



Dr Jane Thompson
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

The feasibility of a National Horse Traceability Register for all horses

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in support of a National Horse Traceability Register for all horses.

My primary motivation for supporting a national horse traceability register is that it will reduce risk of serious injury and death of children and inexperienced adults, who are placed on or in the vicinity of unsuitable animals.

An individual will be identified by the register as being responsible for the horse, irrespective of how many times the animal is sold and relocated within Australia. The onus of presenting a horse for sale will rest with the registered owner.

A horse is a herd animal and a flight animal. Domesticated horses bought and sold for riding present unique challenges to the market place.

THE INTEGRITY IN TRADE OF HORSES

Due to difficulties in evaluating the merits of a horse offered for sale, the pejorative term ‘horse trading’ has evolved to imply a monetary exchange based on shrewdness, which suggests underhanded business practices with unlimited opportunities for dishonesty.

Accurate descriptors for a horse’s temperament, abilities and performance are essential for a buyer to make an informed assessment of the suitability of the horse.

‘Buyer beware’ is an apt clarion call when in the market to buy a horse. At a horse inspection the prospective buyer views the horse, and possibly sees it ridden, and may take the opportunity to ride the horse, to ascertain whether the attributes of the horse match the capability of the rider. However, the risky unknown factor is often the history of the horse. Who bred it, who trained it, who has owned it up until now?

Traditionally the tension between the buyer and the seller centres on a buyer’s desire for the ‘disclosure’ of any negative aspects of a horse’s temperament, behaviour and ability against some sellers tendency to become economical with the truth when advertising a horse for sale. Whether buying directly from an owner or through a horse broker, a potential buyer will be able to trace a horse’s history and make a more informed decision, with a national horse traceability register.

The potential of making a more educated, data driven decision will improve the transparency (honesty) of the current process which will lead to increased certainty for buyers. The greatest positive flow-on affect will be a safer outcome for riders in the future.

CURRENT REGISTERS IN AUSTRALIA

The Property Identification Code (PIC) is the mandatory registration of a property upon which livestock are present. It records the owners of the property, information about the property, species of animals and the numbers of animals present on the property. It is a requirement of the Livestock Act 1997 Biosecurity Act 2015 and the Biosecurity (NLIS) Regulation 2017.

Cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, bison, buffalo, deer, camels, horses and poultry are included in the data. However, the register does not identify individual animals on the property.

The primary purpose of the PIC register is to record types of animals that are kept in flocks or herds such as sheep, cattle or poultry. It does not provide a tracking system for an individual animal, such as a horse, nor does a PIC confer a legal responsibility on the owner for its welfare. A PIC tag is removable.

PICs are essential to the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) because they provide traceability back to a property through which an outbreak of disease will speedily identify the source and readily contain and control the event. The NLIS traces cattle, sheep and goats for the purpose of not only biosecurity, but also importantly food safety.

The NLIS is an individual animal identifier through a visual or electronic ear tag. It is a record of the property location from which the animal last resided (PIC) and it is an accessible database for the movement of animals brought and sold in the supply chain. The NLIS demonstrates a means for tracking an animal's life history as it provides a ready base for discovering where the animal has come from.

The NLIS is beneficial because with the growing interest in the 'paddock to plate' culture any animals suspected of posing a biosecurity or health risk are easily identified at the time of slaughter. It protects Australia's high standards of quality and safety of meat and reduces the risk of incidents of disease.

Breed society stud books are a source of informal record however, many societies are small and run by volunteers with varying competencies for record keeping. Most societies rely upon the good will of horse owners to notify them on the sale or death of horses within the stud book.

REGISTERS SPECIFIC TO HORSES OVERSEAS

The European Union mandates a comprehensive system of identification known as **Equidae**. It is a document or passport which is issued at birth and must accompany the horse throughout its life. Upon the death of the animal the identification document is returned to the register, maintained in a central database.

The **Universal Equine Life Number (UELN)** is a voluntary international horse identification system which provides a database for all horse registering organisations. The purpose is to improve information between organisations, especially those focused on breeding and registering horses.

The Australian Stud Book, Harness Racing Australia, the Australian Pony Stud Book, the Welsh Pony and Cob Society, the Arabian Horse Society, and the Australian Warmblood Horse Association use the UELN system.

A UELN is available to ponies or horses of unknown pedigree.

In the United Kingdom the British Horse Society collates a record of leisure horses. There is the voluntary digital E-Stable, an equine register which provides national identification, registration and traceability services. It currently holds over 1.2 million equine records.

BENEFITS

With a national horse traceability register in place, we will have a means to reduce the chance that lives will be lost, by avoiding the possibility of children and inexperienced adults placed on or in the path of unsuitable horses in high risk situations. This may occur at riding schools or equestrian centres, when trying out a horse for sale, or in the course of work.

The register will assist equestrian businesses under SafeWork regulations to improve their risk management practices by having better knowledge of the history of the horses they are working with. In 2014 SafeWork Australia recorded six fatalities in equestrian facilities and five fatalities during equestrian sport.

By introducing a reliable level of accountability in the form of a national horse traceability register for all horses in Australia, the management and oversight of the movement of horses would improve significantly. Knowing where horses have been and with whom will provide clarity as to the horse's origins. When handlers and riders are aware of the history of a horse, it improves the quality of assessment of that animal. Determining whether or not a horse is suitable for a variety of tasks and situations will assist with the reduction of serious injuries and death in the equine industry. This will have a positive community and economic value.

What is the cost of permanent disability as a result of a horse related injury to families and the NDIS? What is the cost of a life to affected families and the broader community?

With the introduction of a national horse traceability register serious injuries and fatalities will be reduced if not eliminated and we will never know how many lives will be saved.

Yours sincerely,

Maggie Dawkins

Connemara Ponies and Performance Horses
Innisfree Vineyard