

CHAPTER 5

OTHER ANIMAL WELFARE CONCERNS

Introduction

5.1 The previous chapters of this report deal with welfare problems related to specific racing industry practices. This chapter reviews more general welfare problems, in horse, harness and greyhound racing.

Specific Animal Welfare Concerns - Horse Racing

5.2 The Committee received evidence from ANZFAS concerning the prevalence of lameness and Exercise-induced Pulmonary Haemorrhage (EIPH) amongst race-horses. As these are clearly issues affecting animal welfare, the Committee reviews the concerns presented to it during the inquiry. In this section, the Committee also reviews evidence on abuse and cruelty to horses.

Lameness

5.3 According to ANZFAS, lameness is a problem that affects a large percentage of racehorses. ANZFAS refers to a number of veterinary sources. According to these sources, great stress is placed on the limbs of a racehorse. Bone fractures of the carpus are common in thoroughbred and standardbred racehorses. The cause of these fractures relates to factors such as extreme speed, faulty conformation of the horse, fatigue, immaturity, poor conditioning, poor shoeing and inconsistent track conditions.¹

5.4 Several references to scientific literature were provided to illustrate ANZFAS' concern regarding lameness:

An epidemiological study of wastage among racehorses was conducted in 1982 and 1983 among six stables, five of which were in Newmarket [UK]. The basis of the survey was the inability of horses to take part in a cantering exercise as a result of injury or disease. The greatest number of days lost to training was caused by lameness (67.6%) and respiratory problems (20.5%). Conditions of the foot (19%), muscle (18%) carpus (14%) fetlock joints (14%) tendons (10%) and sore

shins (9%) were the major reasons for training days being lost in 198 cases in which a positive diagnosis of the site of lameness was made. The results confirm a previous investigation suggesting that the diagnosis, therapy and prophylaxis of lameness merit a high priority in research efforts to reduce wastage among young racehorses.²

5.5 ANZFAS also referred to a study conducted in Australia by Dr Bourke in 1985.³ In this study, Dr Bourke concluded that lameness was responsible for the greatest number of racing days lost by 461 horses scratched for veterinary reasons in 1983/84. Dr Bourke's study also indicated that "some 20% of these lame horses appear to have been lost to racing".⁴

5.6 Addressing possible reasons for this incidence of lameness, ANZFAS referred to another study prepared by Dr Bourke entitled *Wastage of Racehorses Through Lameness in Victoria 1983/84*. In this study, Dr Bourke recognised a correlation between racetrack surface and the incidence of post-race lameness:

As far as shin soreness is concerned, there is definitely a racing surface or a training surface correlation with incidence. It is higher in the drier months when tracks are hard.⁵

5.7 The Committee notes that several witnesses recognised the problems associated with lameness of horses in the racing industry. Given the incidence of this condition, the Committee considers that priority should be given to research into lameness in order to reduce wastage among racehorses.

Exercise-induced Pulmonary Haemorrhage (EIPH)

5.8 Exercise-Induced Pulmonary Haemorrhage is characterised by the presence of blood in the trachea-bronchial tree following periods of competitive exercise. Studies have shown that the number of horses suffering from EIPH is significantly greater than the number reported with epistaxis (bleeding from the nose).

5.9 ANZFAS expressed its concern that many cases of EIPH go undetected because horses are checked for bleeding in the nose but not in the lungs.

5.10 Data provided to the Committee corroborated ANZFAS' concerns regarding the incidence of bleeding in the lungs.

5.11 The Committee notes that the Australian Rules of Racing have strict provisions regarding the racing of "bleeders". The rules provide that these horses should not be trained, exercised or galloped on any racecourse for a period of two months. The Rules also provide that horses should not start in any race for a period of three months, and then only after a satisfactory gallop of at least 1,000 metres in the presence of a steward. Furthermore, if a horse suffers more than one attack of bleeding, the horse is ineligible to start in any race.

5.12 While the regulations for bleeding from the nose are strict, horses suffering from EIPH without a show of blood at the nose will likely not be detected. ANZFAS expressed its concern that cases of undetected EIPH will cause an unacceptable level of discomfort or suffering to affected horses.

5.13 The Committee considers that a major research priority should be to investigate the prevalence of undetected EIPH in Australia and methods to reduce it.

Abuse and Cruelty

5.14 RSPCA (NSW) drew attention to occurrences of "gross neglect" of horses within the industry. They provided the Committee with several examples. These included:

- Nine thoroughbreds stabled in close proximity to Canterbury racecourse. These animals had not been removed from their stalls for a period of some four years, were in fat to grossly overweight condition, had appalling hoof problems including laminitis, hoof abscesses, dropped soles, mild to severe clubbing of the hooves, pedal bone rotation and general deformity associated with lack of care, no exercise, poor hygiene and grossly contaminated bedding.
- Two purported "thoroughbred studs" in the outer Sydney area where animals were allowed to starve to death because cash was not available for feed.

- Two examples of very poor management during spelling:
 - (a) Two thoroughbred geldings near death on owners property - no provision of food.
 - (b) Two thoroughbreds under care of Canterbury trainer - failure⁶ to provide veterinary treatment or adequate feed.

5.15 The Society commented that while the majority of thoroughbreds are well-managed and well fed, gross neglect does occur with the full knowledge of the racing community, that usually takes no action.

5.16 RSPCA (NSW) also provided evidence documenting the use of barbed wire reins and other goads which could only be described as instruments of cruelty.

5.17 The anecdotal evidence supplied by RSPCA does not allow the Committee to come to a conclusion about the extent of such abuses. Nevertheless, the Committee is convinced that such abuses occur and that they should be condemned. Every effort should be made to rid the industry of such cruel practices.

Specific Animal Welfare Concerns - Greyhound Racing

5.18 Several issues emerged concerning greyhound racing. However, one issue predominated. This relates to the use of live animals as lures in the training of greyhounds. Other concerns raised by the Australian Veterinary Association are also reviewed briefly.

Use of Live Lures

5.19 The major welfare concern is the use of live lures. This practice involves tying rabbits and other small animals to the mechanical lure at training tracks. The dogs chase the lure which is slowed down to allow the dogs to catch the lure and kill the live animal tied to it. The theory behind this practice is that a racing dog having been blooded in this way, becomes a keener chaser of the lure during competitive events.

5.20 Welfare organisations and greyhound racing authorities agree that live baiting is unacceptable. Disagreement does arise, however, over the question of how prevalent is the practice.

5.21 Dr David Butcher from RSPCA (NSW) told the Committee that the use of live lures is extremely widespread. When appearing before the Committee in 1989, Dr Butcher informed the Committee that seven prosecutions on the use of live lures were pending. He indicated that these prosecutions were instituted by the RSPCA in New South Wales. He questioned the surveillance of these practices by racing authorities in the following terms:

It is interesting to note that even the police detect this type of thing but the Greyhound Racing Control Board, with 12 inspectors, has never, to its knowledge, detected this type of activity in all of its operations. That is one of the things we find completely and utterly stunning.⁷

5.22 Mr Gavin Fitzpatrick, appearing before the Committee representing the National Coursing Association of Victoria, responded to these criticisms in the following terms:

I do not believe it is anywhere near as prevalent as is made out by the RSPCA. I heard today that it is supposed to have got 13 convictions in the last five years in Victoria; I honestly cannot believe that. There may have been 13 prosecutions. I doubt whether there would be in fact be 13 convictions.⁸

5.23 Dr Craig Danalis, Chairman of the Greyhound Racing Control Board of Queensland, also expressed the view that the use of live lures was exaggerated, in fact, "it is very low".

5.24 Dr Danalis compared allegations about the use of live lures with allegations about the prevalence of cock-fighting and bull-terrier fighting:

You see, we have to live with the fact that every year the matter of cock fighting is always brought up once again, as well as pit bull-terrier fighting and blooding of greyhounds. In 25 years of veterinary practice, I have never seen a cockfight or the results thereof - the torn up chooks that are supposed to be around. ... I have looked around but I have never been

able to find out about this business of pit bull-terrier fighting. But I tell you that there are certain organisations that will tell you it is everywhere; in 25 years I have not been able to find one venue or the result of it.⁹

5.25 On the basis of the evidence presented on this matter, the Committee cannot reach a firm conclusion on the extent of the use of live animals as lures. However, the Committee is left with a definite impression that it is occurring on more than an occasional basis.

5.26 The Committee sees the use of live animals for blooding greyhounds as essentially a straightforward matter of cruelty towards animals. No arguments can or have been put forward to defend the use of live lures. Allowing live animals to be torn apart by greyhounds is a manifest act of cruelty towards animals and should not happen. The Committee is of the view that the greyhound industry must take a more positive role to prevent the use of live lures.

5.27 The Committee supports the view of RSPCA on the need for stiffer penalties for people convicted of using live animals for blooding. The Committee is of the view that people convicted of such offences, especially repeat offenders, should be banned from participation in all aspects of the industry for a significant length of time.

Other Concerns

5.28 The Australian Veterinary Association made two specific recommendations aimed at improving animal welfare in the greyhound racing industry. These proposals are considered in the following section.

Vaccination

5.29 According to AVA, greyhounds appear to have an increased susceptibility to viral and bacterial diseases, possibly because of the stresses of training and racing. The vaccination status of animals is often unknown or poorly recorded. The Association recommended that following weaning, vaccination records, particularly for canine parvovirus and canine distemper, should be required as part of breed registration procedures.¹⁰

5.30 AVA also recommended the vaccination of greyhounds on an annual basis for canine distemper, canine hepatitis, canine parvovirus, and kennel cough.¹¹ The Association also asserted that the potential for the spread of infectious organisms through race track kennels was high. As a means to reduce the incidence of disease in the greyhound population, AVA suggested a co-ordinated immunisation program throughout the industry.

5.31 The Australian Veterinary Association also recommended that the trainers of all dogs presented at race meetings be required to produce a current vaccination certificate from a registered veterinary surgeon. AVA also argued that such measures would reduce the blackmarket in veterinary vaccines, as well as ensure their proper storage and use.

Therapeutic Care of Dogs

5.32 The Australian Veterinary Association commented on the emergence of "muscle men" or "muscle manipulators" who are a kind of lay, dog healer. According to AVA, these people are often responsible for giving poor and incorrect advice and administering inappropriate or restricted substances. It was also suggested that surgical procedures are performed using physical restraint without anaesthesia. According to the Association, these lay persons are performing acts of veterinary science, and as such are contravening Veterinary Surgeons Acts.¹²

5.33 AVA maintains that if the existence of muscle men and muscle manipulators is to continue, they should be subject to registration or licensing.¹³ The Association observed that there is a need to provide more facilities to enable veterinary graduates to increase their expertise in greyhound medicine and surgery.¹⁴

Destruction of Animals

5.34 The Australian Veterinary Association advised the Committee that it is satisfied with the arrangements for the humane destruction of dogs at race tracks. However, a veterinary surgeon should also be present at official trials as well as competitive events in order to administer first-aid assistance.

Specific Animal Welfare Concerns - Harness Racing

5.35 The Committee wishes to comment on two animal welfare issues that were raised in regard to the harness racing industry. These are sulky design and the use of the swish whip.

Sulky Design

5.36 The Committee received a submission from Mr Bede Ireland, a manufacturer of sulkies for the trotting industry. Mr Ireland presented a case for changing the design of the sulkies used in Australia.

5.37 Australian racing sulkies are narrower and longer than sulkies used in the rest of the world, except in New Zealand. The Australian sulky width is typically 1.2 metres compared to the international average of 1.6 metres. The sulky length is typically 3.05 to 3.2 metres, compared to the international standard of 2.4 to 2.6 metres.

5.38 Mr Ireland maintains that dimensions of the Australian sulky make it more prone to accident. This is so, particularly because of the positioning of driver's stirrups. In Australian sulkies, the stirrups are placed below the driver's centre of gravity. If the sulky slows down suddenly, the rider is less able to restrain himself under conditions of sudden deceleration. With legs held rigid, the driver will tend to be lifted from his seat by a rapid deceleration of the sulky.

5.39 In the sulky with different dimensions, the footrest or stirrup can be located much higher. Drivers can then brace themselves more firmly as a sulky decelerates, thereby reducing the possibility of an accident.

5.40 It was suggested that the following measures would reduce accidents.

- Prohibit the manufacture or sale of sulkies less than 1.29 or more than 1.30 metres wide. That width to be measured as the maximum outside width of the undercarriage. No other part of the sulky to exceed 1.30 metres in maximum outside width.
- Prohibit the manufacture or sale of sulkies more than 2.6 metres in total length.

- Require the use of international type footrests, that is, one that would raise the drivers feet above their present level.¹⁵

5.41 It was also suggested that any timber shafts used in a sulky should have a fail-safe point where they break so that they are unable to store crash energy. In some crashes the shafts in sulkies work to pole-vault the jockey into the air.

5.42 Representatives of the Australian Harness Racing Council were aware of Mr Ireland's arguments on this matter. However, they raised several concerns regarding the proposals to shift to shorter and wider sulkies. One concern is that most harness racing tracks in Australia are too narrow to accommodate wider sulkies. Costs involved in changing to wider tracks would be prohibitive.

5.43 Representatives of the Council also disputed whether the alleged greater number of accidents in Australian trotting are linked to sulky design. In particular, Judge Goran of the Harness Racing Council stated:

The Americans are shocked at the way we race over here. In America, they have a sort of gentlemanly-type of racing. It is not a rule, it is an agreement, but the convention is that you surrender the lead if another mans wants it, and you make your run later on. When they come here, they find that our drivers are so competitive, the race close together. They race so closely together, you wonder why they are not hitting each other all the time.¹⁶

5.44 Unfortunately, the Committee was unable to pursue this matter further. Nevertheless, the Committee urges the Australian Harness Racing Council to investigate thoroughly the implications for animal welfare of changes to the design of sulkies.

Swish Whips

5.45 The trotting industry has recently shifted from the use of canes to the use of swish whips. The swish whip, made from whale bone, is very flexible, and has a flap at the end, usually made of cord.

5.46 Animal welfare organisations are as opposed to the use of the whip in trotting as well as in thoroughbred racing and advocate its abolition.

RSPCA in both New South Wales and Victoria, however, have been prepared to accept the introduction of the swish whip into trotting. In New South Wales, RSPCA recommended that this whip should be held in the same hand that holds the sulky reins. This practice was adopted in New South Wales, but does not apply to the closing section of the race. The Committee understands that there is some concern among drivers in New South Wales that this practice restricts the control of sulkies and horses.

ENDNOTES

1. *Evidence*, Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, p. S 508584.
2. *ibid.*, pp. S 8584-5.
3. *ibid.*, p. S 8585.
4. *ibid.*
5. *ibid.*
6. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. S 8200.
7. *ibid.*, p. 8826.
8. *Evidence*, National Coursing Association of Victoria, p. 9076.
9. *Evidence*, Greyhound Racing Control Board, pp. 9081-2.
10. *Evidence*, Australian Veterinary Association, p. S 8321.
11. *ibid.*, p. S 8325.
12. *ibid.*, p. S 8326.
13. *ibid.*, p. S 8327.
14. *ibid.*
15. *Evidence*, Mr B. Ireland and Mr J. Walsh, p. S 8337.
16. *Evidence*, Australian Harness Racing Council, p. 9115.