



## Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses

Updated: January 2006

AG0005

ISSN 1329-8062

Bureau of Animal Welfare, Attwood

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### 1. Preface

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, more commonly now, as a companion animal for pleasure and competitive sports.

Over the centuries man has selected horses according to traits such as conformation, speed, courage, strength, endurance, and ability to be trained. 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.

This Code of Practice is intended to provide an outline of the principles of husbandry and management that most affect the welfare of horses.

### 2. Introduction

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

This Code of Practice recognises 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 lice, injury and disease

The Code of Practice emphasises the importance of good horsemanship, pointing out that persons in charge have a legal liability to care for horses under their control.

This implies a knowledge of the basic behavioural and physical needs of horses, irrespective of the intensity of husbandry.

Persons 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.

Horses are kept in Australia for a variety of purposes, including:

- work (for example, draught, delivery, stock)
- competition (racing, eventing, jumping, showing, endurance riding)
- pleasure riding or driving
- breeding
- pets
- slaughter for meat and by-products

The absence or mention of any particular practice in this Code of Practice does not imply that such a practice is either acceptable or unacceptable.

This Code of Practice is based on knowledge available at the time of publication and may need to be varied in the light of knowledge gained in the future. They do not replace the need for experience and common sense in horse husbandry and the use of veterinary advice when necessary.

## 3. General Husbandry

### 3.1 Behavioural needs

The application of sound principles of husbandry requires an understanding of animal behaviour.

Horses are social animals that establish a group hierarchy; also they may form social bonds with other animals, including humans. They breed, graze, and respond to fright and painful stimuli in predictable patterns, and can develop behavioural problems.

People experienced with horses appreciate the effect that normal feeding and breeding habits have on reactions of horses to restraint, and the effects of ill health on their attitude and movement.

The design of facilities, the stocking density, and the composition of groups of horses must allow each horse to have an area of its own.

Each horse in a resting group requires about 6 square metres of space. Subordinate horses must have an opportunity to escape from bullying by dominant animals in the group. Colts, stallions, weanlings, pregnant and sick animals usually require segregation from other groups of horses, to reduce the risk of injury and disease.

### 3.2 Supervision

Frequency and level of supervision should relate to the likelihood of risk to the welfare of each horse.

Horses kept under intensive management in stables and yards should be inspected, fed and watered at least twice a day.

Horses grazing under more extensive conditions require variable supervision, according to density of stocking and availability of suitable feed; the breed type; nature and disposition; age and pregnancy status; and the nature of fencing and reliability of water supply.

Steps should be taken to ensure that horses can be attended to promptly in the event of fire, flood or injury. In any situation, the degree of supervision should be comparable with that practised by competent horsemen for that type of husbandry.

Mares in late pregnancy should be observed at least daily for signs of impending foaling.

### 3.3 Food and water

#### 3.3.1 Water

Horses require free access to an adequate supply of good quality water.

Reticulated water should be inspected daily for normal functions during summer, and at least twice a week during winter.

A bucket supply of water should be used only where horses are constantly supervised by a person living on the premises, and should be replenished at least twice a day (see Appendix 1).

Requirements for water vary widely, depending on age, bodyweight, air temperature and humidity, the work, state of health and type of diet of the horse.

Where provision of sufficient water for health and vitality cannot be met, horses should be moved, agisted, sold or slaughtered on site.

#### 3.3.2 Food

Horses need food that will maintain their health, vitality and welfare.

Food for horses should meet the requirements of growth, pregnancy, lactation and work (see Appendix 2).

Where the provision of food sufficient for health and vitality cannot be met, horses should be moved, agisted, sold, or slaughtered on site.

If there is no pasture for horses to graze, they should be fed at least once a day. Regular supervision should be provided to observe behaviour patterns and response to feed. Feed troughs for horses should be spaced to minimise bullying and allow subordinate animals access to feed.

Less thrifty horses require segregation and special feeding if they lose body condition and vitality.

When a horse fails to thrive, the quantity, quality and availability of feed, and the health of the horse (including the state of its teeth and the extent of parasitism), should be evaluated. Care should be taken to protect horses from food harmful to health.

Horses should not be overfed. Overfeeding some horses, particularly idle ponies, can induce laminitis or founder. Animals at risk should be exercised and their intake of food energy reduced to minimal maintenance requirements. Affected horses should be moved to more suitable pasture, or confined to yards and fed suitable dry feed.

However, all components of diet essential for growth health and vitality should be readily available to horses. Selective reduction in food intake should be undertaken only by experienced persons, or under veterinary supervision.

### **3.4 Premises**

#### *3.4.1 General requirements*

Premises should be designed to minimise the risk of injury to horses. There should be adequate numbers of paddocks or yards to permit animals of similar age, sex, size and compatibility to be grouped.

The risk of injury increases where horses are overcrowded and competition for food, water and space leads to fighting.

#### *3.4.2 Fencing*

Suitability of fencing varies according to the breed, sex and disposition of the horses, stocking density and paddock size.

Fences should be readily visible to the horses and properly maintained.

Barbed wire, prefabricated wire fencing, and high tensile (2.8 mm or 2.5 mm) are prone to cause severe injury to horses and are particularly hazardous when used in small areas.

Electric fencing, properly fitted and maintained, provides a safe and effective barrier to horses, when used with conventional post-and-wire and post-and rail fences.

Gateways should be designed to give easy and safe passage of horses.

Gates should be fastened with a secure chain or catch, to prevent escape of horses and possible injury.

#### *3.4.3 Accommodation*

Healthy horses can tolerate extremes of heat and cold if they are acclimatised and have adequate feed and water. However, steps should be taken to minimise the effects of climatic extremes and other factors producing either cold or heat stress. Young foals, very old, or sick horses are most susceptible.

Landscape features, such as windows of trees, hedges, and gullies, provide shelter. Stressed horses should be put in shelter-sheds or stables.

Horses clipped during winter should be rugged, except when working or when weather conditions are very mild.

Yards, shelter-sheds and loose-boxes or stalls provided for horses should not restrict their freedom to stand, lie down, stretch and groom themselves. Sheds should be constructed and maintained so as to provide adequate security and minimise risk of injury and disease.

The floors of yards, sheds and stalls should have surfaces that permit adequate drainage and allow horses to stand and walk normally.

Stables and stalls should give adequate natural ventilation. Air vents on opposite sides of the box are preferred.

Loose-boxes for horses should have a floor area of at least 12 square metres (for ponies 9 square metres) and should be 2.4 metres high.

Horses should be accommodated singly in loose boxes and tied if in stalls. Clean bedding - such as straw, sawdust or wood-shavings - should be provided for warmth, insulation and protection from abrasion.

Fire fighting equipment should be available and there should be ready access to horses to enable them to be released quickly in case of fire.

Provision should be made for storage of feed, bedding, stable equipment and saddlery.

Dirty bedding and stale or contaminated feed and water should be removed each day. Disposal of washings, urine and dung should be made in compliance with the requirements of statutory authorities.

Horses should not be tethered unless they are placid and trained to accept it. Tethered horses require constant supervision. Adequate feed and water should be provided at least twice a day. Horses confined or tethered should be exercised every day.

Horses tethered for grazing should be fitted with a secure collar or halter attached to a light chain that is at least 9 metres long, and fitted with a swivel at both ends. The area should be free of obstructions that may entangle the tether.

Tethering of horses should be a short-term practice only. Long-term tethering of horses is not acceptable.

#### *3.4.4 Agistment*

A wide variety of agistment is available for horses and, usually, the degree of care and attention given to agisted horses is in direct proportion to the fee charged.

Cheap agistment on pasture is satisfactory, providing welfare requirements are met.

Services also available are regular supervision, rugging, grooming, stabling, individual feeding and provision of a high standard of facilities and management.

A written agreement defining conditions of the agistment should be made between the horse-owner and the agistment property-owner. The agreement should state the fee; the service to be provided, the name of the person responsible for supervision and provision of feed and water and the steps to be taken should the horse become sick or be injured.

The owner of the agistment property should indicate the provisions made for safety of the animals, the supply of feed and water, and routine measures for control of parasites and prevention of overstocking.

## 4. Special husbandry requirements

### 4.1 General management

Persons responsible for the supervision of horses should be able to recognise signs of ill-health and should call a veterinarian to diagnose and treat an illness or injury.

Horses should not be allowed to suffer for want of attention. They should be killed humanely when seriously injured or sick if proper care and attention cannot be provided, or removed to suitable facilities to permit adequate treatment, supervision and continuing aftercare.

Healthy horses:

- are active, move freely, eat and drink well
- have clear eyes and nostrils, clean skins and coats
- are neither very thin nor overfat.

Sick horses may show the following signs:

- Lassitude and loss of condition; these signs are frequently associated with an inadequate diet, internal parasites or teeth problems
- digestive upsets; seen as diarrhoea, with soiling of tail and hindlegs, constipation or colic (abdominal pain) with restlessness, pawing, kicking at the stomach or rolling, often accompanied by straining, teeth-grinding and patchy or generalised sweating.
- lameness; due to injury, laminitis or founder, foot abscess or improper hoof maintenance
- discharges from eyes, nostrils, or swollen glands under the throat; these are indications of respiratory disease and may be accompanied by a cough, fever, loss of appetite.

Injuries occur more frequently where horses are overcrowded and facilities are inadequate. Persons responsible for the welfare of horses should seek **immediate** veterinary attention for horses showing the following signs:

- acute abdominal pain or colic
- serious injuries, including deep wounds, severe haemorrhage, suspected bone fractures, or eye injuries.
- straining for more than 30 minutes by a mare that has not foaled
- inability to rise or stand

- Veterinary attention should be sought as soon as possible for horses showing the following signs:
- marked lameness or injuries not responding to treatment within 24 hours
- persistent signs of respiratory disease (colds) accompanied by loss of appetite
- diarrhoea or persistent weight loss.

### 4.2 Education and training

Persons engaged in educating and training horses should be experienced, or under direct supervision of an experienced person.

Competent horsemen and women recognise the different behaviour patterns of horses and successful trainers adapt their training methods to suit the particular horse.

Competent persons are confident and instil this confidence in the horses they train. They recognise that most horses respond best to firm but gentle techniques, and to rewards when the horse responds correctly.

Abnormal physiological and behavioural responses to training and confinement should be recognised and measures taken to correct them. These responses may include aggression, biting, pawing, kicking, weaving, pacing, crib-biting or wind-sucking.

Occasional disciplinary measures may be necessary to establish dominance of the trainer and discourage bad habits, such as biting, in the horse. Discipline has to be administered immediately following the act of misconduct, and should be minimal. Horses should not be beaten or abused.

Basic education of young horses, while desirable, also should be minimal, to reduce risks of injury and growth abnormalities (see Appendix 3). Immature animals should not be given strenuous training.

Training methods involving cruelty or repeated pain 'insults' should not be used.

Horses should be of the appropriate type, be adequately educated, fed and housed, and trained to the degree of fitness for the task to be performed.

All saddlery, harness and other equipment used with horses should be of sound condition, well-fitting, correctly adjusted, and regularly cleaned, so that the risk of injury to horses is reduced.

Horses require regular exercise for a period of weeks before they are adequately conditioned for strenuous exercise. All horses, including well-trained animals, can be over-ridden. Experience and skill are required to ride or drive horses to their utmost ability in competitive horse sports without inducing distress, severe illness, or death.

Inexperienced persons riding or driving horses have an obligation to use the horse in accordance with its fitness and, if in doubt, should seek advice from an experienced horseman.

Veterinary attention should be sought if there is any doubt about the fitness of a horse for a particular purpose.

### 4.3 Foot care

Horses' hooves should be trimmed as required to permit normal mobility. Horses ridden or driven on roads or hard surfaces should be shod. Shoeing should not provoke any abnormality of gait or conformation. Hot shoeings should be practised only by experienced farriers.

Hooves of horses in work should be inspected each day for signs of injury, loose shoes or impacted stones.

Shod horses should be inspected at least every six weeks for replacement or adjustment of shoes. Shoes should be removed or inspected regularly when horses are not in use for a particular purpose.

### 4.4. Treatment procedures

#### 4.4.1 General

Effective management and treatment of horses involves using various forms of restraint. These will vary with the temperament, disposition, and previous learning experience of the particular horse, the nature of the management procedure, and the skill of the horsemen.

Restraint methods used on horses should always be the minimum necessary to carry out routine management procedures. Prolonged or over-zealous use of restraints, such as nose-twitches, may cause severe reaction from many horses.

Adequate facilities to provide a safe environment, and suitable equipment, should be available when horses are subjected to any procedure or treatment. Management and treatment procedures should be performed by competent persons.

Treatment practices that cause pain should not be carried out on horses if painless or alternative methods of treatment can be adopted. Treatment practices causing pain should be performed only under the influence of suitable analgesia or anaesthesia.

#### 4.4.2 Identification

Lip-tattooing and skin-branding are the accepted methods of identifying horses. Hoof fire-branding is acceptable as a short-term procedure.

Freeze-branding and fire-branding are the usual methods of permanent identification. Horses should be branded before weaning and as early as management practices will allow, by persons experienced in such practices. Horses should not be branded using corrosive chemicals.

#### 4.4.3 Surgical and medical procedures

Horses of any age should not be castrated without the use of an appropriate anaesthetic or analgesic agent.

Surgical procedures should be performed and anaesthesia given only by, or under the direct supervision of, a registered veterinary surgeon.

Internal medication such as vaccines, drenches, food additives, and external medications such as liniments, lotions and insecticides, should be used strictly in

accordance with the manufacturer's instructions - overdosing may harm horses; underdosing may be ineffective. Treatments should be administered in a hygienic manner.

### 4.5 Protection from disease

Routine vaccination of horses against tetanus is desirable. Owners should seek veterinary advice about vaccination against other diseases.

Prompt appropriate preventive treatment should be given to horses for diseases that may be common in a district or occurring in a mob.

Routine treatment for internal worm parasites and early treatment of external parasites such as lice, should be practised. The effectiveness of treatment should be evaluated by veterinary examination if the response to routine treatment is poor.

Good hygiene and cleanliness in and around stables, including disposal of effluent and litter, will reduce the risk of parasitism and disease.

Paddocks used for grazing horses should be managed in such a way that contamination by parasites or other agents is minimised. Good management practices include spelling paddocks for intervals of at least six weeks and preferably 12 weeks, or grazing with other species such as sheep and cattle.

### 4.6 Responsible ownership

Indiscriminate breeding of horses, and breeding of horses of a type or temperament unsuitable for specific purposes, are undesirable.

Prospective purchasers and breeders of horses should be aware that proper feeding, maintenance and training of horses represent long-term responsibilities.

Many welfare problems are created when owners neglect animals that may have little economic value.

## 5. Euthanasia or slaughter

Euthanasia or slaughter should be performed humanely.

Acceptable methods are:

- rapid intravenous injection of concentrated barbiturate solutions; it should be noted that tissue residues will render the carcass unfit for human or pet consumption if this technique is used
- shooting, using a fire-arm or humane killer
- use of a captive-bolt pistol

Euthanasia or slaughter should be performed only by persons trained or experienced in the method used (see Appendix 4).

Horses should not be overcrowded when held at premises for slaughter. They should have free access to water and sufficient food (hay or pasture) to provide normal energy requirements for maintenance.

Facilities for handling horses should be designed to:

- minimise injury
- provide security.

Yard surfaces should enable easy cleaning and provide safe footing for the horses.

## 6. Transport

Horses are prone to injury during transport. Appropriate training and conditioning reduce the risk of injury.

Unbroken or unhandled horses should not be transported alone in single or dual horse trailers. Horses unaccustomed to being transported should travel only in the company of other horses.

Young or unbroken horses frequently travel best when loose-penned in small groups. Other horses should be fitted with head-stalls and the leads should be secured to the vehicle, using a quick-release knot, so as not to endanger the animals.

It is recommended to transport in separate pens:

- groups of unbroken horses
- stallions
- mares in advanced pregnancy
- mares with foals
- horses significantly different in size or type, for example weanlings and adults, ponies, light hacks and heavy hacks and draughts.

Unweaned foals should be transported with their mothers. Care should be taken to prevent attempted escapes over tail-gates or under breast-rails of dual horse floats.

After 24 hours of road or rail travel, a rest period of between 12-24 hours should be provided, before starting the next stage of the journey. The period of travel may be extended to 36 hours only if a full 24 hour rest period is provided before starting the next stage of the journey.

Special precautions should be taken to provide shelter and ventilation during extremely hot weather.

Horses in transit should be fed and watered at intervals of no longer than 12 hours. Provision should be made for mares to suckle their foals during transit.

Horses should not be transported for more than eight hours unless they are in good health and have been pre-conditioned for prolonged travel.

Proper pre-conditioning of horses includes treatment for internal and external parasites and paring of feet if necessary. They should be adequately fed and watered before transportation.

Lame and sick horses should not be transported except to or from a place for veterinary treatment.

Mares more than 10 months pregnant should not be transported for more than eight hours.

Mares with foals at foot should not be transported within seven days of foaling, unless it is to or from a place for veterinary treatment, or is for a journey of two hours or

less. Mares foaled fewer than 14 days should not be transported for more than eight hours.

All transport vehicle doors and ramps should be fitted with secure latches, and be close-fitting, to reduce the risk of injury and/or escape.

Floors of transport vehicles should be of solid construction and provide a secure footing for horses.

Transport vehicles should be cleaned thoroughly and inspected regularly for faults. Faulty vehicles should be repaired before further use.

## Appendix 1. Water requirements

The basic maintenance requirement of water for horses is about 52 mL/kg bodyweight/day

**Ponies** (200-300 kg body weight) require 10-15 litres daily.

**Light hacks** (300-450 kg body weight) require 15-25 litres daily.

**Thoroughbreds** (450-500 kg body weight) require 25-30 litres daily.

These requirements are increased with growth, work and lactation. Two or three times as much water as shown above is needed by horses in work.

Water requirement is closely related to the dry matter intake of food. Horses need 2-4 litres of water per kilogram of dry matter intake. This requirement increases as air temperatures rise (15-20% increase for 13°C to 25°C temperature change).

Illness associated with bowel disease, such as obstructive colic or severe diarrhoea, can result in substantial loss of water and other essential electrolytes (50 - 70 litres/day).

Water troughs and containers should be inspected for cleanliness and freedom from contamination, function and replenishment.

## Appendix 2. Food requirements

Good quality pastures, containing suitable grasses and legumes, can provide the food requirements for most horses, except those doing hard work. In temperate areas where permanent pastures are fertilised annually, about one hectare of pasture for each grazing horse should provide maintenance requirements during years with normal rainfall.

Horses should be fed according to body condition. Over fatness is undesirable. The efficiency of food utilisation will vary between particular horses and breeds of horses. Most ponies utilise feed efficiently but thoroughbred horses require substantially more feed per kilogram of body weight.

Most horses kept in smaller areas require supplementary feed for some part of the year, depending on requirements for growth, pregnancy, lactation, and work.

Approximate minimum feed requirements of adult horses are shown in this table.

**Table 1. Approximate minimum feed requirements of adult horses.**

Body weight of horse	Idle horse (maintenance only)	Moderate work (jumping, stock work, some evening); horse needs both hay and grain;	
(kg)	(kg of hay*)	(kg of hay*)	(kg of grain (oats))
300	5.0	4.0	1.0
400	7.0	5.0	3.5
500	8.0-9.0	5.5-7.5	4.0-6.0

\*Good quality pasture hay rich in clover, or lucerne hay

Inexperienced people should consult a veterinarian, the Department of Agriculture, or an experienced horseman about selection of suitable foodstuffs for horses used for a particular purpose.

Protein, mineral and vitamin supplements should be provided when required. Horses should have access to salt.

Adequate, good quality food is necessary for growth of young horses. At six months of age horses require as much energy-rich foods and more protein than idle, adult horses.

Lactating mares require about 70% more energy than idle, adult horses.

### Appendix 3. Guide to education and training of horses

Foals less than four or five months of age may be handled to accustom them to being caught and led, and to being confined within a yard, stall or horse float, when accompanied by their mothers.

After weaning (usually between five and seven months of age), foals may be accustomed to having their legs and feet handled, and to being tied up and confined.

Horses should not be broken to ride or drive until they are aged between 15 and 18 months of age.

Training and conditioning of young horses for competitive purposes requires considerable skill and experience. Inexperienced persons should not ride or drive horses younger than 18-24 months of age on a regular basis.

The selection, care and training of horses used for work and competition are complex arts and skills.

There are great variations between types of horses, types of use and training methods.

The various aspects of the industry have evolved satisfactory methods and guidelines to protect the welfare of horses used in those areas.

Persons involved in the education and training of horses should be familiar with average industry requirements for age, suitability and fitness of horses used for a particular purpose.

### Appendix 4. Euthanasia by shooting

Shooting is a humane method of destruction when properly performed. The firearm should be at least .22 calibre (long rifle). The target area and direction of the bullet are as shown in the figure. Adequate precautions should be taken to ensure the safety of any bystanders.

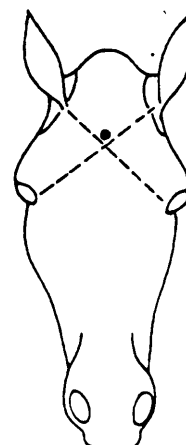


Figure 1. Target area for humane destruction of horse by shooting. The target is just above intersection of broken lines in the figure

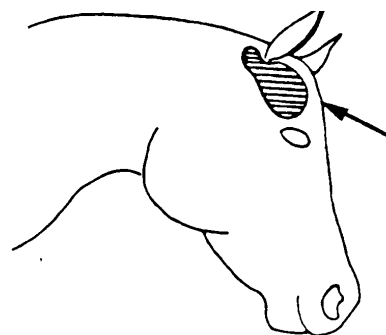


Figure 2. Direction (shown by arrow) in which bullet should be fired at the target area.

**Prepared by the Minister for Agriculture.  
Approved by the Governor in Council, 15 December 1988.  
Published in the Victorian Government Gazette 18 May 1988.**

### Further information

If you would like more information, please contact:

Naomi Pearson, Bureau of Animal Welfare

Phone: 136 186

*The previous version of this note was published in October 2001.*

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