

ANIMAL ETHICS & ANIMAL WELFARE:

values informing outcomes

RSPCA Animal Welfare Seminar 2025

There will always be too many:
“Overbreeding” of animals in
racing industries

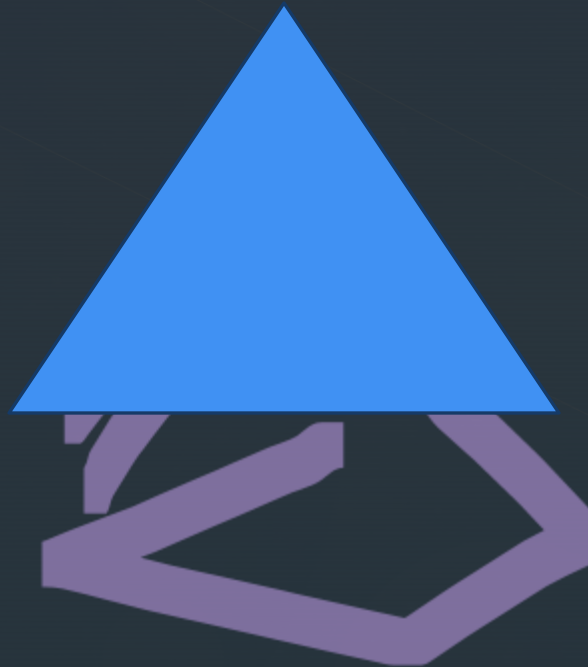
Phil McManus
The University of Sydney

Acknowledgement of Country

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, water and culture. I acknowledge the custodians of the unceded lands on which this presentation was prepared, the Gadigal and Wangal people, and pay respect to Elders past and present.

I also acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the unceded Country on which you are currently on and pay respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person present today.

- One thing, however, remains constant in animal racing industries of all forms – there will always be too many animals at any point in time because the animal racing industries are pyramids with very little room at the top, and success is ephemeral.



The term overproduction has been useful in the quest to improve animal welfare, but I believe that its limits mean that we should not overly invest in the use of this term in the future. There are six reasons why this is the case.

1. The term overproduction privileges economics and the notions of supply and demand.
2. It is debatable as to whether overproduction is occurring today.
3. The matter of time and changes over time.
4. A question of matching supply and demand.
5. It is at the scale of an industry and at the time frame of an industry.
6. Overproduction puts the emphasis on the thoroughbred breeders.

Thoroughbred Welfare Initiative, 2021, 12

- The annual Australian thoroughbred foal crop has been about 13,000 in recent years, which is a decrease of around 30% from the late 1990s. Furthermore, a greater proportion of these foals is being registered to race and is competing on the racetrack. Despite this trend, several submissions stated there was overproduction, that more thoroughbreds than needed were being produced. Others, including Racing NSW, argued the opposite. The TAWWG found there was insufficient evidence to say whether there is overproduction.

BREEDING STATISTICS

Table 14. Breeding Figures 2012/13 – 2021/22

Season	Stallions Returned	Mares Returned	Mares Covered	Live Foals	Live Foals / Mares Returned %
2021/22	522	18,767	20,275	12,907	68.77%
2020/21	528	20,030	19,718	12,805	63.93%
2019/20	502	20,624	19,894	12,761	61.87%
2018/19	585	20,959	20,356	13,023	62.14%
2017/18	613	21,083	20,220	13,076	62.02%
2016/17	618	21,231	19,519	13,073	61.58%
2015/16	646	21,396	19,424	12,858	60.10%
2014/15	668	21,889	19,386	12,992	59.35%
2013/14	696	22,967	20,381	13,800	60.11%
2012/13	758	24,448	21,463	14,519	59.39%

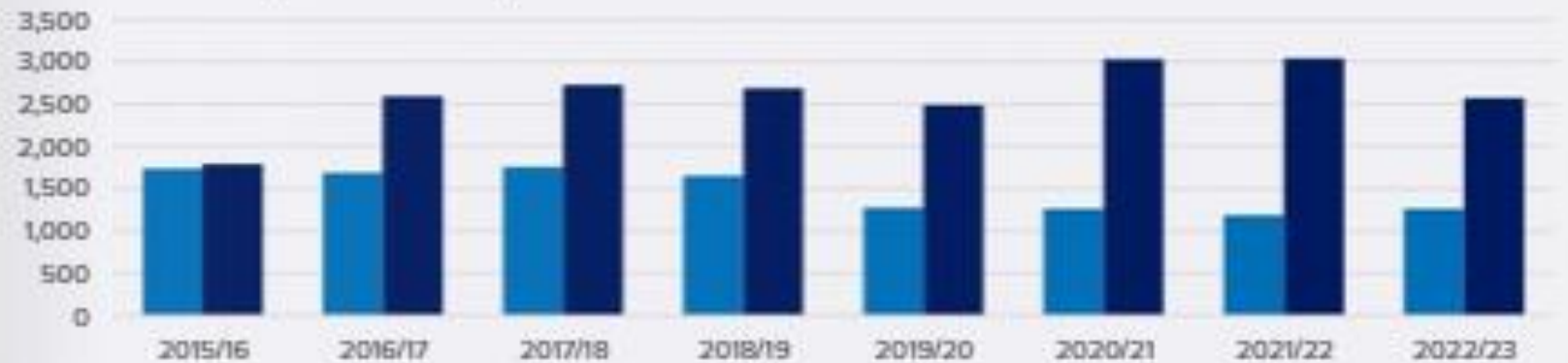
Table 19. Foal Distribution by State 2012/13 - 2021/22

Season	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	Total
2021/22	5,778	3,506	1,941	981	360	334	7	0	12,907
2020/21	5,699	3,589	1,887	939	394	290	6	0	12,805
2019/20	5,770	3,546	1,843	898	417	282	5	1	12,761
2018/19	5,913	3,524	1,848	997	438	298	4	1	13,023
2017/18	6,110	3,240	1,949	957	519	296	4	0	13,076
2016/17	6,087	3,190	2,053	1,001	497	237	8	0	13,073
2015/16	5,847	3,091	2,072	1,039	536	265	6	2	12,858
2014/15	5,824	3,124	1,987	1,238	569	240	9	1	12,992
2013/14	6,214	3,379	2,114	1,307	520	251	14	0	13,800
2012/13	6,523	3,510	2,336	1,390	507	239	12	2	14,519

Table 25. Australian Exports and Imports 2015/16 - 2022/23

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Total
Exports	1,739	1,686	1,756	1,652	1,274	1,263	1,186	1,262	11,818
Imports	1,789	2,591	2,726	2,686	2,490	3,031	3,038	2,572	20,923

Australian Exports and Imports 2015/16 – 2022/23



Note: All figures are correct as of July 31st, 2023 with more return data increasing daily.

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AUSTRALIAN EXPORTS



Table 27. Australian Thoroughbred Exports by Country 2015/16 - 2022/23

TO	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
ARGENTINA	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CHILE	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CHINA	175	261	142	88	0	0	0	0
DENMARK	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
FRANCE	10	8	9	16	6	9	3	5
GERMANY	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
GREAT BRITAIN	21	15	18	14	19	10	21	23
HONG KONG	195	172	235	242	248	243	271	269
INDIA	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
INDONESIA	0	6	0	3	5	0	1	13
IRAN	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
IRELAND	16	19	19	25	15	12	15	13
ITALY	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
JAPAN	31	11	15	29	20	12	9	18
KOREA	20	28	17	21	0	18	0	0
KUWAIT	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LIBYA	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
MACAU	70	92	67	64	67	85	106	65
MALAYSIA	53	81	55	46	34	20	15	21
NEW CALEDONIA	19	2	16	2	0	0	0	6
NEW ZEALAND	756	691	841	821	633	761	649	599
PHILIPPINES	32	28	40	29	53	17	12	37
SAUDI ARABIA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SINGAPORE	198	202	183	195	136	60	66	177
SOUTH AFRICA	103	43	43	20	17	1	2	0
SPAIN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
THAILAND	1	0	20	19	0	0	0	0
TURKEY	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	4	0	6	6	1	0	2	2
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	20	26	28	11	20	14	12	14
VENEZUELA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	1,739	1,686	1,756	1,652	1,274	1,263	1,186	1,262

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Table 26. Australian Thoroughbred Imports by Country 2015/16 - 2022/23

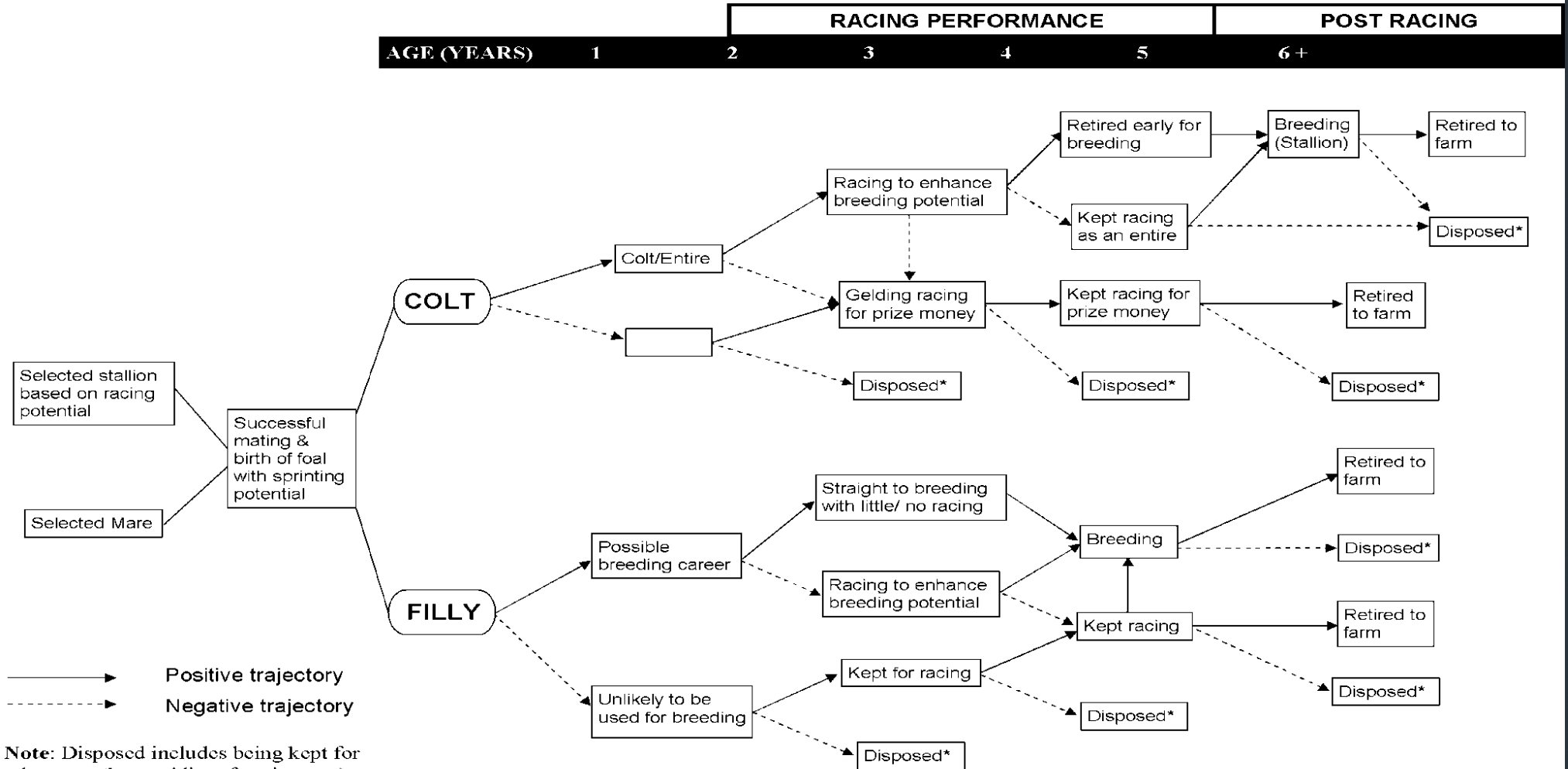
FROM	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
ARGENTINA	0	2	4	3	1	1	2	1
BRAZIL	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
CANADA	1	1	1	9	4	1	0	1
CHILE	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
FRANCE	46	57	52	72	53	68	64	107
GERMANY	9	23	20	36	18	14	15	11
GREAT BRITAIN	117	148	234	197	182	245	358	378
HOLLAND	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
HONG KONG	52	38	10	2	35	50	91	46
HUNGARY	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
IRELAND	63	106	139	153	134	148	230	229
ITALY	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
JAPAN	41	44	43	63	43	16	40	59
MACAU	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0
MALAYSIA	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
NEW ZEALAND	1,380	2,012	2,079	1,997	1,910	2,384	2,113	1,644
SINGAPORE	9	10	6	8	6	22	2	5
SOUTH AFRICA	3	0	3	3	6	0	2	3
SWITZERLAND	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	0	2	4	4	0	1	6	3
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	65	146	129	138	95	80	111	73
TOTALS	1,789	2,591	2,726	2,686	2,489	3,031	3,038	2,572

AUSTRALIAN IMPORTS

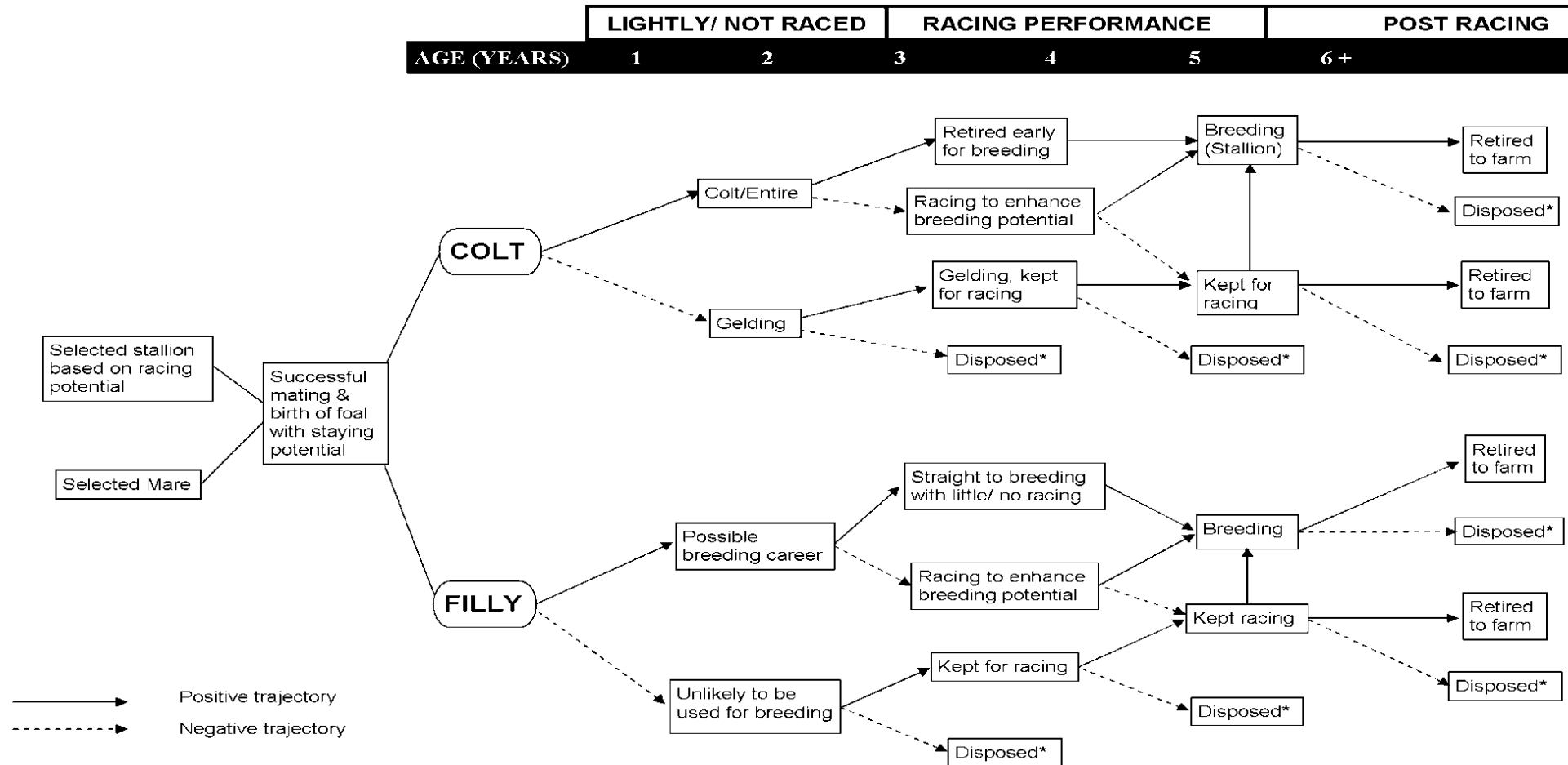




Breeding a Sprinter



Breeding a Stayer



Note: Disposed includes being kept for other uses (horse riding, farming etc.) and being slaughtered for meat.

Conclusion

- The term overproduction has been useful but is rightly contested.
- It does not focus on the whole life of the individual horse. The term arguably reduces ethics to numbers, and to an extent misplaces the onus for change.
- The notion of overbreeding, or overproduction, cannot be solved within the current structures of competitive sports industries that are animal-based. There will always be animals, including expensively bred animals, that at some point in their life are unwanted by the industry.
- There will always be too many – we just don't know which ones and when it will happen in an animal's life at the time when breeders are planning a mating, or when an animal is conceived or born, or even when it is sold as a weanling or yearling.
- Therefore, we need to focus on
 - the whole of life experiences of individual animals
 - the entire thoroughbred breeding and racing industry in order to improve animal welfare.

Thank you and References

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