

Session 1: Equine Welfare Strategy Action Plan

FEI Secretary General Sabrina Ibáñez opened the first session of the day with an overview of the key milestones leading up to the creation of the FEI Equine Welfare Strategy Action Plan and reiterated the role of the equestrian community as guardians of their equine partners.

She also informed delegates that the FEI Board, following their meeting on 10 November in Abu Dhabi (UAE), had agreed to the creation of a Dressage Strategic Action Plan Working Group to review the discipline comprehensively in view of the full revision of the FEI Dressage Rules due in 2027.

Senior Manager for Equine Welfare Initiatives & Implementation Somesh Dutt presented an overview of the 37 targeted Actions from the Plan which are organised into the following seven categories:

1. Training, Riding, Tack & Equipment;
2. Recognising Physical and Emotional Stress;
3. Accountability, Enforcement, and Knowledge;
4. "The Other 23 Hours";
5. Competitive Drive and Treating Horses as Objects;
6. Fitness to Compete and Health Problem Masking;
7. Other Actions

Given the cross-functional demands of these actions, responsibilities are shared across several FEI departments. Specifically, the FEI Legal Department is directly involved in 15 actions, while the Veterinary Department is responsible for 29, many of which overlap with legal matters. Eleven actions require collaboration with external experts.

Dutt also provided a brief overview of the completed and ongoing actions. Although most of the plan's initiatives will be completed between 2024 and 2025, some actions will extend into 2026 and 2027.

Work on certain points was already underway prior to the formalisation of the Action Plan and concluded in 2023 or early 2024. Of the 19 actions currently in progress, nearly all are expected to conclude in 2025.

Together with Dutt, the **FEI Legal Director Mikael Rentsch**, and **FEI Veterinary Director Göran Akerström** provided updates on actions relating to tack and equipment, reporting on fatalities, field-of-play regulations, the out-of-competition testing programme, National Federations (NFs) reporting on their doping controls, Key Event Requirements (KERs), the development of the HorseApp, Database and welfare hub, and changes to the reporting mechanism process.

Also discussed was the ongoing work around the FEI Measuring Device, as well as developments relating to the Equestrian Charter, the definition of horse abuse, the development of educational material on the physical and emotional stress for horses, accountability mechanisms, veterinary and steward check protocols, traditional versus scientific knowledge application, best practices in horse care, the career profiling of Jumping horses, and studies on young horses in collaboration with the World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses (WBFHS). Other areas of focus include the oral cavity project, equine prohibited substance list review, the renaming of the FEI Veterinary Department

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and the setup of an independent advisory group, and developments in transport legislation.

During the discussion session, delegates commended the FEI's commitment to advancing equine welfare and expressed interest in how NFs could further support this agenda. One effective approach suggested was for NFs to disseminate welfare information widely at both national and local levels. Additionally, the Polish delegate proposed creating a database to identify welfare contacts within each NF, which would help facilitate communication and accountability.

Several delegates highlighted the importance of carefully considering the language used to discuss equestrian sport with the public, suggesting that clarity and sensitivity in messaging are crucial.

The FEI Legal Director also announced plans for a workshop to guide NFs managing the legal processes related to horse abuse cases, including best practices on the communication side. This workshop will aim to improve awareness of the procedures and ensure clear expectations.

The FEI Veterinary Director underscored the importance of recognising and understanding the mental wellbeing of sport horses, noting that while horses may exhibit signs of stress, they can also conceal it. This acknowledgment is vital in addressing individual horses' needs, and this awareness could lead to tailored solutions that prioritise both mental and physical welfare.

Questions were raised regarding why noseband measurements are taken only on the front rather than the side. The response clarified that measuring on the nasal bone at the front provides a safer, evidence-based option.

FEI Board member and Athletes' representative Jessica Kürten (IRL) pointed out the need for a comprehensive educational system for riders, not only on technical aspects like noseband measurement but also on broader areas of equestrian responsibility and welfare, to ensure well-rounded knowledge and skills in managing all aspects of the sport.

In the second part of the Session, **FEI Director of Dressage Ronan Murphy** set the context for future plans in the discipline, providing delegates with an overview of the following key points discussed at the 1 October meeting with Dressage stakeholders, including social media monitoring, the evolution of the discipline and its core objectives, and proposals for change.

Following this meeting, it was agreed to establish a **Dressage Strategic Action Plan Working Group**. This group will develop the draft plan in consultation with stakeholders and align with the agreed Object for the sport of Dressage. It will focus on issues identified in the FEI Action Plan and address Dressage-specific concerns highlighted within the Equine Ethics and Welfare Commission's framework.

The Working Group's activities will align with the framework of the Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission and the FEI rule revision schedule, beginning with a partial revision next year, followed by a complete revision the year after.

The Dressage Technical Committee will present the proposed membership of the Working Group to the FEI Board during its December teleconference, targeting strategic implementation by 2027.

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Updates on the Working Group's progress will be provided at the Sports Forum and the FEI General Assembly in 2025.

In the Q&A session, the FEI Dressage Director noted that while some of the rule revisions might not directly impact horse welfare, they could still lead to positive changes by influencing competition and training practices, breeding, and related areas. There was also discussion about potentially accelerating the full rules revision process, though the FEI expressed a preference for a more deliberate, thorough strategic review prior to the full Rules Revision Process.

Delegates highlighted the need to re-evaluate the Dressage judging system and enquired about the timeline for implementing a trainer registration process, noting that some countries already have a comprehensive trainer registration programme in other horse sports. In response, the FEI Legal Director shared that the FEI aims to align its system with those already in place within NFs to avoid duplication and encouraged NFs to share information about their current frameworks.

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