

# A Social Licence for Equestrian Sport

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[www.worldhorsewelfare.org](http://www.worldhorsewelfare.org)  
Registered charity no. 206658 and SC038384

# Outline

1. World Horse Welfare
2. A changing world
3. What constitutes good equine welfare?
4. The social licence concept
5. Putting this into practice
6. Telling the story about equine welfare in horse sport
7. So what?

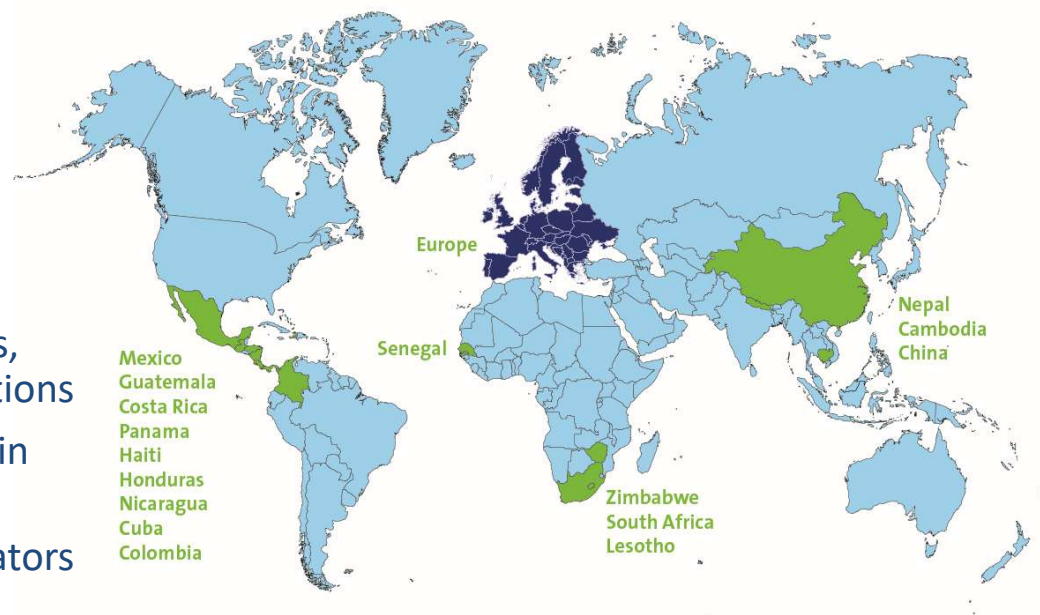


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# 1. World Horse Welfare

- Leading equine charity since 1927
- Supports horse-human partnership
- Works across 4 continents
- 125+ employees – £10m turnover
- Partnership working with governments, universities, NGOs and other organisations
- Strong veterinary credentials & active in policy engagement – OIE, EU, UN
- Sport horse welfare – advisor to regulators



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# Our strategic framework

		Goals				
		Transport	Responsible Ownership		Horse Sport	Working Equids
			Prevention	Intervention		
		Humane transport and slaughter	Responsible ownership and recreational use		Responsible use in sport	Supporting livelihoods
Activities	Care	"Providing relief to equines in immediate need"				
	Research	"Understanding the causes of equine welfare challenges and using evidence to inform our work"				
	Educate	"Supporting and improving the horse-human partnership, including changing behaviours"				
	Influence	"Advocating and campaigning to achieve long-lasting change in equine welfare"				



# Our association with horse sport

- Support responsible use of horses in sport
- Independent welfare advisors to the International Equestrian Federation (FEI) and the British Horseracing Authority (BHA) – informally to other national federations
- Associate Member of British Equestrian Federation (BEF)



## 2. A changing world...

- Public views evolving on use of horses in sport or work
- Partnership or exploitation?
- *'Use but not abuse' vs 'Use is abuse'*

### Montreal's ban on horse-drawn carriages now in effect

Concerns about animal welfare have spawned a wave of public outrage

Jan. 2, 2020 12:00 a.m. / NEWS



# Global impact

- Horse sport is a global industry – what happens in one country impacts how the public view the sport in another
- Horse sport is on an ethical tightrope walk
- Public perception versus reality – bad media does not help public perception

***“The racing industry in Australia, in general, has fundamentally failed to intervene at industry level to effectively protect retired racing horses. The public’s disapproval is deafening.”***

Terry Martin SC - Inquiry into animal cruelty in the management of retired thoroughbred and standardbred horses in Queensland (2020)

**'Mass slaughter' of Australian racehorses rocks industry**

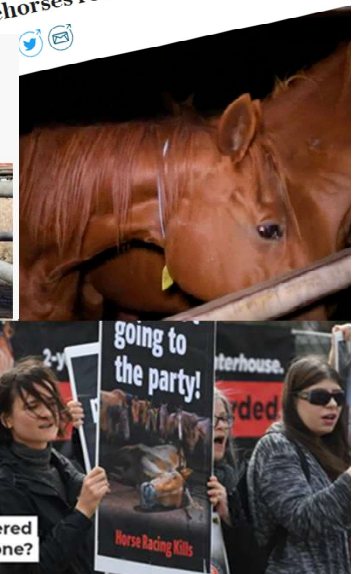
**Mass slaughter and abuse of racehorses undermines industry's commitment to animal welfare**

7:30

Updated 18 Oct 2019, 12:13am



VIDEO: WARNING GRAPHIC FOOTAGE (ABC News)



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## Cheltenham 2019: Ballyward horse death prompts charities to call for 'immediate suspension' of Festival

Just four of the 18 horses that started the National Hunt Challenge Cup finished the race, with Ballyward fatally falling and becoming the first casualty at this year's Cheltenham Festival

## Racing's efforts to grapple with horse slaughter not enough, at least for now

The US racing industry has stepped up its game significantly when it comes to re-homing its retired equine athletes in recent years, but there's still plenty of work to be done

### What Happened to This Retired Racehorse Shows What's Wrong With Racing



### Winx's brother among Australian racehorses killed for meat in South Korea

### Melbourne Cup: Will Australian racing overcome cruelty scandals?

By Phil Mccart  
BBC News, Sydney

4 November 2019



Exclusive: Animal welfare groups call for halt to exports after secret footage shows 'distressing' treatment of horses in Korean slaughter



### Racehorse who was left to starve in field with no hay and water put to sleep in shocking cruelty case

Rescued after being found in a field with no hay and water put to sleep in shocking cruelty case

Animal welfare groups call for halt to exports after secret footage shows 'distressing' treatment of horses in Korean slaughter

Animal welfare groups call for halt to exports after secret footage shows 'distressing' treatment of horses in Korean slaughter



news

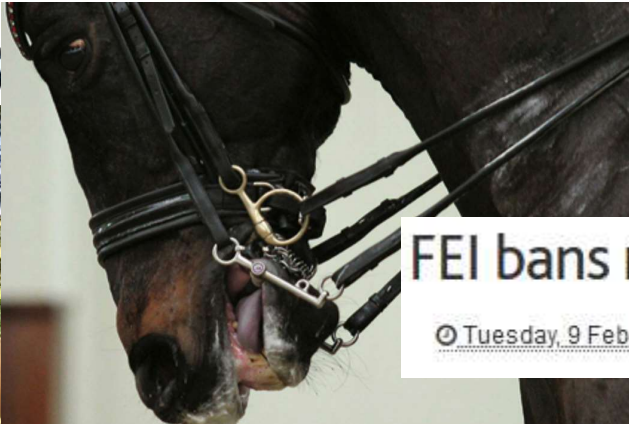
Melbourne Cup follows significant scrutiny of animal welfare



## 35 'emaciated' racehorses rescued by gardaí as animal cruelty investigation is launched



# Outcry over rider's dressage test: US Equestrian responds



## Traumatic Horse Training: Can You Spot Abuse?

When do horse training methods cross the line from accepted to abusive? Despite significant advances in scientific knowledge about horse welfare and behavior, abusive training still occurs.

## FEI bans rollkur after international outrage

Tuesday, 9 February 2010

'Blue tongue' leads to social media outrage



Hector Carmona  
4 hrs · 🌐  
The FEI and SRS Blatant Horse Abuse affecting millions of horses globally is going to be known by the entire world not just the horse community, mark my words, it is written in stone....just spoke with our other journalist again 😊  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtO0zUltOmU>  
<https://sputniknews.com/.../202002141078310792-bloody-gold-...>  
<https://www.change.org/p/hector-carmona-global-horse-abuse-...>  
<https://twitter.com/HectorCarmona/status/1230358543116767233...>



## Dressage: A blood sport?

Olympics row over horse 'cruelty'

YouTube footage of controversial dressage technique provokes

On the Ignorance of Noseband Tightness and Vague FEI Noseband Rules

**Dark Side of EU Dressage:  
How Rollkur & LDR Ruining  
Horses' Health at Equestrian  
Competitions**





# Bad news travels fast



- One “bad” moment can last a lifetime and impact the sport as a whole
- Bad news travels faster than ever and is widely believed
- The public will not readily congratulate the sector for riding/treating their horses responsibly – that is what they expect – **as a minimum**



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# How is the horse sport world reacting?

- Regulators and regulations exist *e.g. FEI Code of Conduct*
- Independent reviews undertaken *e.g. Queensland Government conducted an independent enquiry into the management of retired racehorses*
- Independently-chaired welfare boards set-up *e.g. Britain's Horse Welfare Board and NSW Racing*



Is this enough?



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### 3. What constitutes good equine welfare?

‘...physical and mental health and happiness...’

(Cambridge Dictionary)



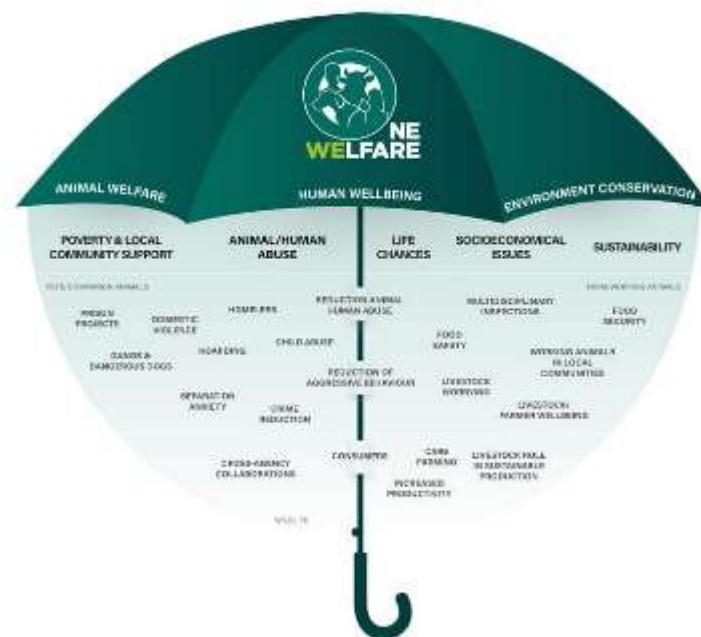
## Also an evolving situation..

- Our understanding of how animals perceive the world and how their physiological and behavioural needs can be met has increased
- How we have traditionally kept and managed horses may no longer be appropriate
- We must be able to adapt and change to ensure good welfare



# One Welfare

- Recognises animal welfare, biodiversity and the environment are connected to human wellbeing
- Closely interrelated to the One Health concept





## But what is good welfare?

- Our understanding of “good welfare” is evolving
- Horse-human partnership plays a fundamental role
- Horse welfare is multidimensional
- Applies to all horses at all stages of life
- Horses are individuals and what is right for one may not be for another

***“...the overall objective is to provide opportunities for animals to ‘thrive’, not simply ‘survive’” (Mellor, 2016)***

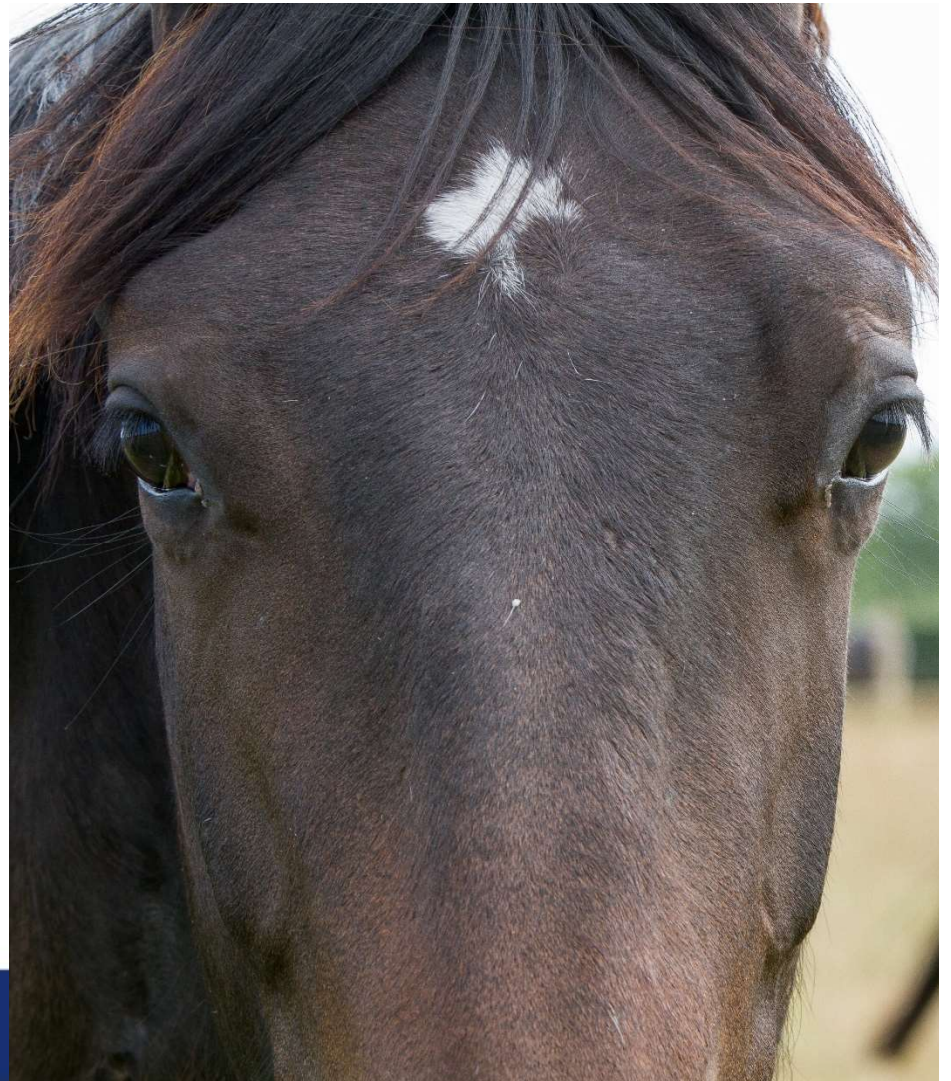


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# Sentience

- Recognises that horses are sentient beings – capable of both positive and negative experiences
- Quality of Life is based on a life worth living – an overall balance that is positive
- Not enough to simply protect from negative experiences



## Five freedoms – have served a great purpose

Freedom from  
hunger & thirst

Freedom from  
discomfort

Freedom from pain,  
injury & disease

Freedom from fear  
& distress

Freedom to express  
natural behaviour

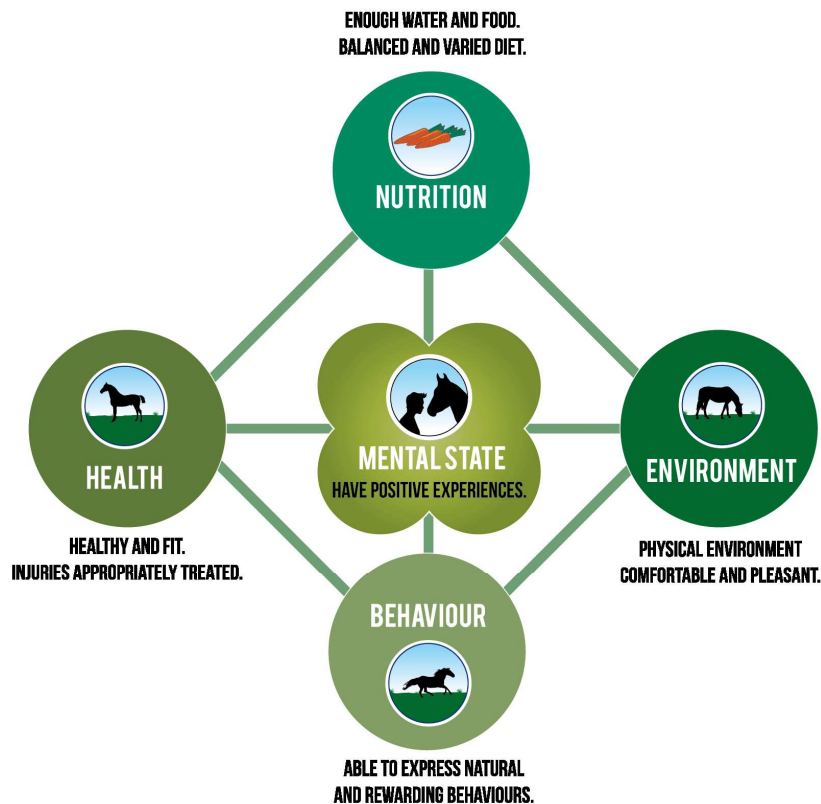


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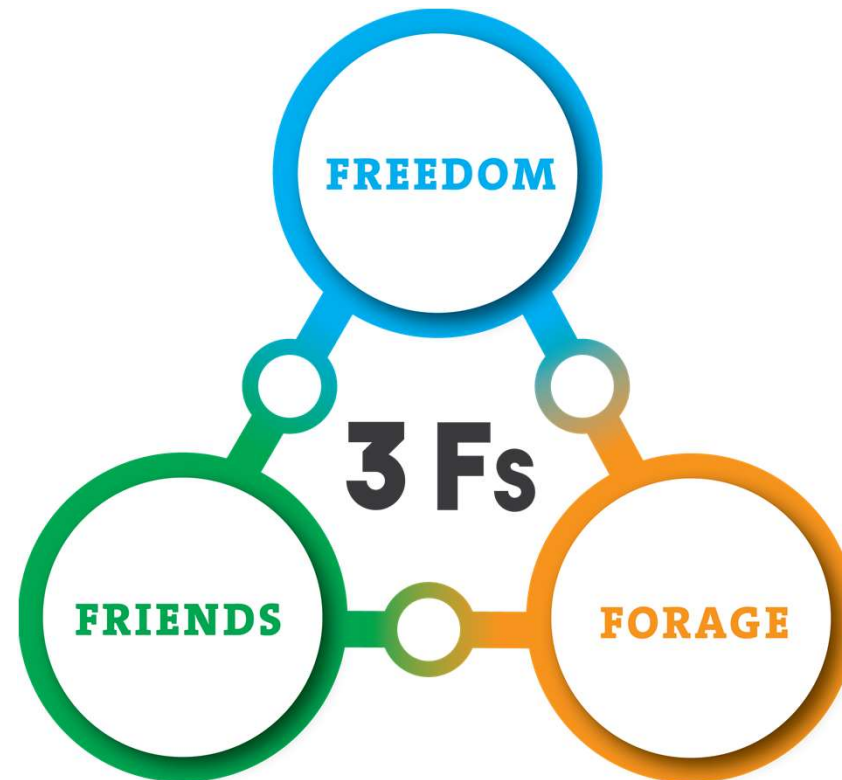
# Five domains



- Protect against negative experiences
- Provide positive experiences
- Need to be able to assess physical and mental welfare
- Mental wellbeing is at least as important as physical welfare



# Three Fs



# On reflection.....

Have we got the balance right between meeting the mental needs of our horses and their physical needs?

Are we investing in research to understand where the gaps/issues are? Decision making should be made on the basis of the evidence, our experience and common sense

What expectations do the public have?



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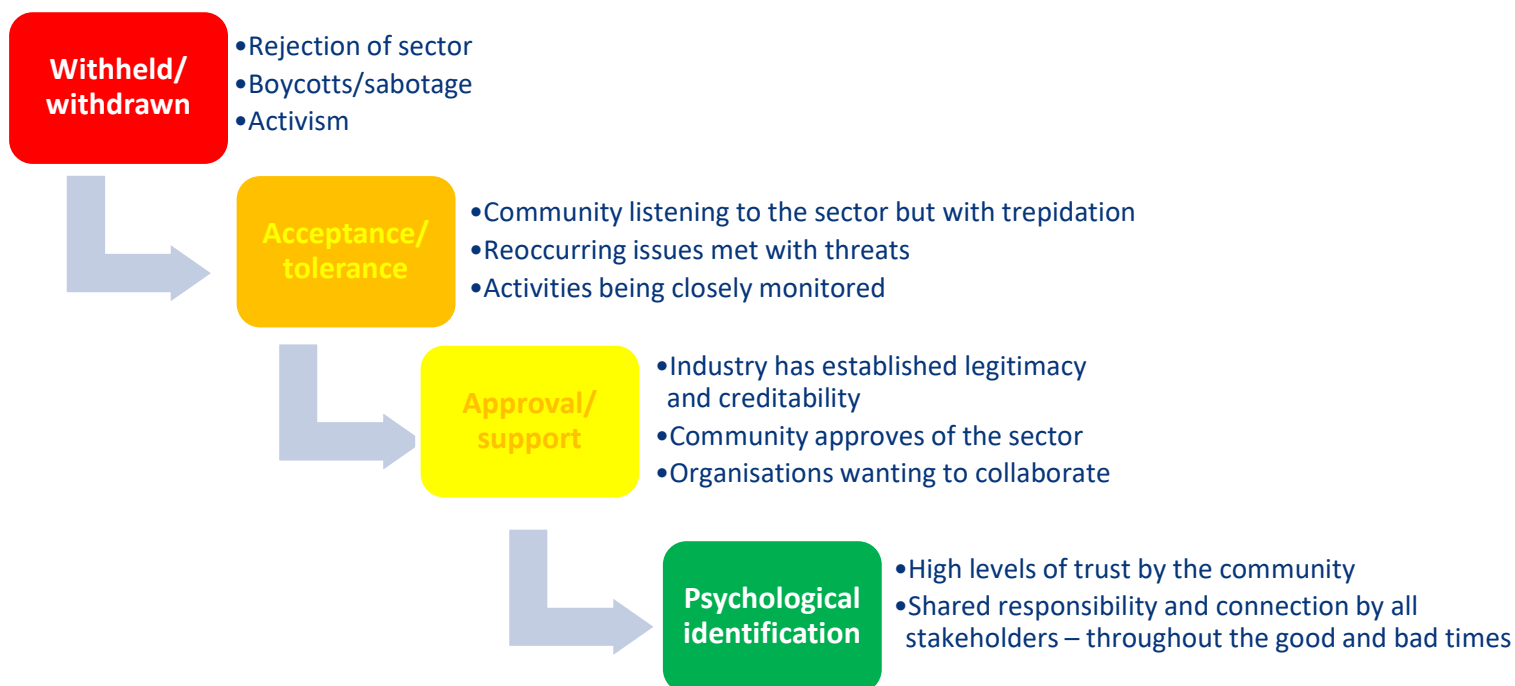
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## 4. The social licence concept

- Unwritten, non-legally binding contract
- Society 'gives' right to operate
- About collectively building trust those involved in horse sport behave ethically
- About doing the right thing and being seen to do the right thing
- Not about mob rule...



# Levels of social licence





# Horse-human partnership

- Responsible use is the main requirement for this partnership
- Requires knowledge, experience and compassion
- Leads to better short-term (greater success) and long-term (future career options) outcomes
- Forms the basis of communicating the horse sport narrative



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## 5. Putting this into practice





# Husbandry and care

- Directly impacts their welfare – both physically and mentally
- Poor management can lead to behaviour and performance issues
- 5Ds and 3Fs are crucial throughout all stages of a horse's life:
  - Can we provide regular turnout for horses – even those in training?
  - What opportunities do horses have for social contact such as mutual grooming?
  - Are horses given ad-lib (constant access) to forage?



# Traceability

- A lifetime commitment
- Effective equine ID system is the foundation for protecting equine health and welfare
- Identifies what risk factors exist and evidence of risk levels
- Better understands what post-career homes are most suitable



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# Breeding

- Good equine health and welfare begins with their breeding
- Consider the long-term use/future of any foal bred
- Equine genomics/cloning is a growing issue
- Breeding for certain traits should not be at the expense of robustness

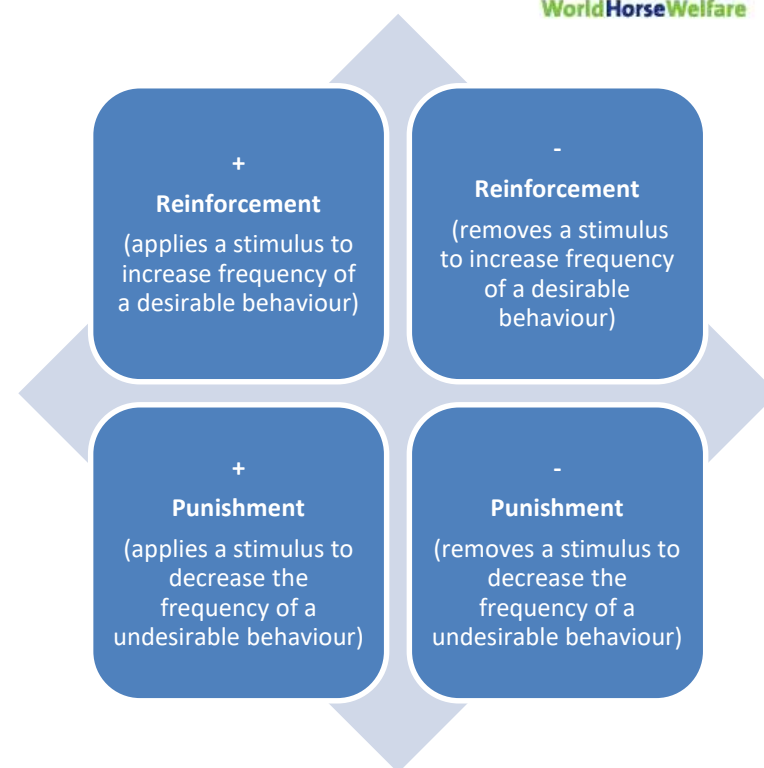


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# Training

- Must be based on compassion and respect for the horse
- Shortcuts rarely work and can have negative consequences for their long-term welfare
- Adapt training to the horse – age, fitness, behaviour, experience, environment
- Consider methods used – understand how horses learn (learning theory)





# Competition

FEI – Code of conduct for the welfare of the horse:

*“Welfare of the horse must never be subordinated to competitive or commercial influences”*



Oliver Townend given official warning for over-use of whip at Badminton



Badminton Horse Trials Oliver Townend

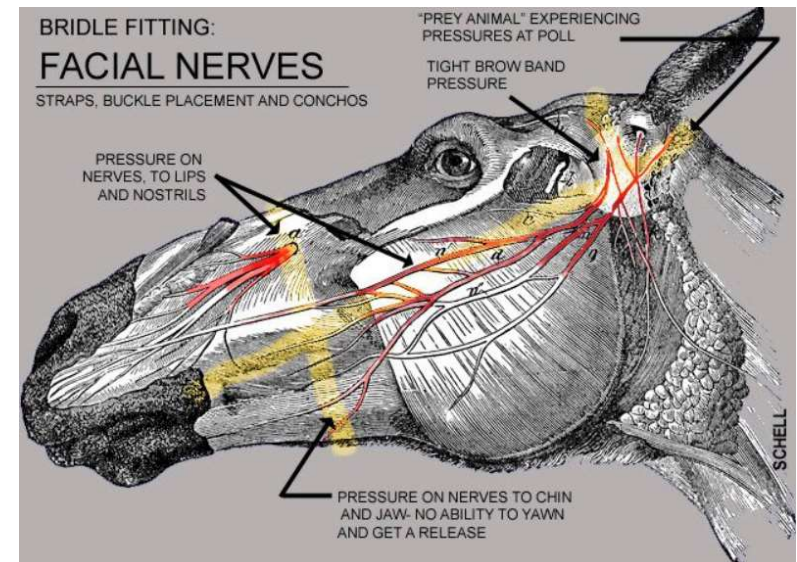


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# Tack and equipment

- Dubious tack and equipment is too often used as a shortcut
- Important to ensure unwanted behaviour is not pain related
- Bridle fit is equally important as saddle fit
  - Tight nosebands and bit type only part of the jigsaw
- Bitless bridles, barefoot trimming....



# The whip – time for a change?

The public (in many countries) do not like the “whip”

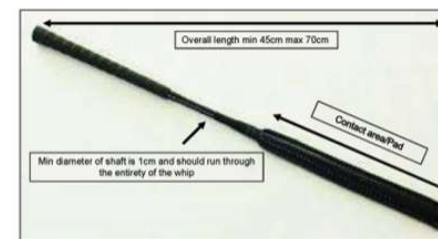
However.....

- Has a role in safety
- It is used across most equestrian disciplines
- Most riders ride with a whip
- General agreement it should only be used by experienced riders – but it is used by all levels

Introduction of padded whips in British showjumping from January 2020



STEWARDS AIDE-MEMOIRE - VISUAL GUIDE TO WHIP RULING - 102.9



- The Contact area must be covered with a Pad and be a minimum two fifths (40%) of the overall length of the whip
- The Pad must be smooth, with no protrusion or raised surface
  - No wording or personalisation on the Pad
- No binding within 17 centimetres of the end of the Pad
- The weight of the whip must not exceed 160 grams and should be evenly distributed throughout the full length of the whip

LENGTH OF WHIP CMS	MIN LENGTH OF PAD CMS	LENGTH OF WHIP CMS	MIN LENGTH OF PAD CMS
45	18	58	23.2
46	18.4	59	23.6
47	18.8	60	24
48	19.2	61	24.4
49	19.6	62	24.8
50	20	63	25.2
51	20.4	64	25.6
52	20.8	65	26
53	21.2	66	26.4
54	21.6	67	26.8
55	22	68	27.2
56	22.4	69	27.6
57	22.8	70	28



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## Aftercare – 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> careers

- Can the horse be responsibly rehomed or sold for retraining?
- For sure many can be – but not all...
- New owners or carers must understand what they are taking on and ideally have experience in looking after sport horses
- Once a sport horse, always a sport horse in the eyes of the public



# Responsible rehoming/selling

## Ridden

If can still be ridden, is uninjured and in good health, these horses can be retrained for another less physically demanding career



## Retired (companion)

Should never be considered as the 'easy option'

Former competition horses may not be accustomed to retired life or may require an experienced carer

*Quality of life rather than quantity of life must be the key decision-making driver at all stages*



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## End of life



- Euthanasia can be the right welfare choice to prevent ongoing suffering
- Be prepared – know what options are available
- Euthanasia/slaughter must be carried out humanely, following OIE or higher standards
- Cultural and religious beliefs need to be handled sensitively



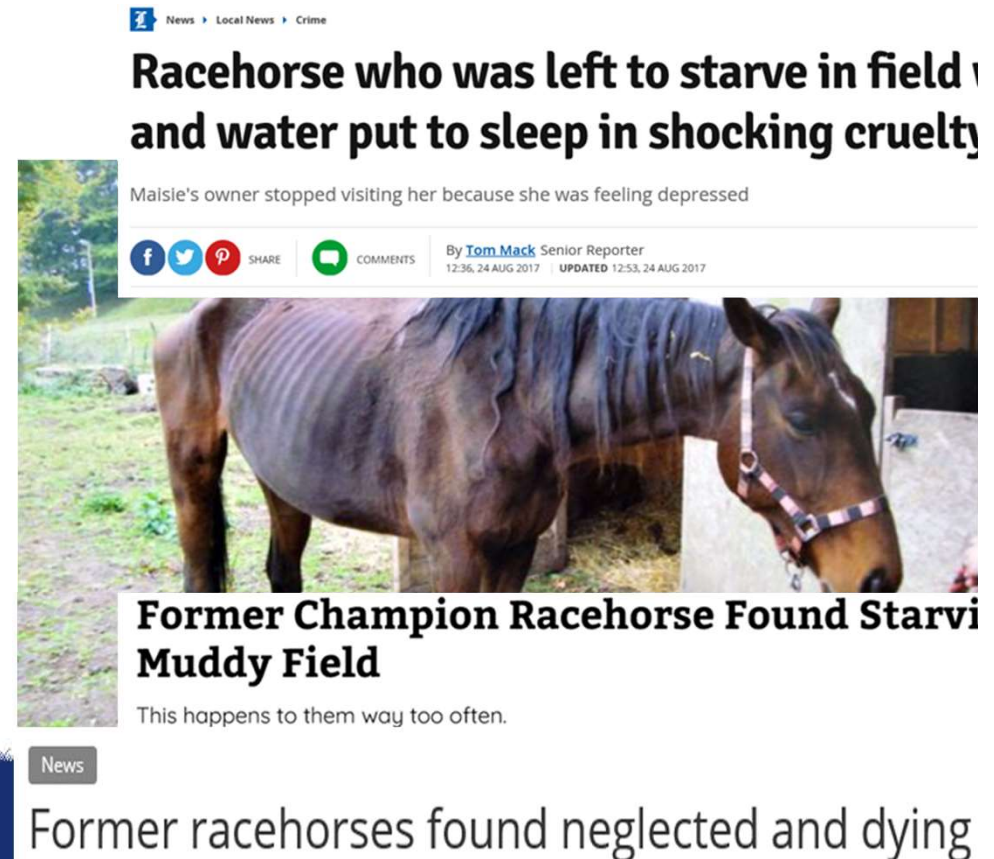


# Slaughter

- If horse is eligible to enter food chain there is always a value to the horse
- Is an acceptable end of life option IF their welfare is not compromised at any point during the process
- Slaughterhouses/abattoirs must have appropriate facilities and trained staff to take equines
- Poor welfare at slaughterhouses is often due to inhumane handling and treatment by staff
- Mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses can provide reassurance

# Unacceptable end of career choices

- Prioritising quantity of life over quality of life
- Selling on a problem leading to a spiral of decline through multiple owners
- Mismatching rehomed horses to the competence of their new keepers
- Routine euthanasia



# Challenge the status-quo

- Existing management practices (e.g. limited turnout, routine treatment for preventing gastric ulcers)
- Regular/routine interventions (e.g. wind ops, medicating joints)
- Training methods e.g. rollkur
- Tack and equipment
- High wastage/injury rates





## 6. Communicating on welfare

- Bring alive what the horse-human partnership truly means
- Articulate the ethical basis of horse sport
- Explain how it is a balanced relationship – teamwork – not exploitation
- Consider looking at the sport through a different 'lens'
- Focus on more than just avoiding the negative and providing the 'basics' for the horse
- ...in order to provide a justification for using horses in sport (for entertainment)

# There will be bad days.....



# .....which we must learn from....

## ....but there will be good ones too

Across all disciplines the most successful riders are (almost always) consistently showing that their humane training and good management are producing new levels of performance quality



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# Leading by example

- Professionals are role models for many amateurs and leisure riders
- Training methods and equipment used by those at top will be copied by the less experienced
- The concept of social licence needs to be engrained in everyone – it is a collective responsibility



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## Next steps

- Invest in further research including identifying the welfare gaps/risks/priorities and changes in public perception
- Develop a better understanding of the ‘benefits’ to horses used in sport
- Encourage horse sport globally to cultivate its “social license” – to articulate a coherent and credible story



A close-up photograph of a person's hands gently holding a horse's head. The horse has a white mane and a dark face. The person is wearing a dark jacket and a green ribbed sleeve. The background is a blurred green field.

## Summary

- Horse sport needs public support for it to have a future – the welfare of the horse must be put first AND be seen to be put first – it is a collective responsibility
- Our understanding of welfare is changing – we need to make changes in how we breed, manage, train, compete, retire and approach end the life decisions for our horses
- Responsible use of horses in sport involves a lifetime commitment – and quality of life must be paramount in our decision making





**Thank you**  
**@rolyowers**  
**@horsecharity**