Project summary

The Thoroughbred Welfare Initiative

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Overview

This project summary outlines the work undertaken by the Thoroughbred Aftercare Welfare Working Group (TAWWG) while it conducted an independent review into the current welfare landscape in the Australian thoroughbred industry.

The research conducted by the TAWWG over the past 18 months formed the basis of a report that was released in spring 2021. The report and its recommendations provide an important framework for the whole industry to use to improve welfare outcomes for thoroughbred horses in Australia, especially those exiting racing or breeding.

The report and its recommendations are a vital step towards restoring racing and breeding’s public image, as a number of incidents in recent years have led to a downturn in support, threatening the prosperity and longevity of the industry.

Submissions and recommendations

The TAWWG received 184 individual submissions and engaged in more than 60 meetings with individuals and organisations to further inform its review. This resulted in extensive consultation with industry and concerned groups.

Following completion of its assessment, the TAWWG proposed a number of recommendations for industry to act on to improve thoroughbred horse welfare across the industry. These recommendations are a vital step towards restoring racing and breeding’s public image.

The recommendations include:

• The development of welfare standards specific to thoroughbreds
• Research into improved techniques for the early handling of horses to improve lifetime outcomes
• An assessment of how to increase demand for thoroughbreds in the recreational sectors
• The development of quality assurance schemes for thoroughbred industry sectors
• Research into what influences community perceptions about the thoroughbred industry

Some of these may be priorities for the AgriFutures Thoroughbred Horses Program, while others are for other groups in the industry to take the lead on.

What the report means for industry

The implications of the TAWWG report are significant and touch many areas of the thoroughbred industry and beyond. As the project was commissioned by industry participants, rather than regulators, the implementation of the recommendations is not guaranteed. For the recommendations to be successfully adopted, the TAWWG will have to clearly articulate and explain the changes it has proposed, and those who have the ability to act on them will need to see the benefits of carrying out the work.

The recommendations of the TAWWG are targeted at governments, racing administrators, industry participants and welfare groups. Taken together, the findings and suggestions in the report aim to create a framework for the appropriate care of thoroughbred horses from birth through to death, even if they have left the industry.

It is hoped that, if adopted, the TAWWG’s recommendations will lead to better welfare outcomes for all thoroughbred horses in Australia.

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