



## Horse Welfare Officer

September 2017

### Overview

In 2016 we were blessed with a very wet year, which resulted in soft, sometimes slippery playing conditions. In 2017 we have had quite the opposite! Many areas desperately looking for rain, resulted in many firm to hard playing surfaces. We saw many clubs concerned and being proactive in the 2016 season, yet have been more relaxed I think this year. This is unfortunate, as many Zones would have access to an aerator, but it seems Clubs have chosen not to utilize the opportunity, to improve their playing surface, and subsequently the welfare of both horse and rider.

This is an area where Clubs MUST be more responsible, and proactive.

I am sending out an updated Grounds questionnaire, that I would like completed ASAP, so we can compare and get an idea of works done, or planned, and have a report for NSWPA by the September meeting, as well as updated contacts ect.

Communication and dedication are in my opinion, the key to improving Horse Welfare in our sport, and especially in NSW. The reporting of incidents, on and off the field is important. Off field seem to be more difficult, but the policy is clear and available on both the NSWPA website and the PAA website, so players should know their responsibilities to their horse.

Yards (or lack of, leaving horses tied up), Tails, Spurs, Bandages and Bell Boots all come to mind, and I have witnessed each of these this season.

Horses are required to play WITH leg protection, and they are required to be rested WITHOUT leg protection, unless for medical reasons. Recently I have seen examples of BOTH. If you do not take the bandages from your horse between games, and it is seen lying down, more than likely, the bandages are TOO TIGHT, this is the same as tape in the tail, players need to be aware how tight, firm or loose their bandages are, or any other thing applied to any other structure!

I urge all your Club and Zone Horse Welfare Officers to continue being proactive and report any activities that they may feel inappropriate. Incidents in games need to be actively reported on the Score Sheet, not only for something involving a player, but also the horse.

### FUNGAL DERMATITIS

It would be remiss of me not to mention the early outbreak of fungal dermatitis/ringworm/rain scald. This was a more significant out break due to the International matches at Warwick in April, where horses came together, saddlery and rugs were shared, and horses were sent home, where more gear was shared and further horses became infected, hence the spread far and wide to a number of Zones.

As always vigilance is the key, at home and at carnivals.

It is possible to treat and compete, but definitely not to **IGNORE**.

This is the same for any contagious condition, it is unacceptable for players to bring any infected or infectious horses to competitions, Club and Zone HWO's need to take positive



action to reduce the number of horses exposed, and report any affected, infected horses, so members can be made aware of any conditions.

### **2017 ALBURY JUNIOR CLASSIC**

Well where do I start. I think if there was any incident possible, it happened at Albury that week.

Whilst you would all know I am heavily involved with the Junior Classic, and I can tell you we have gone through these incidents over and over, and cannot pin point conclusively what the causes may have been.

Three horses tragically suffered suspected fractures, (one requiring euthanasia), all in completely different circumstances, different fields, one on Friday afternoon just throwing around. The only possible, maybe significant thing is that they all came from the same club. 2 more horses, one 13 years old, the other very aged, suffered suspected heart attacks or something similar, that resulted in the horses passing away on the field. One of these involved the young player being trapped under the pony for a small amount of time, luckily not injuring the player.

There were 2 other major incidents, involving horses falling for no apparent reason. Both of these were nasty, and on completely different fields and surfaces. One where the player was trapped under the horse with his leg caught for a considerable amount of time. The horse was not injured, but was 'cast' on top of the player, so removing the horse, without causing trauma to the player was the priority. Both horse and player were uninjured in this incident (luckily). The other fall saw the horse ok, but the rider suffering significant head injuries, which I can thankfully say now, has resulted in a complete recovery.

One field was shut down after playing pretty much incident free on Friday, (Silver Stirrup, adult players) to a Junior Classic game on Saturday morning with 2 horses slipping / stumbling and falling within chukkas. All players and horses were uninjured in these falls. We also had some incidents in the final game of the weekend, which was the Junior Classic Final. The previous round was the A grade Men's final, absolutely incident free. In the boys Chukka between Qld and NSW, 3 horses came down. My personal observation, very poor riding! The umpires were asked to speak sternly to these kids, and..... no more problems. All our Juniors need to be aware of their effect on the horse, and how they make decisions, and how that impacts on the game and incidents.

This will be a "Hot Topic" in Albury 2018!

Wrapping up on Albury, apart from the fractures, and one of the suspected heart attacks, ALL other incidents involved juniors. We realise that the Albury carnival is a strong Junior carnival, so junior player numbers as a percentage at this event are higher than nearly all other tournaments, however we think this may be significant.

My personal thoughts are a lack of experience, and maybe fatigue in our Junior players / horses, MAY be a contributing factor, to the incidents / falls.



### **NSW ZONE CHAMPS 2017    HORSE WELFARE ISSUES**

Elissa Koch and myself were made responsible for the vetting out of horses at the 2017 NSW Zone Championships that were held at Warren.

There were 14 horses that did not complete the weekend that were brought to us for vetting out. Most horses presented with lameness, and there was one with colic, but of importance to me were three horses that had very significant eye injuries, that one can assume came from a wayward racquet.

I think this needs to be addressed at an umpiring level, reminding players of their responsibility of illegal swings on both opponents and horses.

We were also made aware of some ponies that had been left tied up all night on Friday night, and when checked on Saturday night they were still in the same place. I contacted Chrissy Honeyman, as WD Horse Welfare Officer, and also as she was camped / situated in the area where the horses were tied. Once she had made the owners aware of their responsibility the ponies were found yards. Chrissy also reported that there were a number of horses that had been left with their tails plaited so she also addressed these players to remind them of the Horse Welfare Policy.

There was also an instance when a player had been directed by the umpire to remove blood from both sides of his horse, in the first round on Saturday morning. The player voluntarily removed his spurs at this time, and played the remainder of the game without them. Later in the day the same player had put the spurs back on, and I was watching the game and noticed a significant amount of blood again on the horse, and waited for 4 or 5 line-ups before asking the umpire to address the situation.

This game was much closer than the earlier game. This time the horse was cleaned up, Vaseline was applied and spurs were changed, NOT REMOVED. This option worked well, and there was no more blood.

I am a believer in managing a situation and this player had had a chance to deal with this problem, but as his spurs had not been removed by the umpire in the first instance, there was no record on the score sheet. I'm not sure how an umpire in a subsequent game can know that this has been a previous problem, so I am wondering how we address this.

I think that even if the player has voluntarily removed the spurs in a previous game, and has not managed to control the significant amount of blood in the next or another game on the same weekend, the spurs should be removed. What I don't know is how the next umpire will know that there has been an earlier issue.

Whilst the Warren area had been so dry, and then with a moderate amount of rain falling on the Thursday before competition, the Warren Club is to be congratulated on their efforts to prepare playable fields for the tournament. They were always most helpful to try to address any issues with fields, and whilst conditions were heavy, there were only a few games, where I saw some VERY tired horses. **Perhaps 8 minute chukkas in those conditions is an issue worth noting.**



Another area worth considering is the 'special' events that are being promoted throughout the season. These events sometimes are more than what is outlined in the rulebook. I think we need to see clear, publicised tournament rules for these events, to protect the welfare of our equine friends.

I have been getting a great response (from some Zones) to the 2017 Grounds Survey form that has been circulated recently.

It is great to see the amount of work, both from volunteers and through paid construction, to many venues around the State.

North West Plains has to be congratulated, as every club in their Zone has spent a considerable amount of dollars and this is not considering the volunteer efforts. A combined nearly \$30,000 (4 clubs) has been spent improving (mainly playing surfaces) in the North West Plains. This has to be highly commended.

There have been other Clubs that have worked very hard on their grounds and improving their facilities through grants and fundraising efforts. Yet there are also other clubs that struggle to be able to get improvements done.

I can only report on the information that I am given, so it is really important to complete these forms so we can identify the areas and clubs that need help.

I would like to thank all the Zone HWO and Secretaries who have helped with the distribution and collation of these reports, as it has been very helpful when crossing back to the information we were given in early 2016.

It is still a struggle to get information from some Zones and Clubs, and I know it is hard, especially at the end of the season when everyone is trying to get on to all the things that need doing, and put polocrosse on the back burner, but I think whilst the season is fresh in everyone's mind it is a good time to honestly reflect, and consider plans for the 2018 season and beyond.

I hope everyone has a Happy and safe "Off Season" and look forward to 2018!

Cheers,

Sara