

# CHAPTER 6

## IMPROVING ANIMAL WELFARE IN THE RACING INDUSTRY

### Introduction

6.1 During the inquiry, it became apparent that the source of many problems associated with the welfare of animals involved in the racing industry is not during the running of events, but rather in preparation and training for events. The Committee, therefore, was interested to determine how the welfare of racing animals might be improved and even safeguarded in these circumstances. In this chapter, the Committee addresses the issues of quality of training, codes of practice and policing and enforcement of animal welfare standards.

### Quality of Training

6.2 Evidence presented to the Committee suggests that the quality of handling during the training period is crucial to animal welfare. It is during this period that an animal is most likely to suffer injury or serious strain. It is also at this stage that decisions are made on the future career of a horse or dog.

6.3 The need for proper care, training and preparation particularly in relation to horses was recognised by the Australian Veterinary Association. The Association suggested that licensing and registration within the racing industry should be more conditional upon the people involved displaying a sufficient and continuing knowledge of, and sensitivity towards, the care and welfare of horses. The Association also suggested that trainers, stewards, jockeys and drivers require more formal education in the physiology, anatomy, locomotion and husbandry of horses.<sup>1</sup>

6.4 In keeping with the approach adopted in previous reports on animal welfare matters, the Committee supports education and training as a means of safeguarding the welfare of animals.

6.5 The Committee considers that formal training and examination in the physiology, anatomy, locomotion and husbandry of horses should be phased in over a period of time for all trainers seeking licensing or

registration. Similar training and examination procedures should apply to those who handle greyhounds.

6.6 The Committee is of the view that racing associations should sponsor seminars and education programs in order to promote sound animal welfare practices among those who handle animals involved in racing.

### **Track Design and Ergonomics**

6.7 The Committee received evidence on track design and ergonomics from Mr Bede Ireland and Mr James Walsh, consulting engineers in harness racing track design.

6.8 According to Mr Ireland and Mr Walsh, bad track design plays a major role in causing horses to break down, especially the faster horses. Bad track geometry places a physical limit on how fast the horse can run so that when it tries to reach its natural speed limit, the horse can suffer various forms of strain and injury.

6.9 These injuries are caused by the need for the horse to counteract the centrifugal forces created by the horse running at speed in a circle around a central point. Just as a motor cycle racer needs to lean over to counteract such forces when turning, so too do horses lean towards the inside running rail. In the case of two horses racing at equal speed, the horse near the inside running rail leans more than the horse wider out on the track. As the horse supports its weight on the front near side foot, and is in the leaning position necessary for speed, the joints of this leg become subject to strain.<sup>2</sup> The joints may become strained and malaligned because the horses hoof must come down flat on the track.

6.10 The strain can be reduced on a horse travelling at high speed by increasing the slope of the track or by an increase in the radius of the track. Mr Ireland advocated track design similar to a velodrome.<sup>3</sup>

6.11 According to Mr Ireland, these principles have not been applied in the design of the majority of thoroughbred racing tracks in Australia.

6.12 The Australian Equine Veterinary Association also suggested that more attention should be paid to track design for thoroughbred racing as well as harness racing and even greyhound racing. Dr Basset stated that

horses were probably not taken into account enough in the designing of tracks. Dr Heynes suggested that track authorities, owners and veterinarians should co-operate to build on available injury data which could then be used in track design.

6.13 The Committee is of the view that the racing industry, especially thoroughbred racing, should make every effort to improve the quality of track design. The Committee notes that the design of a new course at Scone, New South Wales, takes into account relevant ergonomic principles.<sup>4</sup> Based on discussions with leading members of the racing industry, the Committee understands that the costs involved in improving track design would not be prohibitive especially when compared with associated costs of injuries to horses.

### Codes of Practice

6.14 RSPCA (NSW) and RSPCA (Vic) called for the introduction of Codes of Practice for the racing industry. RSPCA (NSW) stated:

A Code of Practice should be developed for the breeding, management, breaking, training practices and disposal of animals and that licensing of breeders, owners, trainers and jockeys be directly conditional upon the strict compliance with its provisions.<sup>5</sup>

6.15 A similar view was presented to the Committee by the Australian Veterinary Association. For example, AVA maintains that much needs to be done to improve dissemination of available knowledge within the greyhound racing community. As one means of facilitating this, AVA recommended the preparation and distribution of a Code of Practice covering the husbandry of the young greyhound as part of the registration system.

6.16 The Committee recognises that the racing industry advocates self-regulation. However, evidence to the Committee suggests that the powers and authority of racing clubs in pursuing self-regulation especially outside of racing activities are limited.

6.17 The Committee considers that Codes of Practice should be developed through co-operation between the racing industry authorities,

the Australian Veterinary Association, animal welfare organisations and other interested parties.

6.18 The Committee is of the view that Codes of Practice would benefit the industry as these codes would clarify the industries' position on acceptable and unacceptable practices.

### **Policing and Enforcement of Animal Welfare**

6.19 During the inquiry, the Committee gained the impression that the racing industry involvement in safeguarding animal welfare is primarily related to race day activities. Animal welfare problems originating or occurring at other times do not attract the same level of involvement and concern.

6.20 For example, the Committee understands that most cases of greyhound bleeding and neglect of greyhounds are discovered by RSPCA and not greyhound racing authorities. Similarly, outright cases of neglect or cruelty by horse owners are often discovered and prosecuted by RSPCA and not by the racing authorities.

6.21 Additionally, racing rules tend to concentrate on the administration of racing and the activities on race day. The rules do not cover in any detail animal welfare matters, especially those relating to the care, training and preparation of horses. Stewards do have the power to investigate "incidents" at official training tracks and to ban horses that have been reported as experiencing bleeding from the nose during training. However, in both cases, stewards must rely on the trainers making reports. For example, the rules prohibiting excessive use of the whip does not extend to its use during training or in stables.

6.22 The Committee is of the view that the respective racing authorities must take more responsibility for overseeing and controlling the welfare of animals involved in every facet of their industries. The Committee considers that these authorities should either enhance and extend their role in this area, or implement alternative strategies.

6.23 For example, RSPCA plays an active role in safeguarding the basic welfare of animals involved in the industry and has considerable expertise in this area. Indeed, the Committee understands that most animal welfare concerns, including those leading to prosecution, are initiated by RSPCA.

In order to safeguard the welfare of animals involved in all facets of the racing industry, State Governments should consider channelling a percentage of TAB revenue to RSPCA. In return, RSPCA could ensure the highest animal welfare standards. This in turn would foster an even more professional, modern and accountable racing industry as far as animal welfare is concerned.

## ENDNOTES

1. *Evidence*, Australian Equine Veterinary Association, p. S 8310.
2. *Evidence*, Mr B. Ireland and Mr J. Walsh, pp. S 8933-34.
3. *ibid.*, p. S 8934.
4. *Sun Herald*, August 18, 1991, p. 87.
5. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. S 8201.