require an owner, or such



person responsible, to take a ‘whole of life’ approach and to ensure the best possible and practical outcome for a horse that is no longer suitable for a racing career.

In providing the following advice, I act on the assumption that the Tasmanian Government will implement the recommendations of the Monteith Review through legislative reform – with a draft set of bills currently out for public consultation – which I fully support. These reforms provide the pathway forward by joining together welfare policy and enforcement, with Tasracing assuming the powers of enforcement under the Rules of Racing, now held by ORI.

It is proposed by Monteith that this will include the establishment of an appropriately ring-fenced and independent Integrity Unit in Tasracing, which will include Stewards, investigators, race officials and animal welfare support functions. ORI will no longer exist, however a Tasmanian Racing Integrity Commissioner (TasRIC), appointed by the Governor and reporting to the Minister, will have primary oversight and, in addition to comprehensive oversight powers, will receive functions presently allocated to the role of Director of Racing. TasRIC’s responsibilities include comprehensive audit, compliance and investigatory functions to oversee the racing industry, as well as to create integrity and animal welfare standards.

These proposals put in place the necessary checks and balances to ensure transparency and accountability, with the Integrity Unit being answerable to the Tasracing Integrity Director, who in turn reports to the Tasracing Integrity Committee – which has two independent members appointed by the Minister. Further, the reforms make provision for the matter of animal rehoming being incorporated within Tasracing Integrity, removing the current anomaly whereby policy and enforcement are housed in two different structures.

Importantly the recommendations of the Monteith Review have been supported by Government. These reforms provide TasRIC with the powers and responsibilities of creating welfare standards, reviewing welfare processes and systems, and promoting animal welfare by stipulating standards for the education of Stewards and participants in the racing industry generally.

Among the other practical measures I would like to see included in the implementation of the new TasRIC model are:

- written policies and procedures for complaint management and record keeping;
- the disclosure and promotion of these policies and procedures to racing participants and the public;
- best practice processes for privacy and record keeping;
- specific timelines by which complaints need to be handled; and
- clear guidelines that define when the threshold to investigate is triggered, as well as procedures for exercising any discretion in deciding whether or not to advance an investigation.



Also, with TasRIC to have oversight of Tasracing's animal welfare inspections, I would recommend as a policy that any stable inspections conducted by the independent Integrity Unit be on an unannounced basis.

Meanwhile ToR 7 provides opportunities to advise on other matters relevant to horse welfare, team driving and race fixing. On the basis of relevancy, I believe that competition on the racetrack is the industry's best deterrent to allegations of team driving and race fixing. I presently make no findings with respect to the occurrence of team driving and race fixing, but note that there is a public perception and allegations that such practices occur, which can be seen in, for example, the ABC online report on harness racing of 26 March 2023. Therefore this report would be remiss not to also raise what I observe as a stifling of competition, particularly in the lower-class races, brought about by the current Tasmanian racing model. Whilst acknowledging harness field sizes and prize monies are healthy, the rating system (which is a national one), programming and balloting in its current form will not see higher-class racing flourish. There is an inevitability of there being a continued proliferation of horses within the lower rating bands. Compounding this, one leading trainer quite legally has taken advantage of this model by acquiring a number of mainland horses, at the end of their careers, to be sent to be trained in Tasmania. This has evolved into monopolisation by that trainer of lower-rating races, whereby he will regularly have the majority or all runners in those races. This is clearly deleterious to encouraging participation and ensuring strong competition.

This situation also has the undesirable effect of Tasmania becoming somewhat of a 'last station' for non-competitive mainland horses, when a model is needed that promotes investment in young horses with racing potential, with opportunities to compete in higher-class racing, including on the national stage.



E. IMPROVING HORSE WELFARE

Term of Reference 6

No other aspect of harness racing is more important than horse welfare, including the care, control and management when preparing and presenting horses for Tasmanian harness race meetings. 'Welfare' includes factors such as a horse's health and physical environment, through to its mental state and nutrition. Community expectations require these needs be met throughout the lifetime of a harness horse, and there can be no tolerance for any practice that causes suffering – whether it be by a mistreatment or by neglect. This proper care is not only important on a humane level but is crucial to the social licence by which the wider community accepts and approves of the sport of harness racing and the industry as a whole.

In Tasmania, the *Animal Welfare Act 1993* is the primary legislative basis for all animal welfare matters. This Act contains provisions to prevent the neglect of, and cruelty to animals to ensure the welfare of animals across the state. There are also Rules of Racing that apply to the licensing and conduct of persons, the administration of races, and aspects of animal welfare within the industry.

With regard to animal welfare, the relevant Australian Harness Racing Rule (AHRR) 218 states: *A person having responsibility for the welfare of a horse shall not fail to care for it properly.*

1. *A person shall not mistreat a horse.*
2. *For the purposes of this rule, 'mistreat' means to abuse or treat a horse badly, cruelly or unfairly.*

The Rules are nationally consistent and managed by Tasracing, but enforced by Stewards (currently working within ORI). This structure is unwieldy, not conducive to good outcomes or to satisfying community expectations, which in recent times have heightened focus in regards to the whole of life treatment of horses. Under the *Racing Regulation Act 2004*, Tasracing is responsible for animal welfare policy but has no substantive powers of implementation. This governance structure has resulted in Tasmania not comparing favourably with the significant progress in implementing welfare best practice by many other codes in mainland states, which include a mandatory regulated path for horses that no longer have racing careers.

The Monteith recommendations, in my view, provide a clear path forward towards providing strong governance protocols with the transfer of welfare enforceability to Tasracing and the creation of TasRIC. TasRIC will have mandatory oversight of Tasracing's animal welfare responsibilities and will have the power to implement welfare standards. The proposals include a Tasracing Integrity Unit, bringing together Stewards, investigators and animal welfare functions to provide an effective welfare enforcement entity. Tasracing's Chief Veterinary and Animal Welfare Officer will work alongside the new Racing Integrity Unit, providing a cohesive management of animal welfare within that entity.



Consequently, I fully support the Monteith recommendations as they apply to horse welfare with the proposed transfer of enforcement to Tasracing and the creation of TasRIC as an oversight body. This matches industry-best practice and models that are in place in other jurisdictions in Australia, whereby both policy and enforcement are housed in the one structure – as proposed in this jurisdiction to be within Tasracing.

Currently, there are two key documents that give a level of detail regarding the humane treatment and welfare of harness horses: the *Harness Racing Australia Equine Health and Welfare Statement (updated 2019)*; and the *Tasmanian Equine Welfare Guidelines (2008)*. However, importantly, the provisions of these guidelines are not enforceable as they are only indicative standards. There is not a link between these guidelines and the Australian Harness Racing Rules, which would allow officials to enforce these standards. Many other racing jurisdictions and codes have developed enforceable animal welfare codes, policies and rules. In my view, there is a quite urgent need to develop enforceable minimum standards in respect to horse welfare conditions at training properties.

Minimum standards are the minimum requirements to meet the basic welfare needs of horses. Guidelines are recommended practices to achieve desirable welfare outcomes.

The starting point of this process would require a new Australian Harness Racing Rule, or a Tasmanian local rule, providing the necessary power to penalise anyone found in breach of a minimum standard in a code of practice. Guidance is given in the thoroughbred rule ARR16 in the *Australian Rules of Racing*, which states:

ARR16: Without limiting any other PRA (Principal Racing Authority) powers, a PRA has the following powers in relation to disciplining and/or penalising a person...:

[b] to penalise:

(iv) any person who breaches a Code of Practice.

As referenced previously, Tasracing is already developing (and is soon to release for public comment) a draft Code of Practice that will set minimum standards for the management and care of thoroughbred and harness horses in Tasmania. Additionally the proposed Monteith reforms – as laid out in the draft Bill – will require Tasracing to develop a welfare plan and this document, providing minimum standards for training properties, will form part of this task. In formulating my recommendations with respect to ToR 6, I have had the opportunity of input into the draft code in discussions with its author. My following recommendations refer to the minimum standards that should be included and enforced within this proposed Code of Practice.

As much will inevitably turn on the enforcement of the minimum standards within the Code, there is a need to move away from the unwieldy governance model in which Tasracing has carriage of welfare policy and ORI the carriage of enforcement. A new governance model is provided in the Monteith recommendations, as they apply to horse welfare, with the



proposed transfer of enforcement to the Tasracing Integrity Unit, and with the creation of TasRIC and its oversight of Tasracing's animal welfare responsibilities.

I fully support the development of Tasracing's Code of Practice for equine welfare and management, and see it as being a pivotal document that will set minimum standards for the care, management and training of horses in Tasmania. My support is contingent upon the Code of Practice being linked to the Rules of Racing. I am also aware that within the framework of the *Animal Welfare Act 1993* there may be opportunity for key elements within this proposed code to be considered for inclusion in the regulations and guidelines made under that Act.

My recommendations for inclusion in this Code of Practice are detailed in the following categories.

Stocking density

I support minimum standards that set a stocking rate for paddock-trained horses that is as prescriptive as is possible so as to ensure there is sufficient space for each horse to have ample area of its own. This is particularly so giving regard to the expected competition for feed and the inevitable bullying by dominant horses of subordinate horses. I support that in paddock situations, a measure of that area required is that horses have access to sufficient pasture, supplemented by fibrous feed such as hay. Furthermore, I support that the physical layout should include an adequate number of paddocks and yards to permit animals of a similar age, sex, size and compatible temperament to be grouped together.

Ground conditions

Whilst recognising that wet conditions and horse movement in paddocks inevitably create mud, I support the minimum requirement that provides for horses to have ample access to firm conditions underfoot. This access for horses to areas of higher ground should include sufficient area of their own, where they are not subject to bullying from dominant horses. The minimum requirements should also provide for the regular removal of manure, which, in wet and muddy conditions, exacerbates sanitary issues, particularly if a horse has an open wound.

Feeding

I support the minimum requirement that stocking densities must be adjusted to ensure a system of paddock management that recognises the effect of behaviour patterns, such as bullying by dominant horses, so as to ensure all horses receive sufficient nutrition. Also, I support that stocking density must be adjusted from time to time on seasonal grounds to ensure there is sufficient pasture for horses to graze, or to have access to a supplementary fibrous feed such as hay. A further minimum requirement should be that feed and water bins be located on higher ground in the paddock, or alternately a raised area be developed using materials such as crusher dust, so that the area does not become muddy and waterlogged.



Protection from weather extremes

I support the proposed minimum standard in the draft Code of Practice for the provision of adequate shade and shelter, and other reasonable protection for horses from the elements in paddock-training establishments.

Husbandry

I support the proposed minimum standard and guidelines in the draft Code of Practice that are designed to meet basic welfare needs for horses. These include provision of designated dental care, worming treatments and hoof care. To this I would add designated stomach ulcer treatment regimes.

Transportation

I support minimum standards in the draft Code of Practice to minimise the time horses are held on floats and at the track by ensuring that horses are not brought to the track unduly early, and are then returned, unloaded and fed as soon as is practical.

Veterinary Medicines and Records

Provision is already made in the Australian Harness Racing Rules (AHRR 190B) requiring trainers to keep and maintain a log book “recording all details of treatment administered to any horse in his or her care...”. Further, AHRR 194 prescribes the medications that may be held at a training establishment. As indiscriminate administration of medication and drugs to horses forms a welfare issue for the industry, I recommend that the minimum standards highlight in greater detail record-keeping and medication possession responsibilities of licenced trainers.

Rehoming, including euthanasia and slaughter

Disturbing images that have appeared in media reports depicting the slaughter of an unidentified horse on a Tasmanian property are an affront to most fair-minded community members. Whilst my observation of this practice is not directed at any one particular party, the images, which are quite dated, nevertheless are upsetting, particularly where they involve horses that have finished their racing careers only days earlier. This is not representative of the fate of the vast majority of retired horses in Tasmania, which continue to be well cared for by their owners or are suitably rehomed.

I acknowledge that Tasracing has made some significant steps with its ‘Off the Track’ program, which incentivises owners to endeavour to rehome those horses not suitable for racing, or horses at the end of their racing careers. Meanwhile Australian Harness Racing Rule 96 A and B were introduced in November 2020 to require an owner, or person responsible, to notify when a horse is retired, or sent to stud or is deceased. This has led to a significant decrease in the percentage of retired horses being listed as deceased. However it is still solely the decision of the owner or the person responsible to progress a horse into the breeding arena, or rehome it, or send a horse to a knackery, or employ any other



method of euthanasia. I am advised that in Tasmania, the current legislation, rules and policies do not preclude or prevent the owner of a horse from sending such horse to a knackery, or having it disposed of by a suitably licenced person. In some other codes and jurisdictions the rules create an offence for a horse to be sent to a livestock auction or to be sent to a knackery or to be euthanised. Provision is made in emergency situations, on welfare grounds, for horses to be euthanised following certification by a veterinary surgeon or permission from a controlling body.

Whilst it is recognised that a small percentage of horses, because of temperament issues, will not be suitable for rehoming, rules and policies need to be developed in Tasmania to regulate when, how and in what circumstances a retired horse, or a horse not undertaking a racing career, might be destroyed.

In my view, the harness racing industry must be predicated on the basis that wherever possible and practical, there will be a good and humane post-racing outcome for every horse. The owner of a horse must be compelled to take responsibility for the whole of life experiences of that horse, and not just for its racing career. Acting on the assumption that the Monteith recommendations are to be implemented, I recommend that as an early priority TasRIC and Tasracing investigate and introduce rehoming and traceability rules. The National Horse Traceability Working Group, presided over by Agriculture Ministers, is looking at a system of whole of life traceability for all horses. This however will take time to implement and should not inhibit Tasmania from introducing its own measures to ensure the best outcomes for retired horses. Whilst I am mindful that significant funding is required in implementing rehoming regimes, some other jurisdictions have introduced provisions whereby a small percentage of winning prize monies is set aside to fund these important welfare considerations. Although it is not suggested that a subject as broad as the rehoming of horses can be detailed in the draft Code of Practice, nevertheless the 'Euthanasia and Slaughter' section of the Code should clearly outline that owners and persons responsible for a horse are subject to the provisions of the Australian and local rules in regards to the rehoming of retired horses, and horses not deemed suitable for a racing career.

As a starting point, I recommend that local rules be introduced firstly to require specific permission before a retired horse may be transferred, sold or gifted. A rule is then required to provide for a timely assessment by an approved, competent and independent person as to the retraining and rehoming potential of each and every horse at the end of its racing career. Further, I would recommend that a local rule be invoked compelling the owner of a horse to firstly obtain the express permission of the Tasracing Chief Veterinary and Animal Welfare Officer before any decision can be made for a horse to be destroyed upon retirement. Factors that would necessarily weigh on that decisions would necessarily include the outcome of the suitability for rehoming assessment and also the length of time and the efforts made by the person responsible for the horse for it to be successfully rehomed. Guidance in developing rules and policies can be achieved by studying rehoming procedures already successfully in place in other codes in mainland states.



F. PROTECTING THE LEGACY

Term of Reference 7

The final Term of Reference (ToR 7) provides opportunity to advise on other matters relevant to horse welfare, team driving and race fixing. On the basis of relevancy, I believe that competition on the racetrack is the industry's best deterrent to team driving and race fixing. Therefore this interim statement would be remiss not to also raise what I observe as a stifling of competition in the lower-class races, brought about by the current Tasmanian racing model.

What is clear to me is that the current national rating system, current programming and current balloting provisions have the unintended consequence of promoting lower-class racing to the detriment of the quality of the overall racing product. With some 90 per cent of wagering by Tasmanian residents taking place on mainland racing, there is a need for a racing model that promotes interest in local racing over and above being just another product on which to bet.

If one was to draw up Tasmania's horse populations by ratings, the structure would take the appearance of a pyramid. Every handicapping/rating system should, in my view, be aimed at promoting horses from the larger pool of lower rating horses at the bottom of the pyramid to the top, with the aim to have available a bank of horses for higher-class racing. The current rating system, as it works in Tasmanian harness racing, appears to do quite the opposite. It rewards horses racing below their best and it promotes the race as one to get to the bottom of the pool, where a horse becomes the most competitive. The national rating system provides for horses to lose a rating point when they finish in sixth or lower placing. For races with a stake of up to \$4,500 (to the winner), the first placed horse gains two ratings points, for races in which the stake is between \$4,501 and \$6,999, the first place getter gains three ratings points, and for races in which the stake is between \$7,000 to \$9,999, the first place getter gains four points. With lower-class races in Tasmania inevitably having full fields (12 starters), what follows is that one horse, the winner, will gain three or four ratings points, and seven horses from that race each lose one rating point. So there is a situation in which more points are lost than are gained, and accordingly more horses are descending the pyramid rather than progressing through to higher classes. Even the winner, accruing ratings points, can quickly descend back down the ratings scale by finishing sixth or worse at its next three or four starts, and again become eligible for the same class of race in which it was successful. All of this is achievable within a period of two weeks. Then, because of the expanding horse pool in the lower band, those races are programmed and invariably divided when an additional race is required at acceptance time. Thus, the situation of too many members of the horse population being in the lower rating bands is self-perpetuating. This is the converse of what a handicapping system should seek to achieve. Examples have been given questioning the fairness of the rating system whereby a younger horse with no or minimal wins is pitted against older, more seasoned horses with far superior lifetime racetrack performances. For example, at Launceston on 18 August 2023, in an up to 44 NR



event, 'Jedi Mind', with 31 wins and \$317,000 in prize money, raced against 'Baldassarre', which had had one win involving \$11,000 stakes. Another example of the unfairness of the ratings as it applies to Tasmanian harness racing is that a three-year-old is allotted a 50NR and then, as an unraced four-year-old, is not even eligible to compete in the lower ratings races that are programmed.

Quite within the rules, the Yole Sidmouth racing stable has acquired a number of horses from mainland states to be trained in Tasmania whereby, within the ratings, programming and balloting systems, they can again become productive. This training model has been successful to the degree that Yole stable runners monopolise and dominate particularly lower-rating races. Currently the stable provides in the order of 60 per cent of runners for many meetings, having had some 4,250 starters last season, which is almost 4,000 more than his nearest Tasmanian competitor. The stable often provides every starter in the lower-rating races. Measures to limit the proliferation of runners from the one stable by the framing of balloting clauses have not been successful.

Assuming the Monteith recommendations are adopted, I recommend that one of the first tasks of the new governance should be to address the absence of the necessary level of competitiveness in Tasmanian harness racing. Whilst inevitably it will mean short-term pain involving smaller fields and reduced race programs, it is my belief that the current model is not sustainable, with the number of participants and their degree of involvement in the industry waning. The answers are not simple but changes do need to be made to ratings, programming and balloting, with the long-term object of engendering more competitiveness by encouraging new investment and participation. It is acknowledged Tasracing is active in making programming and balloting changes, but the national rating system, as it works in the Tasmanian model, will continue to expand the number of horses eligible for the lower races to the detriment of better-class racing.

Ratings

The ratings system is a national one, adopted by all but one state in Australia. However in my view, with Tasmania having full race fields and only racing usually two race dates per week, the ratings system is not conducive to the best outcome for competitive racing. Tasmanian handicap conditions need to effect changes that incentivise winning and discourage the quest for shredding rating points, which creates an unhealthy race to the bottom.

With a local handicapping system, measures could for example be introduced requiring that a horse have six consecutive unplaced starts before dropping a rating point, and as such horses will take much longer to drop down the rating scale. The provision to do this is at 13.1 and 13.2 of the Australian Handicapping Rules. I do, however, accept that adopting and implementing a local ratings system will require resources.



Programming

An innovative long-term approach to programming is required to encourage competitiveness and participation. Tasracing consults broadly with industry on programming but also, understandably, is mindful that smaller race fields mean less betting turnover. I acknowledge that currently some conditioned events are programmed based on the number of race wins and/or prize monies won, either in the horse's lifetime career or over a specified period.

I believe there needs to be a more concerted move away from a ratings based program to include more conditioned events, which aim to bring together horses of similar abilities and records. More, not fewer, encouragement races for trainers who have trained only a specified number of winners over a specific period (for example, five wins in the past 12 months) should be programmed to nurture smaller stables. Also more maiden races and standing-start claiming races (with set claiming prices) should be considered to encourage new investment.

The above suggestions are not at all meant to be exhaustive but rather are put forward to promote discussion of movement away from a prevalence of ratings-based race programs catering for the poorer class of horses at the bottom of the pool.

Balloting

Balloting and current race division policies will need to complement changes to rating and programming in order to enliven broader interest in participation and investment, and to provide a more competitive racing product. Monopolisation by any one stable is anti-competitive and is not sustainable. Incentives introduced by Tasracing of ballot preferences for 'Tasbred' horses, preferential barrier draws and restricting the number of ballots that can be accumulated within the period of a calendar month are worthwhile initiatives.

The Tasmanian racing model requires a major overhaul so as to actively encourage opportunities for investment in young horses with racing potential. This in turn will serve to stimulate the breeding industry and encourage new owners. Importantly, the changes will arrest the trend of participants either leaving or downgrading their interest in Tasmanian harness racing, and will enhance competition out on the racetrack.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge that Tasmanian harness racing has a long and distinguished history of champion horses and horsemen. These recommendations for consideration are made with a view to ensuring those traditions can both continue and flourish.





31 August 2023