

Social licence to operate: Why equestrianism should care and act

Roly Owers MRCVS

World Horse Welfare

Equiforum Belgium 24. 21 February 2024



Outline

1. World Horse Welfare
2. Horse sport's challenge
3. Social licence concept
4. Goalposts of social licence
5. 12 actions to maintain a social licence
6. Pulling this together...



1. World Horse Welfare – overview

- Leading equine charity since 1927
- Actively promote the horse-human relationship
- Work with horses in need, sport & leisure horses, work & production horses
- Work in partnership with governments, universities, regulators, other NGOs
- Strong veterinary credentials
- **Four activities: care, research, education, influence**



The inter-connectivity of our four activities



Supporting responsible horse sport

- Welfare advisor to sport regulators
 - International Equestrian Federation (FEI) – Code of Conduct for Welfare of Horse
 - FEI’s Equine Ethics & Wellbeing Commission
 - International Horse Sport Confederation (IHSC)
 - British Horseracing Authority (BHA)
 - Informally to other national federations
- Associate Member of British Equestrian
 - Member of Equine Welfare and Ethics Advisory Group



Focus on social licence



Review

Social Licence to Operate: What Can Equestrian Sports Learn from Other Industries?

Janet Douglas ^{1,*}, Roly Owers ¹ and Madeleine L. H. Campbell ²

¹ World Horse Welfare, Anne Colvin House, Snetterton, Norwich NR16 2LR, UK

² School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, University of Nottingham, Sutton Bonington, Nottingham LE12 5RD, UK

* Correspondence: janetdouglas@worldhorsewelfare.org



2. Horse sport's challenge

- Equestrianism is on an ethical tightrope walk



'PETA campaign'

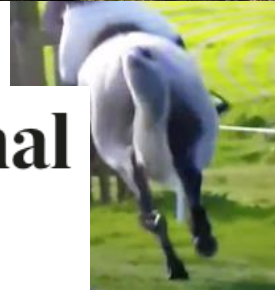
Evening Standard

How many horses died at the Grand National 2023?

Animal rights charities call for jump racing to be banned following more deaths at the annual Aintree showpiece

pictures continue to shock'

racehorses killed in slaughterhouses'



r officials doing enough?'



WorldHorseWelfare

www.worldhorsewelfare.org
Registered charity no. 206658 and SC038384



Society is changing

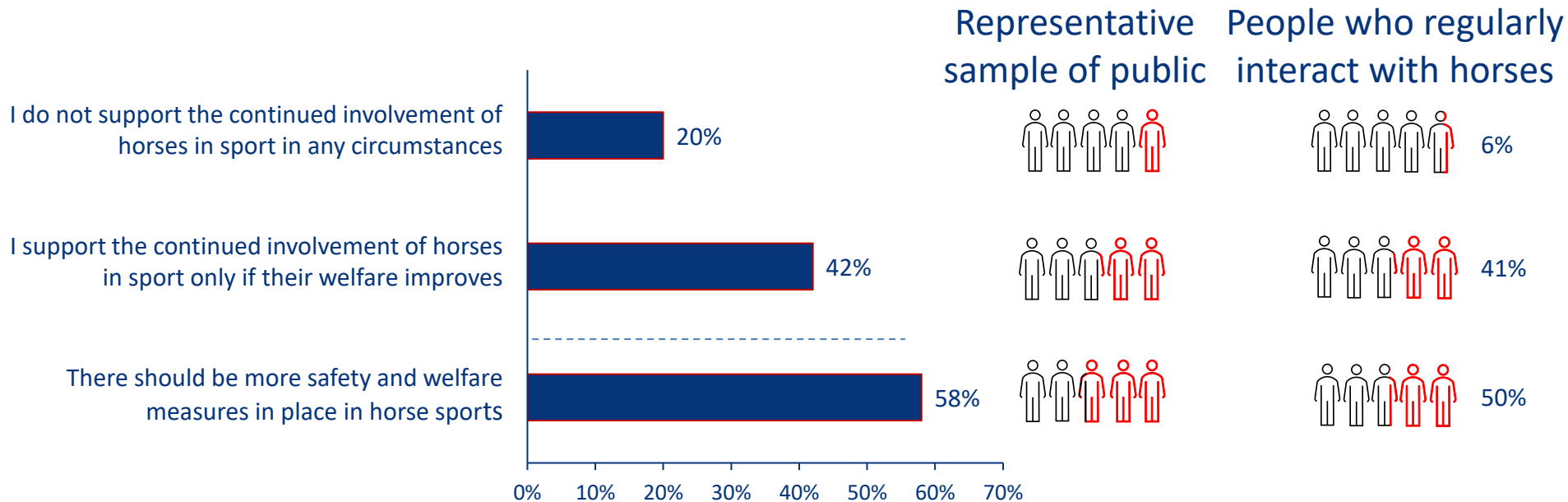


 THE DANISH ANIMAL ETHICS COUNCIL

The Danish Animal Ethics Council:
Statement on the use of horses for sport



Perceptions of UK public and 'horse people' re the use of horses in sport



YouGov research conducted in UK 12–16 May, 2023; N=4,368

Global perceptions re welfare of horses in sport



Savanta opinion surveys, 2022

¹ Public: 14,000 respondents from 14 countries

Data weighted to be representative of each country by age, region and gender

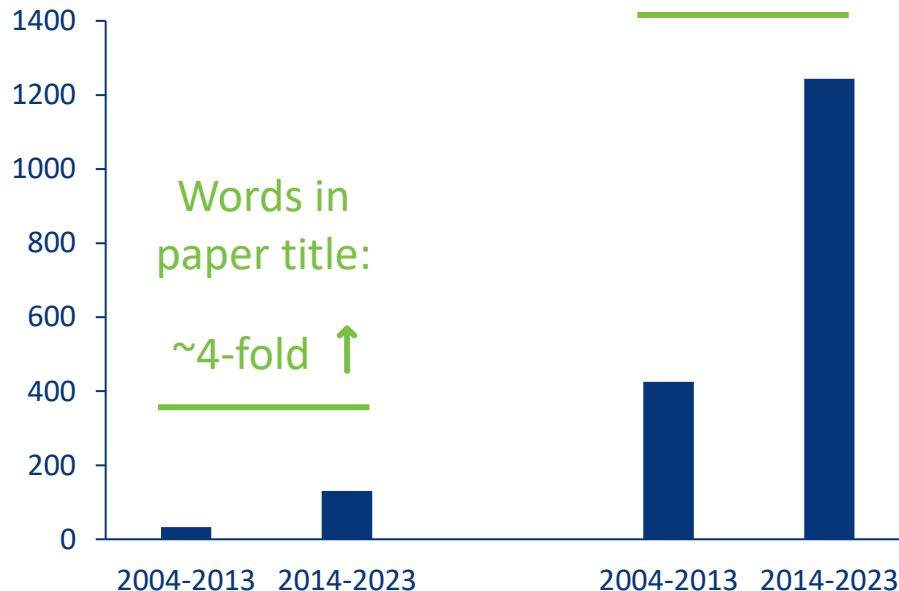
² Equestrian stakeholders: 27,710 respondents from 116 countries

Sources: ¹ Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission for the FEI. Public Attitudes on the Use of Horses in Sport: Survey Report (November 2022)

² Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission for the FEI. Opinions of Equestrian Stakeholders on the use of Horses in Sport: Survey Report (November 2022)

Scientific interest and knowledge

- PubMed search: “(horse OR horses OR equine) AND welfare”
- 3–4-fold increase between 2004–2013 and 2014–2023





Horse sport's landscape in 2024



Society cares more



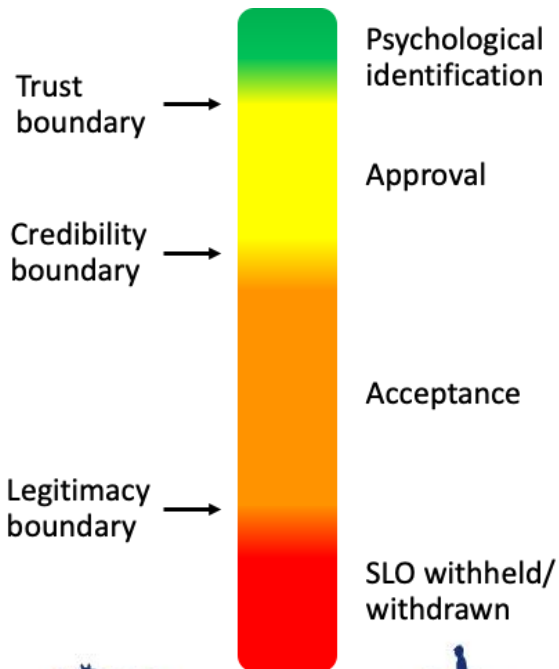
Everybody knows more

Can lead to criticism from outside – and inside – the sport





3. Social licence to operate (SLO)



Graphic: After Thomson & Boutilier (2011)



The consequences of losing a social licence



Greyhound racing:
Banned in parts of
Australia and the USA and
under threat in the UK



Jump racing:
Disappeared from
most of Australia



Equestrianism:
Lost from modern
pentathlon after 2024
Olympics

Loss of self-regulation – or the sport – could be the price that we pay for inaction



Society says:

“You regulate yourselves the way we would regulate [you] if we understood what you do, which we don’t. But we will know if you don’t self-regulate properly and then we will regulate you, despite our lack of understanding.”

Bernard Rollin (1943–2021)

Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Animal Sciences, and Biomedical Sciences, Colorado State University, USA



How is a social licence lost?



What lies at the heart of the threat?

Equine welfare

sustainability, inclusion, accessibility

British Equestrian

#HorsesForAll

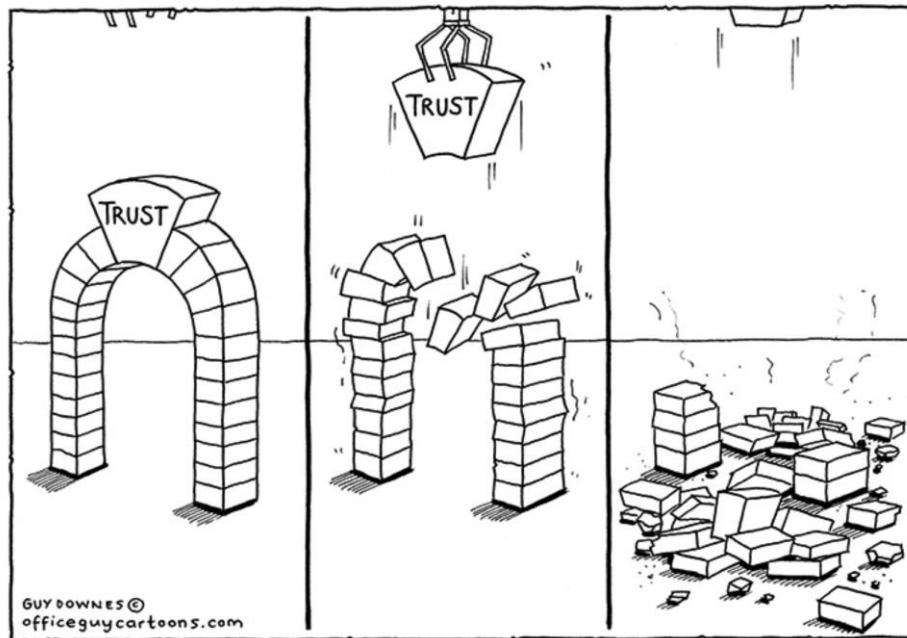
The response from British Equestrian and community members

Summary of the research of the represented communities conducted by AKD Solutions, their recommendations and our commitments.



4. The goalposts of social licence

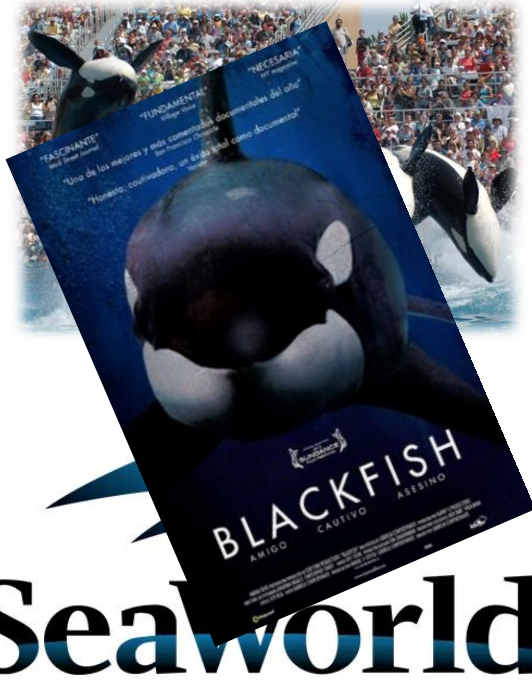
- Trust is key
- Relevant for those outside and inside the sport



We need to talk about this – or do we?



Yes we do...



SeaWorld®

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Nature on screen: The implications of visual media for human–nature relationships

PEOPLE
NATURE

BRITISH
ECOLOGICAL
SOCIETY


Nature documentaries as catalysts for change: Mapping out the 'Blackfish Effect'

Laure Boissat¹ | Laura Thomas-Walters²  | Diogo Veríssimo³ 

Boissat et al. *People and Nature* 2021;3:1179–92

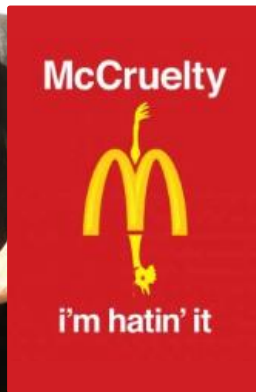
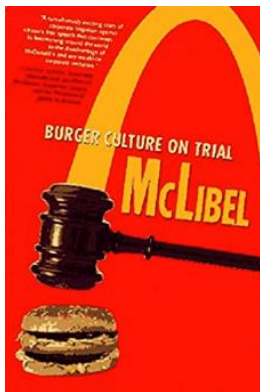


Change is possible

 "McDonald's Turns the Tide"



 "How Temple Grandin's designs have transformed the meat industry"

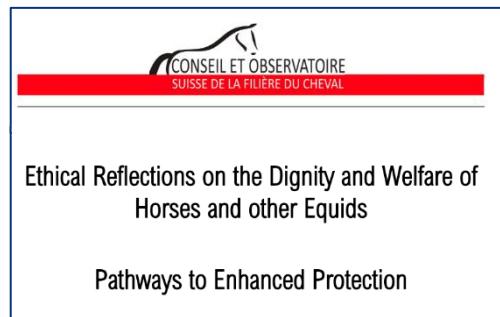


Dr Temple Grandin

What is horse sport doing about this?



Equine Welfare Panel



Equine Welfare and
Ethics Advisory
Group



5. Twelve actions to help maintain a social licence

ACT!

Use communications well

Focus on the long game

Use human
behaviour change
principles

Promote lifelong
learning

Take welfare
seriously



Research public
sentiment

Be open &
transparent

Collaborate with
independent scientists
& good NGOs

Consider ethics

Be evidence-based

Invoke the
precautionary principle

Find out what the public (and equestrians) think – and why they think it

Why?

- These people control the future of your sport

Suggested actions

- Espouse (and take action to stand behind) shared values
- Target the issues identified



Be open and transparent

Why?

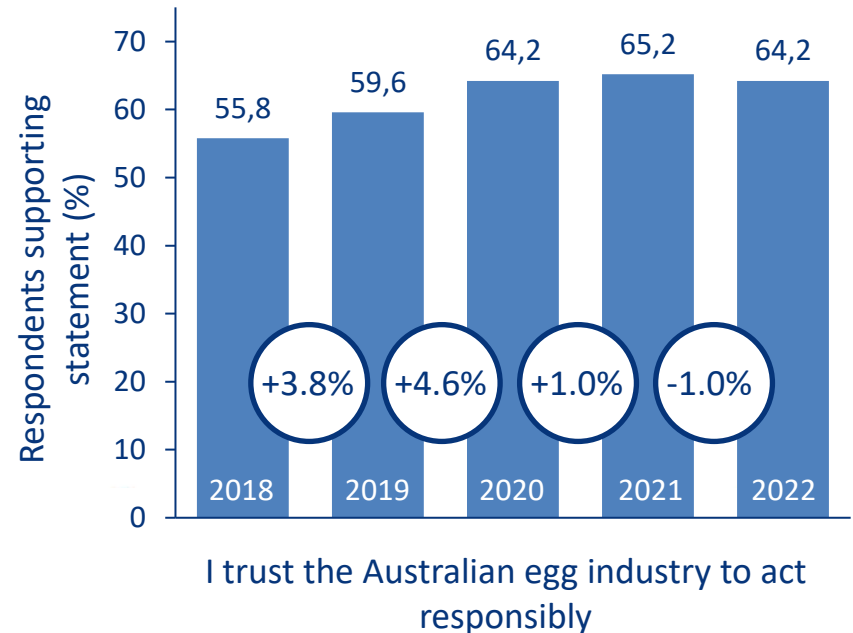
- Transparency lies at the heart of trust

Suggested actions

- Be honest with all stakeholders
- Provide easy access to/share information



“Confidence rises as transparency drives consumer trust within the Australian egg industry”



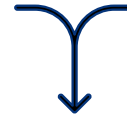
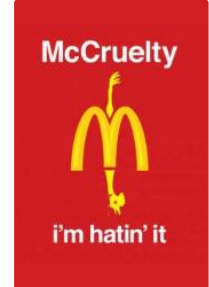
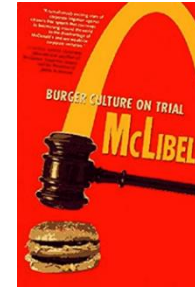
Collaborate with independent scientists and good NGOs

Why?

- Marking your own homework doesn't wash

Suggested actions

- “Invite the wolf into the henhouse”
- Work with respected welfare scientists and NGOs
- Give them free rein to talk about the work you are doing together



Dr Temple Grandin



McDonald's Turns the Tide

Bob Langert

*Former VP of Corporate Social Responsibility
McDonald's Corporation*



“Rather than being on the defensive, we reached out to our critics and collaborated ... it had such a positive effect on our industry. We went from being the enemy to becoming a leader.”



Consider the ethics of everything we do

Why?

- Nothing speaks to shared values like ethical principles

Suggested actions

- Formalise & normalise asking ‘Should I?’ before asking ‘Can I?’



Brown et al. *Animals* 2023;13:1821



Allen et al. *Equine Vet J* 2024;56:26–36

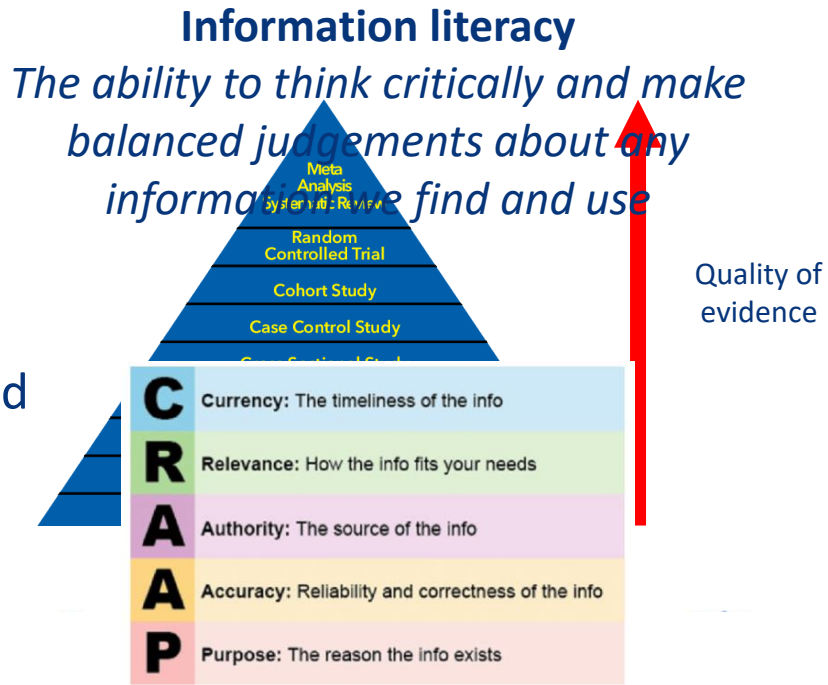
Ensure that your actions are evidence-based

Why?

- Evidence provides support for your chosen actions

Suggested actions

- Learn how to differentiate between good & bad information/who to believe
- Act quickly on good science
- Support research where it is lacking
- Measure welfare outcomes



Invoke the precautionary principle

Why?

- We will never know everything

Suggested actions

- If the evidence isn't clear cut but there is potential for harm, must give the horse the benefit of the doubt



The onus to prove no detrimental impact should be on the proponents of an activity

Be serious and holistic in embracing good welfare

Why?

- It's the right thing to do, we owe it to our horses – and it will safeguard your SLO



Suggested actions

- Use 5 Domains welfare assessment
- Mandate 3 Fs (friends, freedom, forage) to the fullest extent possible
- Establish equine safeguarding measures



What does equine safeguarding look like?

Organisations

- Enforce the rules
- Develop and advertise process for reporting welfare concerns
- Support those who report welfare concerns
- Encourage culture of zero tolerance for poor practices



Individuals

- Find out how to report welfare concerns constructively
 - Be an 'active bystander'



Focus on mental welfare

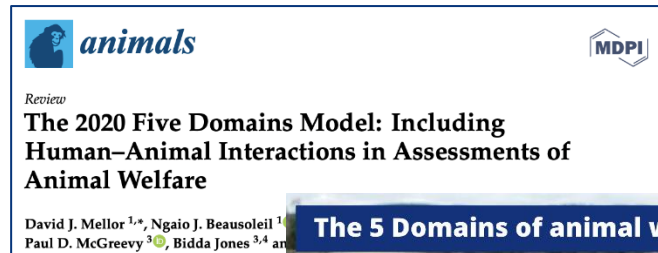
Why?

- For any sentient creature, what matters most is their mental experience of their situation

Suggested actions

- Teach stakeholders to consider all their actions from the standpoint of what the horse is experiencing

5 Domains



animals MDPI

Review
The 2020 Five Domains Model: Including Human-Animal Interactions in Assessments of Animal Welfare

David J. Mellor ^{1,*}, Ngaio J. Beausoleil ¹, Paul D. McGreevy ³, Bidda Jones ^{3,4} and



The 5 Domains of animal welfare

Find out how you can meet the species specific needs of your horse using the 5 Domains of animal welfare

QBA



Applied Animal Behaviour Science 196 (2017) 44–51

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Applied Animal Behaviour Science

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/applanim

Qualitative Behaviour Assessment of horses exposed to short-term emotional treatments

Sara Hintze^{a,b,*}, Eimear Murphy^a, Iris Bachmann^b, Françoise Wemelsfelder^c, Hanno Würbel^a

Mellor et al. *Animals* 2020;10:1870

Hintze et al. *Appl Anim Behav Sci* 2017;196:44-51

Emphasise importance of lifelong learning

Why?

- 'Best practice' changes – knowledge is always expanding

Suggested actions

- Teach people how to evaluate an information source
- Topical topics:
 - Correct training principles, including understanding how horses learn
 - How horses manifest pain




Use human behaviour change science


Why?

- Horses' welfare depends on human behaviour

Suggested actions

- Incorporate human behaviour change principles into your organisation, at all levels


animals

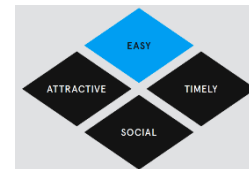


Review
Changing Hearts and Minds in the Equestrian World One Behaviour at a Time
 Inga A. Wolframm ^{1,*}, Janet Douglas ² and Gemma Pearson ^{3,4}



Michie et al.'s Behaviour Change Wheel adapted for the equestrian sector

Wolframm et al. *Animals* 2023;13:748



Focus on the long game

Why?

- ‘Quick wins’ may be tempting – but if they are to be seen as more than sticking plasters, sustained change at all levels is necessary

Suggested actions

- Embed throughout equestrianism
 - Respect for horses
 - Knowledge of what constitutes good welfare
 - Strategies that change public opinion



<https://www.worldhorsewelfare.org/social-licence-learning-from-other-industries>

Understand the power of good communications

Why?

- Nobody will know about your stance on welfare if you don't talk about it

Suggested actions

- **DON'T:** Try to persuade, correct, or win the argument
- **DO:** Listen – Ask – Listen – Ask – Listen – Ask
 - Only then consider how and what to Share
- Be transparent, balanced, open-minded, humble, engaged, and non-confrontational
- Don't just 'communicate' – **ACT**



 *animals* 

Commentary
Used like Pawns or Treated like Kings? How Narratives around Racehorse Welfare in the 2023 Grand National May Affect Public Acceptance: An Informed Commentary

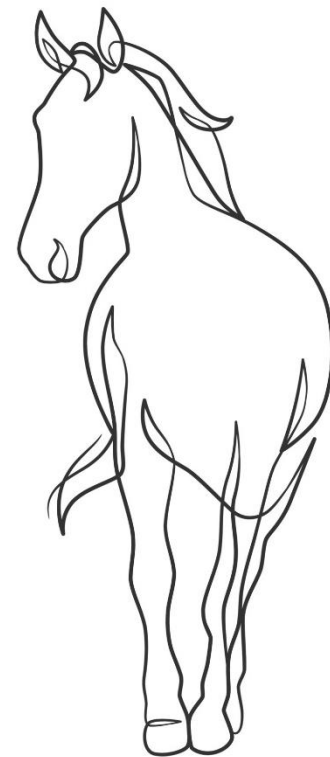
Gemma Pearson ^{1,2,*}, Janet Douglas ³, Inga Wolframm ⁴ and Tamzin Furtado ⁵



Pearson et al. *Animals* 2023;13:3137

6. Pulling this together...

- The threat posed by the public's attitude to horse sport is real – and imminent
- Prioritising welfare is key to preserving our sport - and turning this challenge into an opportunity for growth
- This must be based on:
 - Embedding a 'horse-first', 'horse-centric', ethics-based mindset
 - Being open to challenge and change
 - Funding – and acting on the results of – high quality research
 - Learning more about welfare, human behaviour change, and how to recognise valid information



Vecteezy.com

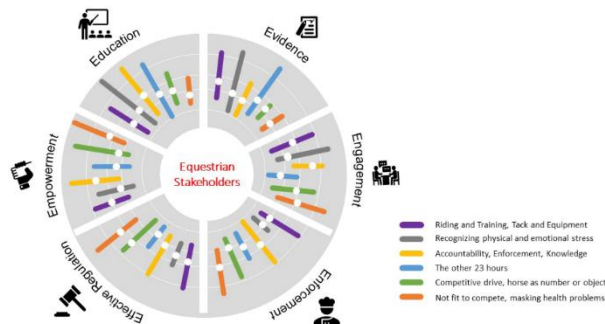


Starting point: A good life for horses

30 Recommendations



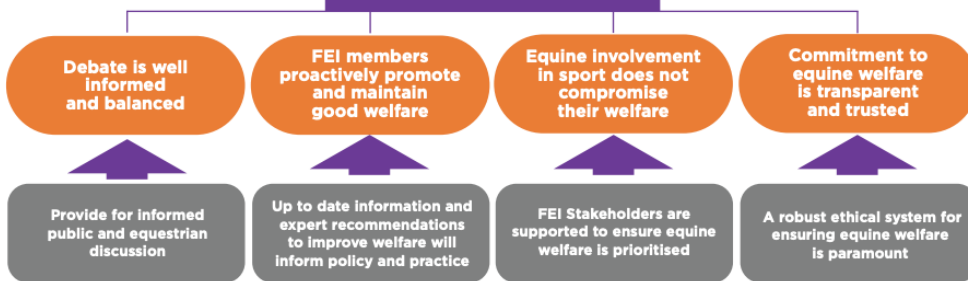
Wheel of Change



Strategic approach

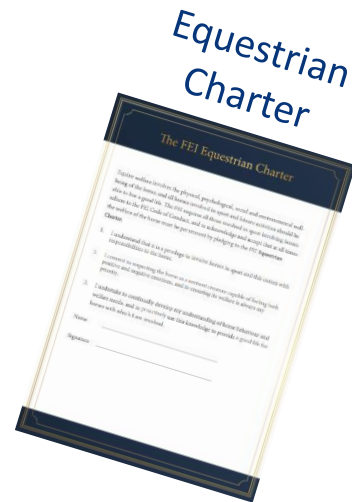
Maintain Social Licence for the involvement of horses in sport

A GOOD LIFE FOR HORSES



<https://equinewellbeing.fei.org/>

Priority Areas of Focus



Looking ahead

- Deeper understanding of equine behaviour



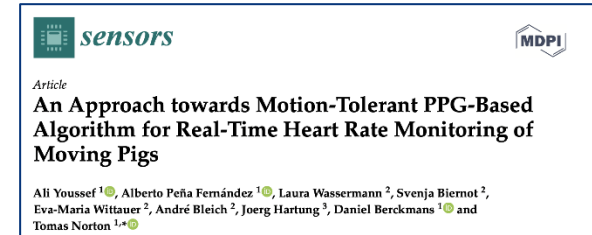
Ricci-Bonot & Mills. *Appl Anim Beh Sci* 2023;265:105966

- Use of artificial intelligence to detect pain and negative emotions



Lencioni et al. *PLOS ONE* 2021;16: e0258672

- Monitoring mental and physical health in real time



Youssef et al. *Sensors* 2020;20:4251

- Characterising positive emotion



Charles Sturt University



Companion Animals NZ



Henshall C; Randle H; Williams J; Waran N



THANK YOU

@rolyowers
@horsecharity

