

QUIT HORSING AROUND

ADVANCING HORSE WELFARE IN AUSTRALIA



22-23
FEBRUARY
ONLINE

ANIMAL WELFARE SEMINAR 2023

QUIT HORSING AROUND

ADVANCING HORSE WELFARE IN AUSTRALIA

SUMMARY

Horses play an important role in many people's lives and in many different contexts including competition, racing, leisure, therapy and companionship. Throughout their lifetime, horses may be subjected to various interventions relating to their care, housing, training, exercise and general management. There has been some improvement in the welfare of horses in Australia – but there is still a long way to go. This Seminar brings together a diverse range of stakeholders to share knowledge, the current science and thoughts on the way forward to ensure all horses have a good quality of life no matter their connections or relationships with people. It's time for Australia to get serious about improving horse welfare – horses deserve nothing less.

PROGRAM



DAY 1 Wednesday 22 February

HORSE WELFARE

12:30	<p>WELCOME TO DAY 1</p> <p>Chair: Dr Suzanne Fowler Chief Science Officer, RSPCA Australia</p> <p>Official welcome: Richard Mussell Chief Executive Officer, RSPCA Australia</p>
12:45	<p>EQUITATION SCIENCE AND ITS CONTRIBUTIONS TO HORSE WELFARE</p> <p>Speaker: Prof Paul McGreevy Professor of Animal Behaviour and Welfare, Faculty of Science, Agriculture, Business and Law, School of Environmental and Rural Science, University of New England</p>
13:30	<p>RUNNING INTO PROBLEMS: EQUINE WELFARE DURING EXERCISE</p> <p>Speaker: Dr Kat Littlewood Lecturer in Animal Welfare, School of Veterinary Science, Massey University, New Zealand</p>
14:15	BREAK
14:30	<p>BRAIN TRAIN YOUR HORSE - APPLYING NEUROSCIENCE TO IMPROVE HORSE TRAINING AND WELFARE</p> <p>Speaker: Dr Cathrynne Henshall PhD candidate, Hillydale Equitation Science, Charles Sturt University</p>
15:15	<p>EXPLORING BARRIERS TO WELFARE IMPROVEMENT - LEARNINGS FROM THE WORKING EQUID CONTEXT</p> <p>Speaker: Ashleigh Brown Global Animal Welfare Advisor, Brooke</p>
16:00	CLOSE

*All times are in AEDT

DAY 2 Thursday 23 February

HORSES IN SPORT AND SOCIETY

12:20	<p>WELCOME TO DAY 2</p> <p>Chair: Dr Suzanne Fowler Chief Science Officer, RSPCA Australia</p>
12:30	<p>HOW IMPORTANT IS PUBLIC TRUST FOR THE FUTURE OF THE HORSE SPORT SECTOR?</p> <p>Speaker: Julie Fiedler PhD Candidate, Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences, University of Melbourne</p>
13:15	<p>TALKING THE TAWWG</p> <p>Speaker: Tom Reilly Chief Executive Officer, Thoroughbred Breeders Australia</p>
14:00	BREAK
14:15	<p>PARIS 2024 ... A 'GAMES CHANGER' FOR SPORT HORSE WELFARE?</p> <p>Speaker: Cristina Wilkins Author, Horses and People</p>
15:00	<p>ETHICAL TRAINING – WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?</p> <p>Speaker: Dr Andrew McLean PhD (Equine Cognition & Learning), BSc (Zoology), Dip Ed; Co-Director, Equitation Science International</p>
15:45	<p>PANEL SESSION</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cristina Wilkins • Andrew McLean • Meredith Chapman PhD Candidate, National Safety Manager, Equestrian Australia
16:30	CLOSE OF SEMINAR

SPEAKERS





PROF PAUL McGREEVY

Professor of Animal Behaviour and Welfare,
Faculty of Science,
Agriculture,
Business and Law,
School of Environmental
and Rural Science,
University of New England

Paul McGreevy BVSc, PhD, FRCVS, FRSN is a veterinarian and ethologist. He is the author of over 300 peer-reviewed scientific publications and seven books. With expertise in learning theory, animal training, animal welfare science, veterinary behavioural medicine and anthrozoology, Paul is a co-founder and honorary fellow of the International Society for Equitation Science. He led the VetCompass Australia initiative that brought together all of the Australian veterinary schools to provide ongoing national disease surveillance for companion animals and horses.

ABSTRACT

Equitation Science and its contributions to horse welfare

Horses unquestionably hold a special place in the hearts and minds of many Australians. Historically, they have acted as ambassadors for other, perhaps less charismatic, members of the animal kingdom. Images of horses being whipped on the streets of Victorian England are recognised as a major impetus to the birth of the animal protection movement as we know it today. These were exhausted work and carriage horses, thrashed to deliver more effort where none was possible. Observing their plight inspired the creation of the world's first animal cruelty legislation and enforcement regime. Paradoxically, despite this pivotal role, horses have yet to benefit fully from the strides that the animal protection movement has since made for other species. Today, horses are still whipped in public, but only in the name of sport.

Horses have missed out when it comes to advances in behavioural science too. Established traditional equestrian techniques bypassed the findings of modern learning theorists, including the principles of operant conditioning that have transformed dog training over the past 30 years. Accordingly, many observers now question the welfare of ridden horses since most are trained using negative reinforcement and pressure-based cues. Failure to define best practice in the use of aversive stimuli in equitation has contributed to the erosion of horse sports' social-license-to-operate.

In the two decades since the RSPCA Australia Seminar last focussed on horses, we have seen the emergence of equitation science; a multidisciplinary discipline that combines learning theory, ethology and physics to examine the salience and efficacy of horse-training techniques. It is removing emotiveness from the horse-riding welfare debate because it permits consideration and, in some cases, assessment of equine discomfort, pain and learned helplessness.

We have also seen the formation of the International Society for Equitation Science (ISES), a global group with strong Australian connections. ISES promotes the application of objective research and advanced practice which will ultimately improve the welfare of horses in their associations with humans. This Society has produced several science-based [position statements](#) that address key topics, including the consequences of restrictive nosebands and the use/misuse of leadership and dominance concepts in horse training. This presentation will examine how equitation science has advanced horse welfare and the obstacles it has confronted along the way.



DR KAT LITTLEWOOD

Lecturer in Animal Welfare
School of Veterinary Science
Massey University, New Zealand

Kat is a veterinarian and Lecturer in Animal Welfare within Tāwharau Ora (School of Veterinary Science) at Massey University in New Zealand. She is a fellow of the Australian and New Zealand College of Veterinary Scientists in Animal Welfare Science, Ethics, & Law. Her PhD research focused on the veterinarian's role in end-of-life management of animals, and she explored veterinary training and the perspectives of New Zealand cat owners. Kat's research employs social science approaches to better understand complex human-animal interactions and ethically challenging situations. She aims to develop a nuanced understanding of why and how people make the decisions they do about how animals are managed. She also works to operationalise the Five Domains Model for animal welfare assessment and training. She has a diverse range of research interests. Major research themes include: understanding how animal welfare is conceptualised by different people; exploring how human values, attitudes, and behaviours influence animal welfare; developing systematic scientific strategies to evaluate animal welfare; and implementation of animal welfare policy and standards.

ABSTRACT

Running into problems: Equine welfare during exercise

Given the degree of control or influence humans have over the lives of horses, it is our responsibility to ensure that they have good welfare. Humans keep and manage domestic horses for various purposes, including recreational riding and sporting activities such as racing, dressage, show jumping, eventing, endurance, hunting, polo, polocross, and western riding. However, horses engaged in strenuous exercise display physiological responses that approach the upper functional limits of key organ systems, in particular their cardiorespiratory systems. Factors that diminish these functional capacities might lead to horses experiencing unpleasant respiratory sensations, i.e., breathlessness. In this presentation, equine cardiorespiratory physiology and athletic performance will be used to illustrate the potential for various types of breathlessness to occur in exercising horses. The impact of management factors, such as rein and bit use, on the likelihood and intensity of equine breathlessness occurring during exercise will also be explored.

DR CATHRYNNE HENSHALL

PhD candidate, Hillydale Equitation Science, Charles Sturt University



Dr Cathrynne Henshall (BA Hons, M.An. Sci, PhD) recently completed a PhD investigating the effects of stress and exercise on equine cognition,

applying a cognitive and affective neuroscience lens to the interpretation of equine learning behaviour and welfare.

Cath lectures at Western Sydney University and Charles Sturt University on animal welfare and equine behaviour. Previously she taught equine studies and livestock production and welfare at TAFE NSW, working with students and equine and livestock industry participants to bridge the gap between research and its practical implementation in industry. Cath has also worked in a variety of roles in government and industry organisations focussed on participant education, animal welfare law enforcement and professional development in animal welfare assessment and management.

Prior to commencing her PhD, Cath ran an equitation science based horse training and rider education business, providing evidence-based horse training services and rider education in horse-centred training, management and welfare. Cath is the lead or co-author of a range of publications on equine welfare and learning and is a council member of the International Society for Equitation Science, a body that promotes research and evidence-based horse training and management to the equestrian industry. Cath has recently started a new business, HorseLogic to help horse owners and trainers apply cognitive and affective neuroscience to improve their training and care of their horses.

ABSTRACT

Brain train your horse - applying neuroscience to improve horse training and welfare

Research in cognitive and affective neuroscience has transformed our understanding of learning and emotion in animals and humans. The application of this knowledge to horse training could deliver many benefits to horses and their owners, as equine emotions and learning abilities rely on similar neural processes as other species. There are few available techniques to directly probe equine brain function, so the translation of these findings to horses is necessarily inferential; however, validated methodologies bridging this gap in human research can be applied to horses. Areas within neuroscience research with particular relevance for horse training and management include: how the brain processes the kinds of aversive stimuli commonly used in horse training; the effects of stress neurophysiology on learning; the interactions between new learning versus habit learning - an issue for retraining unwanted behaviour; and the prediction error concept - a dopamine influenced neural “teaching signal” that assists animals to make decisions that deliver the best outcomes for them. In human-horse interactions, behaviour provides the interface between neural activity and horses’ responses to training and environmental stimuli. Providing owners with a greater understanding, even at a simplified level, of the putative neural processes underpinning behaviour could assist them to improve their practices. For example, a knowledge of the workings of the habit and flexible learning neural networks and prediction errors could assist trainers to identify why horses may fail to learn a new habit or why they persist with unwanted behaviour despite extensive retraining. Alternatively, a knowledge of the effects of stress physiology could assist trainers to modify their practices to manage stress and enhance learning. The addition of neuroscience to inform horse training and management techniques could provide a mechanism to develop truly horse-centred training approaches that could improve welfare outcomes for horses and enhance human safety.

ASHLEIGH BROWN

Global Animal Welfare Advisor, Brooke



With a background in applied ethology, animal welfare, equine science, education and development management, Ashleigh has been with international NGO, Brooke, in scientific advisory

roles since 2009, working closely with horses, donkeys, mules, equid-owning communities and colleagues internationally. She recently managed a global project for the World Bank, producing practical guidance to support implementation of WOAHA (World Organisation for Animal Health) standards for working equid welfare, and participated in validation of new animal welfare science and equine science degree programmes in the UK. Ashleigh has practical equestrian experience from sports and competition, stud and young-stock, riding school, dealership, livery and tourism contexts; and has worked with rescued bears, domesticated elephants and as a teacher. She has been a member of the International Society for Applied Ethology, Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour and International Society for Equitation Science; a trustee for wildlife and conservation charities; and a contributing writer on animal welfare topics.

Ashleigh is a lay advisor for the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and Academy of Medical Royal Colleges in London, a member of TEDxLondon's leadership team, and an academic and career mentor. She has now worked or travelled in 80 countries, and values opportunities to learn from diverse cultures.

ABSTRACT

Exploring barriers to welfare improvement - learnings from the working equid context

As animal behaviour and welfare sciences evolve, we are increasingly equipped with methodologies for assessing, and interpreting in welfare terms, the subjective experiences of non-human animals. Similarly, advancements in equine science render us better informed than ever before on application of these concepts to equine species, whose roles, relationships and interactions with humans typically differ from other animal groups. Despite the privilege of unprecedented access to research, resources and services to support equid welfare, evidence-based and welfare-focussed equid management is not yet consistently implemented, raising the question of why practice is not keeping pace with advancement of scientific knowledge.

An estimated 100 million working horses, donkeys and mules globally, predominantly in low-income and resource-poor contexts, are vulnerable to welfare impairment on account of poor knowledge of welfare needs; limited husbandry provisions; high work-loads; harsh living and working environments; and minimal access to professional animal health and welfare services. Accordingly, working equid welfare practitioners - operating at the intersection of animal welfare and international development - face multi-factorial challenges to effecting welfare improvement, be they socio-economic, cultural, educational or geo-political.

However, this complexity necessitates problem-solving, innovation and critical evaluation of prevailing norms, offering scope for valuable learning. Drawing upon experience from the working equid sector, this talk will explore emergent findings of relevance for cross-sectoral or inter-disciplinary application. In particular, themes of welfare issue prioritisation, barriers to effective amelioration and means of overcoming these will be considered.

Whilst specific physical and psychological demands upon equids are subject to contextual variation, their fundamental behavioural and welfare needs are consistent. Thus, regardless of the context, as equid welfare practitioners, advocates, stakeholders or supporters, we share a common objective of optimising welfare within the parameters of our respective constraints.

JULIE FIEDLER

PhD Candidate, Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences, University of Melbourne

Julie is currently undertaking a PhD titled 'Forecasting horse welfare expectations: Insights from within' at the University of Melbourne. This project is asking people inside the horse sectors of horse racing, riding, sports, and tourism activities about horse welfare practices. Until May 2020, Julie was the Executive Officer for Horse SA, a non-profit organisation working across the South Australian horse sector on wide-ranging topics of common interest, such as horse welfare, biosecurity, and recreational trails; a position held for nearly 20 years. Julie is currently the interim Secretary for the Animal Emergency Incident Management Network ANZ.

ABSTRACT

How important is public trust for the future of the horse sport sector?



Welfare is the common ground that can bring together people from diverse equestrian and racing interests to improve horses' everyday lives and performance. Reflecting on the markers for a functioning horse sector, such as national standards and plans for welfare, transport, biosecurity, and traceability, provides some guidance on where to go next. But is this enough? Without acknowledging the changing societal expectations towards animal welfare, horse activities risk losing relevance, a real threat to long-term sustainability. By exploring ideas such as developing industry-led concepts of animal safeguarding and practical, measurable improvements for events and businesses, we can shape our collective future with horses. Public trust is forward looking. It's not only what is said could be done, and to what standard, but the 'doing' of welfare that will maintain the horse sector's Social Licence to Operate.

TOM REILLY

Chief Executive Officer, Thoroughbred Breeders Australia

Tom is the chief executive of Thoroughbred Breeders Australia (TBA), the peak body for breeders.

He has been at the forefront of the welfare debate in Australia and has twice organised forums for the racing industry to discuss welfare and hear from other industries about their path to sustainability.

TBA was also the driving force behind the Thoroughbred Aftercare Welfare Working Group, an independent panel set up to review thoroughbred welfare in Australia.

His perspective is informed by his previous career as a journalist, which included serving as the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper.



ABSTRACT

Talking The TAWWG

Tom is speaking about the Thoroughbred Aftercare Welfare Working Group (TAWWG), an independent panel set up by Thoroughbred Breeders Australia. The TAWWG published their 140 page report in late 2021, with 46 recommendations on how to improve the welfare of horses in breeding, racing and once they leave the thoroughbred industry.



CRISTINA WILKINS

Author, Horses and People

Cristina Wilkins is the publisher and editor of Horses and People, a media platform that promotes ethical, sustainable, and evidence-based information on horse keeping and training. Cristina was an equestrian coach and official, and a competitive young rider, representing her home country of Spain in eventing. She lived, rode, and coached riders in Spain, the UK and New Zealand, before settling in Queensland, Australia in 1998. Her perspective changed significantly when she discovered the evidence-base of horse training. She was a member of the Council of the International Society for Equitation Science (ISES) from 2011 to 2019, and has co-authored several articles published in peer-reviewed journals. Currently, she is applying her experience in science communication and constructive journalism to develop welfare education tools that advance the One Welfare premise.

ABSTRACT

Paris 2024 ... A 'Games Changer' for Sport Horse Welfare?

Horses have competed in the Olympics since 1912, but their future participation is by no means guaranteed. Under the leadership of the International Equestrian Federation (FEI), equestrian sports are under pressure to demonstrate to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that equestrianism meets the principles of Olympism. To achieve this, horse sports must successfully argue their universality, integrity and fairness, gender equality, popularity, environmental sustainability and youth development. While each of these qualities deserves to be debated in great detail, it is reasonable to say that fairness – particularly the question of whether participation in the sport is inherently harmful to the welfare of horses – has become an Olympic problem of the highest priority. This was largely the result of several incidents and accidents that marred the Tokyo 2021 Games, when for the first time and because of the combination of Covid-19 lockdowns and 21st century technologies, the equestrian events were live streamed in their entirety and all around the world. The additional visibility, which was welcomed by fans proved to be a double-edged sword; there were many times when both organisers and equestrians might have wished their sport had received less coverage. We learned that one eventing horse was euthanased as a result of a hard landing, and we watched on as a horse was punched by the team coach for refusing to jump, and another was allowed to finish the show jumping round despite profuse nasal bleeding, his crimson nostrils and blood-splattered chest contrasting sharply against his light grey coat. These incidents, added to other displays of questionable riding skill or preparation, triggered very strong reactions from the media and spectators, with a section of the population asking for a ban of all equestrian events from future Olympic Games. In an unprecedented pre-emptive intervention aimed at protecting the country's reputation, the French National Assembly (the lower house of the French Parliament) commissioned and published a 72-page report highlighting what they called, "shortcomings in the current regulations". The list of issues and depth of analysis is comprehensive and includes 46 recommendations for revising specific rules. Will Paris 2024 be the 'Games' changer for equine welfare or will horse sports lose their Olympic licence to operate and be absent from the Brisbane 2032 Games? The stakes are high and, in this presentation, I will analyse the challenges ahead and discuss the opportunities to leverage the tension of this historic moment to maximise progress on horse welfare outcomes beyond the boundaries of the Olympic disciplines.



DR ANDREW MCLEAN

**PhD (Equine Cognition & Learning),
BSc (Zoology), Dip Ed; Co-Director,
Equitation Science International**

Andrew is a clinical and forensic ethologist with specialist academic areas in animal cognition, equine learning/training and welfare science.

Andrew has authored and co-authored numerous research and review journal papers and a number of horse and elephant training texts. In 2020 he co-authored the most recent Five Domains Model of Animal Welfare, focusing on human-animal interactions. Andrew has been co-winner of the Eureka Science award and the Premio Flambo Award for Animal Welfare (Italian Equestrian Sports Federation). In 2014 he was awarded the John H Daniels Fellowship from the USA National Sporting Library, Virginia.

Professionally, Andrew founded and directed the Australian Equine Behaviour Centre and is currently the CEO of Equitation Science International. He is past Director of Pony Club Australia where he has instigated a revolutionary syllabus that leads the world in equestrian education for young riders. Andrew has dedicated the past 25 years teaching evidence-based horse training and management workshops across Western Europe as well as the USA, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand. In doing so, he has coached Olympic medalists, National Federations and National Representatives. Andrew is also Founder of the Human Elephant Learning Programs Foundation, a not-for-profit charity that delivers evidence-based training and management across South and Southeast Asia and is supported there by various government organisations.

A winner of the Advanced section of the famous Gawler Three-Day-Event in 1989, Andrew has enjoyed a decorated equestrian sport career and has represented Australia in three-day eventing and competed in State and National titles in FEI dressage, eventing and showjumping. He was an Olympic Academy delegate in 1991 and was Australian Champion (30 + age) in Tetrathlon in 2018. In addition, Andrew was the former and founding President of the Victorian Event Riders Association and former President of the Tasmanian Eventing Association.

ABSTRACT

Ethical training what does it look like?

Over the last few decades, the term ‘social license to operate’ emerged as a result of the decreasing public legitimacy of mining activities from the standpoint of environmental sustainability. To remain in business, the mining industry has had to work harder for public acceptance. A parallel spotlight is now on the use of animals in sport, and in particular the use of horses. Like mining, the horse industry must now work harder for public acceptance of practices.

Social license prescribes that all animal industries are subject to the same rising community expectations of welfare and the inevitable reassessment of practices. In response, there is a pervasive belief in the horse industry that the solution is to convince and educate the public about the sanctity and worthiness of human-equine partnerships and then ‘social license to operate’ will be restored. What is less understood is that social license is the trust owed to the public and must be earned.

As we look toward our future with horses, sustainability implies that horse management, training and horse sports need to rethink an equine-centric future: welfare from the horse’s perspective. The advent of equitation science and the International Society for Equitation Science have been integral in the burgeoning research in horse welfare including the Five Domains Model of Animal Welfare’s legacy in the notion of a ‘worthwhile life’ for animals.

This presentation illuminates an equine-centric blueprint and paints a futuristic ethical framework for horse training. Approximating humane as well as efficient locomotory control of the horse in-hand and under-saddle requires human education in the use of associative learning, non-associative learning and reinforcement strategies. However, from an optimal welfare perspective, these components are not enough. Unless training strategies take into account the animal’s current emotional states, sustainability is threatened and indeed learning can be inhibited.

This presentation journeys through the ways in which trainers can optimise mental affect through an understanding of the complex dynamics of arousal, the emerging implications of attachment theory and the adoption of equine-centric management practices. Optimal training is therefore not only about the training regimen itself but implicitly requires knowledge derived from an understanding of the horse’s telos. These insights provide a universal framework for future horse training and provides the best prospects for a worthwhile life for the horse in human-horse interactions and ultimately sustainability of horse training.

PANEL





MEREDITH CHAPMAN

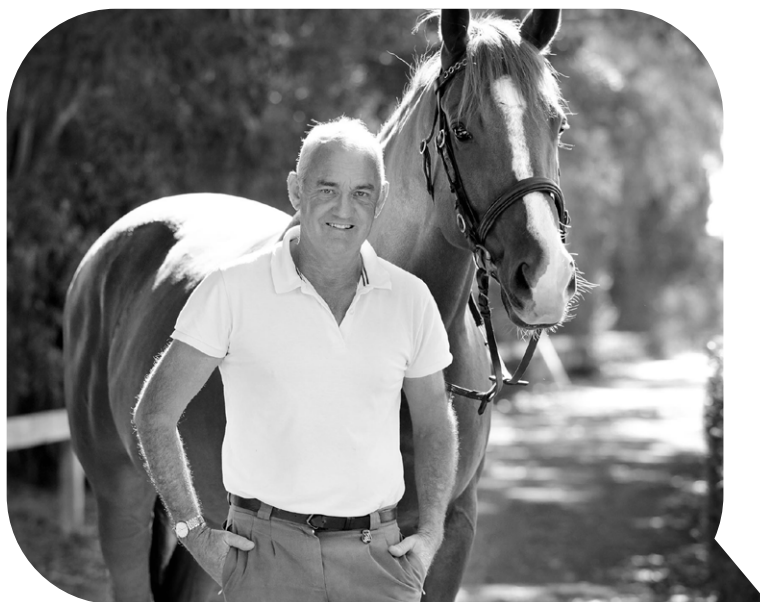
PhD Candidate,
National Safety Manager,
Equestrian Australia

Meredith Chapman has a strong interest in achieving best-practice health, safety and welfare standards for both humans and horses throughout the world of Equestrianism. Meredith currently holds the position as Equestrian Australia's National Health and Safety Manager and has been working closely with the sports states, organising and discipline committees to future proof the sport for EA members for 3 years. In addition, Meredith is in the final stages of completing a PhD, researching how the application of a WHS framework used in high-risk industries can reduce horse-related human injuries in both work and non-work environments.



CRISTINA WILKINS

Author, Horses and People



ANDREW McLEAN

PhD (Equine Cognition & Learning),
BSc (Zoology), Dip Ed; Co-Director,
Equitation Science International



RSPCA AUSTRALIA

PO Box 265
Deakin West ACT 2600

02 6282 8300

rspca@rspca.org.au

rspca.org.au