



## Codes of Practice for horse welfare in Victoria

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### What is a Code of Practice?

#### Do I have to follow a Code if I keep horses?

#### Where can I obtain information?

Horses have been domesticated and selectively bred by man for about 5000 years. They are socially organised and have been utilised by man for food, transport and work, but are used more commonly now as a companion animal for pleasure and competitive sports.

In the now largely urban and mechanised society of Australia, few people possess the art of horsemanship or the knowledge of husbandry necessary to properly select, sustain and educate horses.

Horses are kept under a variety of conditions, from extensive grazing in unfenced wilderness to intensive housing in individual stalls.

It is recognised that there are certain basic needs of horses, irrespective of the husbandry system, including:

- readily accessible food and water to maintain health and vigour
- freedom of movement to stand, stretch and lie down
- regular exercise
- social contact with other horses or people
- accommodation that neither harms nor causes undue strain, and provides adequate protection
- protection from disease, and regular inspections to assess the need for attention to feet, teeth and parasite control
- rapid identification and treatment of vice, injury and disease

Any person responsible for the welfare of horses should acquire maximum possible expertise, because the well-being and usefulness of horses depend on the skill and attitude of the individuals who manage them. Assistance or advice on management of horses can be obtained from veterinarians or other qualified advisers.

### Codes of Practice

In addition to seeking advice from professional advisers, a person in charge of horses should be aware of the various Codes of Practice, which set out the minimum husbandry standards for various animal species, or for animals subject to procedures where their welfare may be at risk.

A code of practice is developed following:

- needs analysis
- extensive consultation (including industry, government and animal welfare organisations)
- draft preparation and distribution for comment
- analysis of public comment

Codes are given status under *the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* and, while a breach of a Code is not considered an offence in itself, animal husbandry conducted outside a Code of Practice could lead to animal suffering and a possible offence.

It is a defence against a charge of cruelty if an owner can demonstrate that the conduct was within the scope of a code of practice. The exception is the Victorian Code Of Practice For The Care And Use Of Animals For Scientific Purposes which is made under part 3 of the Act and for which a breach is grounds for prosecution without the need to prove cruelty.

In addition, Codes of Practice foster improved animal welfare through self-regulation, by promoting greater awareness of the features and benefits of good welfare practice and by acting as educational and discussion tools.

### Victorian Codes of Practice relating to horses

Current Victorian Codes of Practice relating to horses include:

- Code of accepted farming practice for the welfare of horses
- Code of Practice for the land transport of horses (Victoria)
- Code of practice for the tethering of animals
- Code of practice for the public display and exhibition of animals
- Code of practice for the welfare of film animals
- Code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes
- Code of practice for the welfare of horses competing at bush race meetings

In addition, new Victorian Codes relating to horses are presently being developed, including:

- Code of Practice for horse hire and riding establishments
- Code of Practice for animals at saleyards
- Code of Practice for rodeos

Current Codes are available on the web at:

[www.nre.vic.gov.au/plnt.anml/welfare/code/codes.htm](http://www.nre.vic.gov.au/plnt.anml/welfare/code/codes.htm)

Or:

Bureau of Animal Welfare  
475 Mickleham Road  
Attwood Vic 3049

Telephone: 03 9217 4228

Fax: 03 9217 4331

## Model Codes of Practice

At the Federal level of Government, a number of Australian model Codes of Practice have been produced which in the absence of a Victorian state code would act as guidelines.

The codes are developed by a National Animal Welfare Committee which receives input from state and federal departments with responsibility for agriculture and/or animal welfare, as well as industry and animal welfare groups.

Australian model codes are used as models for states to develop their own.

Current model codes relating to horses include:

- Air transport of livestock
- Animals at saleyards
- Land transport of horses
- Feral livestock animals
- Sea transport of livestock
- Care and use of animals for scientific purposes

Most of the model codes are available for a small fee from CSIRO publications (1800 645 051); some are on the web at

[www.affa.gov.au/armcanz/pubsinfo/mcpwa/animal\\_welfare.htm](http://www.affa.gov.au/armcanz/pubsinfo/mcpwa/animal_welfare.htm).

## Further information

In the event of concerns regarding welfare of horses, to obtain copies of Codes of Practice, or to clarify the provisions of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*, you may contact:

Bureau of Animal Welfare  
Department of Primary Industries  
475 Mickleham Road  
Attwood Vic 3049

Telephone: 03 9217 4147

Fax: 03 9217 4331

Further information on NRE horse programs may be obtained from:

Dr Patricia Ellis  
Principal Veterinary Officer, Horse Industry Programs

at: Chief Veterinary Officer's Unit

475 Mickleham Road

Attwood Vic 3049

Telephone: 03 9217.4237

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