Ethics and Horse Sport

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World Horse Welfare
Equestrian sports have an animal cruelty problem – dressage should be banned from the Olympics

In my experience, the most distressed horses are always those who come from the horse racing industry
World Horse Welfare

- Leading equine charity since 1927
- Actively promotes the horse-human partnership
- Works across 4 continents
- 120+ employees – $14m turnover (US$)
- Partnership working with governments, universities, regulators, other NGOs
- Strong veterinary credentials
- Active in policy engagement – OIE, EU, UN
- Supports responsible horse sport
Our strategic framework

Goals

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Activities

- Care
  - “Providing relief to equines in immediate need”

- Research
  - “Understanding the causes of equine welfare challenges and using evidence to inform our work”

- Educate
  - “Supporting and improving the horse-human partnership, including changing behaviours”

- Influence
  - “Advocating and campaigning to achieve long-lasting change in equine welfare”
Support responsible horse sport

- Welfare advisor to sport regulators
  - International Equestrian Federation (FEI) – Code of Conduct for Welfare of Horse
  - International Horse Sport Confederation (IHSC)
  - British Horseracing Authority (BHA)
  - Informally to other national federations
- Associate Member of British Equestrian
Responsibility for welfare
“Please don’t say that you are passionate about ethics when you still ride horses.”

- Online commentator September 2021
Ethical framework for equestrian sport

1. Define the ethical issue/question
2. Identify stakeholders and their interests (matrix available to use)
3. Identify relevant legislation/regulation (national and international)
4. Identify relevant evidence
   - Available evidence may include published research, risk assessments, conference proceedings, etc.
   - Is there evidence lacking?

   - Apply harm:benefit analysis (matrix available to use)
   - Reach preliminary conclusion/decision

   - Test the preliminary conclusion/decision from the harm:benefit analysis against the central tenets of the framework
   - Identify any conflicts in the outcome/decision

   - Agree final conclusion/decision/outcome
     - Record any dissenting opinions
     - Note any further work which needs to be done (e.g. to gather further evidence)
     - Agree action plan to be implemented from decision

   - Agree a plan for future review of the decision (for example if currently missing evidence becomes available)

The Central Tenets are:
- Minimisation of negative welfare effects and maximisation of positive welfare effects for horses.
- Identification of and mitigation against avoidable, unnecessary risk to horses.
- Compliance with governing body regulations and the law.

World Horse Welfare
Royal Veterinary College
University of London
Challenges at Olympics – but FEI showed welfare paramount

Bleeding nose ends Irish horse’s Tokyo 2020 Olympic journey

..... Unfortunately, Kilkenny suffered a nose-bleed (epistaxis) towards the end of the round. This was confirmed by the on-site veterinary team who immediately checked the horse straight after the competition, and he was then taken to the on-site Veterinary Clinic.
PETA calls on IOC president to remove equestrian events from Games

People Want Equestrian Events Banned From Olympics After Coach Disqualified For Hitting Horse
The social licence concept

- Unwritten, non-legally binding contract
- Society ‘gives’ right to operate
- Concept originated in resource-based industries
- Recently applied to animal-based industries
Levels of social licence

- **SLO withheld/withdrawn**
  - Rejection of industry
  - Boycotts/sabotage
  - Activism

- **Acceptance/tolerance**
  - Community listening to industry – but with trepidation
  - Reoccurring issues met with threats
  - Activities closely monitored

- **Approval/support**
  - Industry has established legitimacy and credibility
  - Community approves of industry
  - Organisations want to collaborate

- **Psychological identification**
  - High levels of trust by the community
  - Shared responsibility and connection by all stakeholders, through good times and bad
“Society basically says to professions it does not understand well enough to regulate:

‘You regulate yourselves the way we would regulate you if we understood what you do, which we don’t.

‘But we will know if you don’t self-regulate properly and then we will regulate you, despite our lack of understanding.’”

-Bernie Rollin
Threats to social licence?

• Not prioritising our horses’ mental and physical welfare
• Not listening and engaging with all stakeholders, including the public
• Not basing practice and rules on evidence
• Not being accountable, transparent, and ethical
• Not recognising that our responsibility applies anytime, anywhere – and lasts a lifetime
• Not proactively communicating about welfare and the importance of the horse-human partnership.
What good welfare looks like is changing
Physical and mental welfare: Five domains

- Recognising that horses are sentient beings – protecting against negative experiences and maximising positive experiences

- Quality of life is based on both physical welfare and mental wellbeing

- Mental wellbeing is at least as important as physical welfare
1) Provide for horses’ basic needs

- Management should consider horses’ basic physiological, ethological, and psychological needs
2) Understand how horses learn

- **Learning theory**
  - Aligns with horse’s natural learning ability
  - Fundamental to safe and effective handling, riding, and training
  - Improves horse welfare

- Non-use of learning theory underpins many training and behavioral problems
3) Stop misuse of tack & training aids
How can we protect our social licence?

- Accept the world is changing
- Be transparent, ethical and accountable
- Ask not only ‘Can I?’ but also ‘Should I?’
- Consider the ethical basis and use of an ethical framework for decision making
- Combine experience with ethics and science to challenge the status quo
- Be ahead of public expectations on horse welfare
THANK YOU
@rolyowers
@horsecharity