



Horse Welfare Policy



PONY CLUB
AUSTRALIA

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Note: This document uses the word 'horse' to refer to both horses and ponies.

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Introduction

Pony Club Australia (PCA) is committed to the highest welfare for horses involved in our sports. This policy sets clear welfare standards and describes what is considered best practice. It is expected that riders, coaches, officials and supporters involved in Pony Club® use this document and associated policies to meet PCA and community expectations.

Horse welfare best practice is an evolving journey, and this policy builds on PCA's past practices and the education provided in the PCA Syllabus of Instruction.

Horses have been domesticated for more than 5000 years and selective breeding has changed the horse to make it more suitable for use by humans. Horses are now used most commonly for pleasure and competitive sports. Only a minority of the population now interacts with horses and learns the art and science of horsemanship.

Many traditional practices are not supported by science and PCA seeks to educate and inform our members of the need for change. PCA approaches this primarily by education to increase understanding of the horse's experience and perception of these practices, and their impacts on horse welfare.

Frameworks for assessing horse welfare change as knowledge is gained about the horse's needs and the impacts of humans and the environment on the horse's wellbeing. PCA has based this policy on the Five Domains¹ model of animal welfare. This model builds on the Five Freedoms model and has greater emphasis on the horse's mental state.²

A horse experiences good welfare if it is healthy, comfortable, well-nourished, safe, is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear and distress, and is able to express behaviours that are important for its physical and mental state, that is, it experiences "a life worth living". Good horse welfare requires disease prevention and appropriate veterinary care, shelter, management and nutrition, a socially stimulating and safe environment, humane handling and when necessary, humane euthanasia.

1 D.J. Mellor, N.J. Beausoleil, K.E. Littlewood, A.N. McLean, P.D. McGreevy, B. Jones and C. Wilkins. The 2020 Five Domains Model: Including Human-Animal Interactions in Assessments of Animal Welfare. *Animals (Basel)*. 2020; 10(10): 1870. Published 2020 Oct 14. doi: 10.3390/ani10101870

2 McGreevy P, Berger J, de Brauwere N, et al. Using the Five Domains Model to Assess the Adverse Impacts of Husbandry, Veterinary, and Equitation Interventions on Horse Welfare. *Animals (Basel)*. 2018;8(3):41. Published 2018 Mar 18. doi:10.3390/ani8030041

The Five Domains

■ Survival-related factors

■ Situation-related factors

Physical Environment

Safe and appropriate surroundings



Health

Fit and healthy

Injuries and illnesses treated



Nutrition

Enough water

Balanced and varied diet



Behavioural interactions

Able to express natural behaviours.
Positive interactions



Mental experiences

Pleasure of eating and grazing

Safe and pleasant environment

Vitality and high functional capacity

Calm, confident and secure

Engaging, social and playful

Welfare status



Policy framework

Under each of the five domains in this policy there are three sections.

- **When caring for your horse you should:**

Most of a horse's life is lived at its home base, and away from Pony Club. This section gives guidance on standards and practices that promote good health and welfare.

- **Coaches and Officials at Pony Club should monitor for:**

PCA seeks first to educate and supports the role of coaches and officials to guide Pony Club members on care of their horse.

- **It is a breach of this policy to:**

All riders; and coaches, officials and supporters assisting with care of horses at Pony Club events and activities; are required to comply with mandatory clauses of this policy.

Policy breaches and disciplinary action

It is a requirement that all PCA members, supporters, coaches and officials comply with the mandatory clauses of this policy. A Pony Club official can immediately withdraw a horse and rider combination from Pony Club activities, eliminate them from a competition, or refer the matter for investigation, if there is a breach of the mandatory clauses of this policy.

The PCA Conduct and Disciplinary Policy applies to any Alleged Breach (as defined in the Conduct and Disciplinary Policy) of the mandatory clauses of the PCA Horse Welfare Policy. Disciplinary penalties may be imposed for breaches of this policy.

Cases of perceived cruelty must be reported to the appropriate agency in each state. These are listed in Appendix A.

Domain 1 - Nutrition



As well as providing nutrition for life, eating contributes positively to a horse's wellbeing (Domain 5). The pleasure of chewing, interest from a variety of foods, tastes that he likes and the comfort of having some food in his gut.

Welfare needs of Pony Club horses are generally met by providing ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour. Horses would normally spend over 60% of the day grazing and PCA promotes pasture based diets. If there is not sufficient pasture for horses to graze, suitable and sufficient forage and concentrate feed, and supplements as necessary, must be provided. There are mental welfare consequences if horses are denied opportunities to eat sufficient roughage. Horses in groups should be managed at feeding time to reduce competition.

When caring for your horse you should:

- Provide food of good quality and reduce access to harmful items such as mouldy hay or poisonous plants.
- Adjust the feeding rate so that it is appropriate for the horse's age, body condition and amount of exercise. Both over and under feeding can have a negative impact on a horse's welfare.
- Provide roughage (pasture, hay and chaff) as a significant part of the horse's diet.
- Know the rationale for feeding supplements. Not all supplements are necessary or safe.
- Make changes to the diet gradually.
- Seek veterinary advice to manage the negative effects of metabolic conditions. For example restricting access to fresh, green grass in Spring for horses prone to laminitis.
- Feed from clean, suitable, non-spillable containers.
- Check the water supply at least once daily.

Coaches and Officials at Pony Club should monitor for:

- Body condition scores less than 2 or more than 4 and direct the member to appropriate sources of information. The PCA Body Condition Scoring tool is in Appendix B.
- Dehydration especially on hot days and at competitive events.
- Health conditions that might have a dietary cause or remedy, such as diarrhoea, brittle hooves, poor coat, 'Big Head' or lameness issues that may occur as a result of laminitis.

It is a breach of this policy to:

- Fail to provide clean water to horses at a Pony Club event. Water containers must be clean, safe, secured and non-spillable.
- Fail to ensure that horses are not deprived of access to food for more than four hours at a Pony Club event. For example, provide a hay net when tethered or yarded between activities.
- Not actively address management of feed intake for any horse that has a body condition score less than 2 or more than 4.



Domain 2 - Physical Environment

Horses need an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area. Participation in Pony Club may require the use of horse transport and will expose the horse to different environments at Pony Club activities, camps and competitions.

When caring for your horse you should:

- Ensure that the area where the horse is kept provides freedom of movement, shade from the sun, protection from adverse weather and is clear of debris, wire and hazards that may cause an injury
- Have a paddock of sufficient size for the number of horses
- If stabled, provide good flooring, ventilation and suitable clean bedding for warmth, insulation and protection from abrasion

If your horse is used to an outdoor paddock with a mate at home, then a single stable for several consecutive days at a Pony Club event is a major change that will impact his sleep patterns and wellbeing.

- Use a stable with area not less than 12 m² and at least 2.4m roof height for the average horse. The stable should be suitable for the size of the horse.
- Use a stable that gives the horse visual access to the stable surroundings, including other horses if possible.
- Provide stabled horses with daily access to a yard, paddock, exercise and contact with other horses or humans.
- Closely observe a horse that is relocated as it will take time to adjust to a new environment.
- Be aware of the horse's Thermo-Neutral Zone (5°C - 25°C) and use rugs appropriately to protect against cold but prevent overheating. Check rugs daily and horses weekly for signs of abrasions and rubbing.
- Maintain fences and gates to adequately and safely confine horses.
- Ensure gateways have secure fasteners and are at least 1.2m wide to give easy passage.
- Use a float or truck that is safe, clean, well ventilated, that provides a comfortable space and is regularly maintained and disinfected.



- Plan long journeys carefully and allow horses regular rest periods. Unload the horse and provide access to water at least every four hours. Respiratory problems arising from transport can often be reduced if horses are able to lower their heads to ground level during rest periods.
- Travelling is hard work for a horse as he needs to balance constantly, so ensure there is time before competing for him to recover.
- Horses can easily overheat during transport. Horses should be unrugged, or only have a light cotton rug for transport. In hot weather, horses should be transported in the very early morning or at night.
- Have a Property Identification Code (PIC) for the property where horses are kept (particularly in states where mandatory).

Coaches and Officials at Pony Club should monitor for:

- Condition and security of fences, gates and yards at Pony Club grounds.
- Appropriate surfaces for riding.
- Over-rugging of horses.
- Provision and use of shade at Pony Club activities and events.

It is a breach of this policy:

- For a club or event organiser to conduct an event that does not comply with the PCA Hot Weather Policy.
- For a club or event organiser to conduct an event when a local extreme weather warning has been issued by authorities.



Domain 3 - Health



The objective is to maintain physical health and fitness, and to prevent or rapidly diagnose and treat injury and disease. Horses need exercise for mental health too.

When caring for your horse you should:

- Inspect your horse at least once per day and observe his movement, appetite, demeanour, and check for injury.
 - Have a preventative health program that includes annual vaccination for Tetanus, Strangles and Hendra (if appropriate).
 - Monitor (through faecal egg counting) and treat worm burdens. Reduce parasite exposure through pasture and manure management.
 - Actively manage mosquitoes and flies on the property to protect against vector-borne diseases³.
 - Quarantine new horses for 14 days prior to mixing with existing horses on the property.
- Keep a record of your horse's normal physiological parameters, including resting heart and respiration rates.
 - Identify a veterinarian in your area and keep contact details updated.
 - Manage your horse's training so that his ground manners facilitate safe veterinary and other treatments, eg farrier, dentist, physio.
 - Allow the horse to exercise daily if confined, and ride regularly to maintain fitness for Pony Club activities.
 - Inspect hooves daily and have regular (eg every six weeks) farrier visits.
 - Have the horse's teeth checked annually by a qualified person.
 - Have an appropriately fitted saddle and bit for comfort of the horse and seek expert advice if necessary.
 - Use anti-inflammatories and analgesics under veterinary supervision. Their purpose is not to mask lameness or to enable the horse to be ridden when it causes pain and discomfort.
 - Have a plan for emergencies including fire and flood (see Appendix C).

³ https://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/JE_Mosquito-Management-for-Horses_A4_v1_for_AHA_220701.pdf

- Keep your contact details updated with the property owner or manager if your horse is agisted. Organise an experienced person to check on your horse if you are away. If your horse is on an unoccupied property you should have your contact details displayed.
- Microchip or otherwise identify (brands, markings) your horse and keep current records.
- Be aware of any local fire or flood plan.

Coaches and Officials at Pony Club should monitor for:

- The combined weight of rider and saddlery should not be more than 20% of the horse's weight. For example, a 13.2hh pony weighing 400kg should not be ridden by a rider weighing more than 80kg with gear.
- Signs of fatigue and overwork (lethargy, poor recovery, reduced interest in surroundings). The workload imposed must not exceed the horse's ability for its age, size, strength, and fitness.
- Entry rules must ensure that horses do not compete in more than two jumping classes per day, eg showjumping and jumping equitation.
- Signs that can indicate poor health such as dull, coarse coat (worms), apathetic demeanour (learned helplessness/chronic pain), aggression towards humans (pain - general), girthing and/or aggression during saddling (ulcers/back pain), uncooperative during hoof care (foot/musculoskeletal pain).
- Missing shoes, overly long toes and other signs of inadequate hoof care.

It is a breach of this policy to:

- Trim the horse's sensory hairs around the mouth, nose and eyes as this reduces the horse's sensory ability.
- Remove hair from the inner ear as this performs a protective function. Longer hairs extending beyond the edges of the ear can be trimmed to neaten.
- Use a horse less than four years old (from its date of birth) for competitive Pony Club® activities, other than walk/trot dressage which can be done at three years old.
- Ride a horse with lameness or an altered gait due to pain, injury or abnormality.
- Use a noseband, bit, spurs or whip in a manner that results in injury or visible blood or swelling in the mouth or on the body of the horse.
- Use any method of deliberate pain or injury in training such as rapping, or soring.



Domain 4 - Behavioural interactions



Does your horse have Friends, Forage and Freedom (to do horsey things)?

Horses should have sufficient space, proper facilities, and the company of other horses. The horse's interactions with humans should also have a positive impact on the horse's welfare.

Horses may develop inappropriate behaviour patterns resulting from lack of stimulation, frustration, close confinement, isolation, insufficient access to hay or high-fibre forage and inadequate exercise. Stereotypic behaviour (weaving, crib-biting, wind-sucking, pacing, pawing) may indicate a welfare problem, so needs to be addressed.

Training methods used must be humane and must not cause pain or suffering to the horse. Gear and aids that cause pain to the horse should not be used.

The Pony Club Australia syllabus includes training methods that incorporate an understanding of horse behaviour, learning theory and training techniques proven through evidenced-based research.

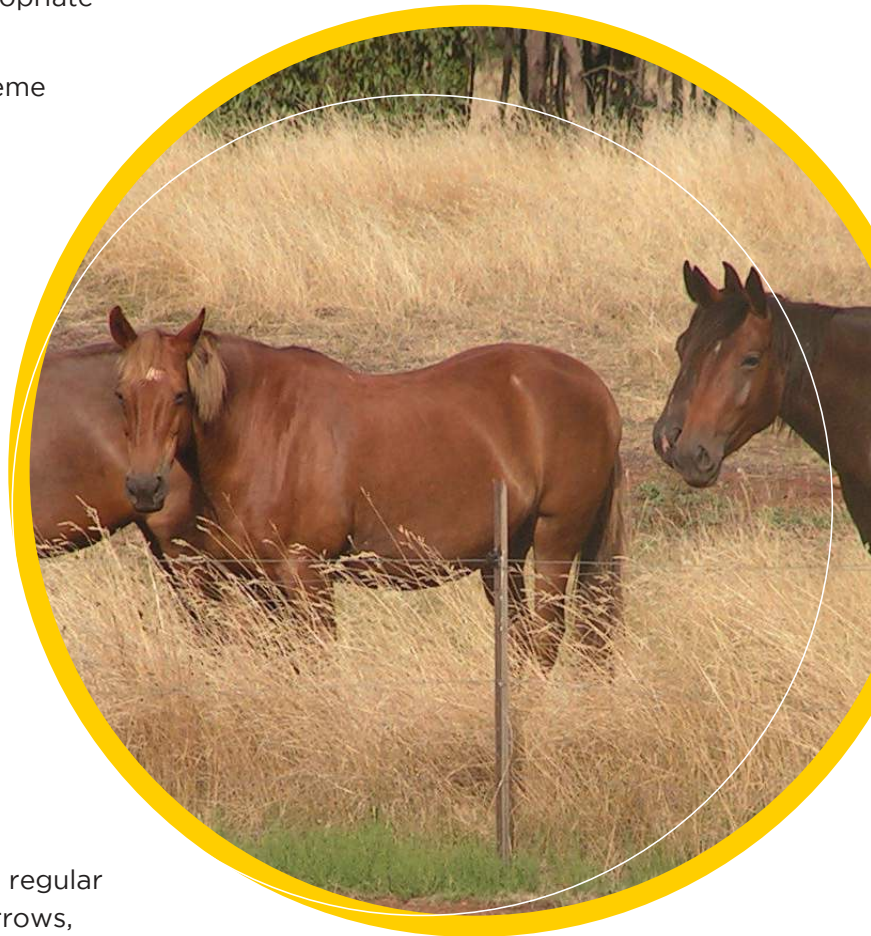
Punishment is not a training method supported by Pony Club Australia. The whip has a role as an aid to encourage the horse forward, in conjunction with the leg aid. Use of the whip as punishment will not be effective unless it is applied at the onset or immediately after the unwanted behaviour. Punishment only frightens and confuses the horse. It also weakens your partnership with your horse and increases your risk of having a riding accident.

Use of terms like naughty, lazy or stubborn to describe the unwanted behaviour of a horse demonstrates a lack of understanding. Using such terms shows the person is not a knowledgeable horse person who recognises the part their behaviour plays in the horse's behaviour.

Horses need clear and consistent aids and consistent expectations for their behaviour. If aids are unclear (for example, using the same aid to ask for two different things) or behavioural expectations are inconsistent (for example, if you reward a behaviour one day and then punish it the next day), the horse's world becomes unpredictable and scary. In this situation, the horse is unsure which behaviour you want when you apply an aid or which behaviour will lead to them receiving a reward or being punished. This leads to confusion and worry in the horse, who then tries to solve it first by escaping, then by fighting and finally by giving up.

When caring for your horse you should:

- Observe your horse for signs of stereotypic behaviour. Remedies should first be focussed on reducing the stress that is the likely cause of the inappropriate behaviour.
- Avoid use of stables unless there are extreme weather conditions. If stables are used or horses are kept alone, consider environmental enrichment methods such as
 - novel feeders
 - varied food types
 - use of slow feeders for roughage
 - open top doors or windows for ventilation and to enable the horse to view the surroundings
 - partially remove the barriers between stables to enable horses to touch each other
 - maximising turn-out time or daily hand grazing.
- Provide regular opportunities for passive interactions with other horses.
- Train your horse in order to habituate it to regular stressors such as aerosol sprays, wheelbarrows, visiting trucks, dogs, flapping rugs or tarpaulins.
- Behave calmly around your horse.
- Allow your horse to explore things in which he shows interest, such as the ramp of the float or something new in the yard.
- If your horse cannot practice allogrooming (horses grooming one another), make sure that you groom your horse regularly and pay particular attention to the withers.



Living in a stable will not meet the horse's mental needs. Boredom, stress and lack of interaction can lead to stereotypic behaviour and have a negative effect on his mental state.

Coaches and Officials at Pony Club should monitor for:

- Signs of stress in horses tethered or yarded at Pony Club.
- Horses being lunged for more than 20 minutes at a Pony Club activity or event (5 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes work, 5 minutes cool-down).
- Use of gear that is fitted appropriately and does not inflict pain. Nosebands must comply with PCA gear rules and a measuring gauge should be used when necessary.

It is a breach of this policy to:

- Use an item of gear that does not comply with the published PCA National Gear Rules.
- Use an item of gear that is not adjusted in compliance with the PCA National Gear Rules (for example, overtightened nosebands).
- Use any gear or method that maintains a horse's head and neck posture in which the nasal plane is behind the vertical for an extended period of time.
- Apply hobbles to a horse.

- Ride a horse dangerously such as to increase the likelihood of injury to the horse.
- Leave a horse tethered without active supervision.
- Leave a stressed horse tethered without constant supervision and attempts to reduce the stress.



Domain 5 - Mental experiences

The living conditions and treatment of horses should not impose mental suffering. Actions and practices under the other four domains impact on the horse's mental state. As well as minimising negative impacts, we seek to provide horses with positive experiences.

Mental security is important for the horse, and it comes about through enabling the horse's basic needs especially the close company of other horses. An isolated horse will spend more time being vigilant, which can affect sleep patterns. In riding and handling horses, mental security also comes from clear, consistent training where horses respond to light, almost invisible aids.

It is important that the following are prioritized for the horse's wellbeing.⁴

- Foraging needs: this is about the horse's urgent need to eat and chew and search for high fibre, low calorie food (such as hay) for around 13 - 16 hours per day. Depriving animals of the constant need to chew contributes to oral stereotypies such as crib-biting and windsucking.
- Movement needs: allowing the horse's need for movement and exercise can avoid the horse developing locomotory stereotypies such as fence walking. This means allowing them a few kilometres per day of exercise.
- Social needs: the horse is a social animal and social contact is essential for his well-being. If a horse is stabled, it helps a lot if he can not only see other horses but can touch and groom them as well. If it simply isn't possible to have another horse as a companion, then as a last resort even another species such as a sheep can help. Isolation is very bad for horses and contributes to both oral and locomotory stereotypies such as crib biting and fence walking.
- Communication and mental stimulation: this means training the horse correctly so that every single aid you give him (reins, legs, seat and voice) has a consistent and singular meaning. This is essential because horses are very good at learning to communicate with each other but sometimes humans are very confusing to them and this causes conflict behaviours such as bucking, rearing, bolting and spooking. It is also about giving the horse lots of mental stimulation such as going out on rides in the bush and a variety of activities.



⁴ From the Pony Club Australia B certificate manual

When caring for your horse you should:

- Provide:
 - a diet that enables the horse to enjoy the pleasure of eating
 - a safe and predictable environment
 - treatment of disease and injuries to minimise pain and maximise health and fitness
 - a variety of ridden activities that end each session on a positive note.
- Train your horse to do the things that are needed, to reduce their impact on his mental state, such as floating, shoeing and veterinary treatment.
- Use the training processes in the PCA Syllabus.
- Avoid overworking the horse where he can become too tired to respond properly.
- Consider what your horse enjoys (food treats, sand roll, grooming, playing with the hose) and regularly spend some downtime providing these positive experiences.
- Seek advice from a horse behaviour professional to deal with dangerous behaviours such as barging, kicking, biting.

Coaches and Officials at Pony Club should monitor for:

Hyperreactive behaviour (sometimes called conflict behaviour) including bucking, rearing, bolting or repeated spooking. This behaviour is both a safety and a welfare issue, and a rider should never be encouraged to 'ride through it'. The rider should be instructed to de-escalate this situation (for example by dismounting) before continuing.

It is a breach of this policy to:

- Use a whip or other item to hit an unriden horse, other than as a guide when loading a horse on a float/truck and in ground work exercises, or using a lungeing whip whilst lungeing.
- Use a whip or other item to hit the head of a horse.
 - Use the whip to strike a ridden horse:
 - more than twice in succession
 - after the last effort in a competition
 - with an overarm action (eg. using the whip in the right hand to strike the left flank or shoulder)
 - to vent the rider's or coach's temper
 - on any area of the body other than behind the rider's leg or down the shoulder of the horse.
 - Abuse a horse by tugging on the reins and inflicting pain with the bit.
 - Use spurs to reprimand a horse.
 - Instruct a rider to use a whip or spurs in a non-approved manner. This applies to parents, supporters and coaches.



Appendix A - Animal Welfare Legislation

When evidence of horse suffering is presented, we should take every reasonable step to alleviate that suffering as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Each State has animal protection legislation which makes it an offence to cause physical or mental suffering, whether by positive act or omission, to a protected animal (which includes horses) if the person knew or could be expected to know that an animal would suffer as a result. The Acts also place an additional responsibility on the keeper, owner or person otherwise responsible for an animal to ensure that its basic needs are met.

Many states have Codes of Practice, specific to an aspect of horse care or activity which may have a legal standing. Check the Agriculture Department website in your state.

Reporting animal cruelty offences

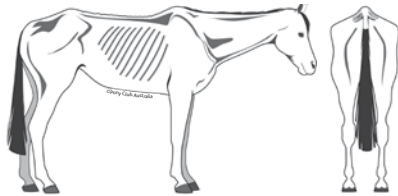
State/Territory	Telephone	Website
New South Wales	1300CRUELTY 1300 2783589	www.rspcansw.org.au/report-a-cruelty-case/
ACT	1300 777 221	www.rspca-act.org.au/contact/report_animal_cruelty
Northern Territory	1300 720 386	Email to animalwelfare@nt.gov.au
Queensland	1300 264 625	www.rspcaqld.org.au/what-we-do/save-animals/inspectorate/report-cruelty
South Australia	1300 477722	www.rspcasa.org.au/services/inspectorate/report-cruelty/
Tasmania	1300 139 947	www.rspcatas.org.au/report-animal-cruelty/
Victoria	03 92242222	rspcavic.org/cruelty-report/
Western Australia	1300 278 358	www.rspcawa.org.au/report-cruelty



Appendix B - Body Condition Scoring

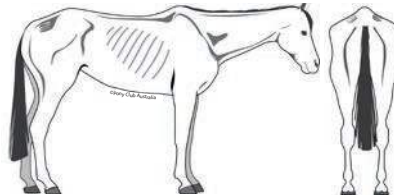
SIX POINT SCALE 0 TO 5

0. VERY POOR



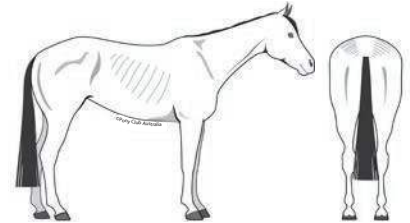
- Very sunken rump
- Deep cavity under tail
- Skin tight over bones
- Very prominent backbone and pelvis
- Marked U shaped neck

1. POOR



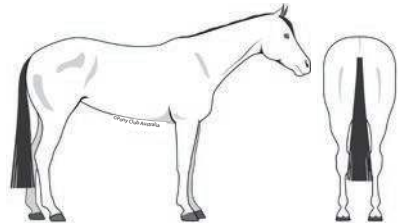
- Sunken rump
- Cavity under tail
- Ribs easily visible
- Prominent backbone and croup
- U shaped neck – narrow and slack

2. MODERATE



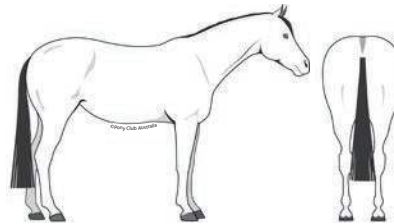
- Flat rump either side of backbone
- Ribs just visible
- Narrow but firm neck
- Backbone well covered

3. GOOD



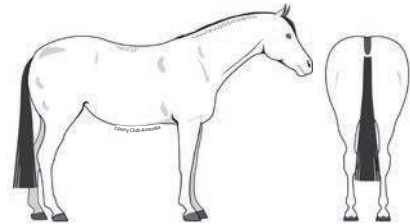
- Rounded rump
- Ribs just covered but easily felt
- No crest, firm neck

4. FAT



- Rump well rounded
- Gutter along back
- Ribs and pelvis hard to feel
- Slight crest

5. VERY FAT



- Very bulging rump
- Deep gutter along back
- Ribs buried
- Marked crest
- Folds and lumps of fat

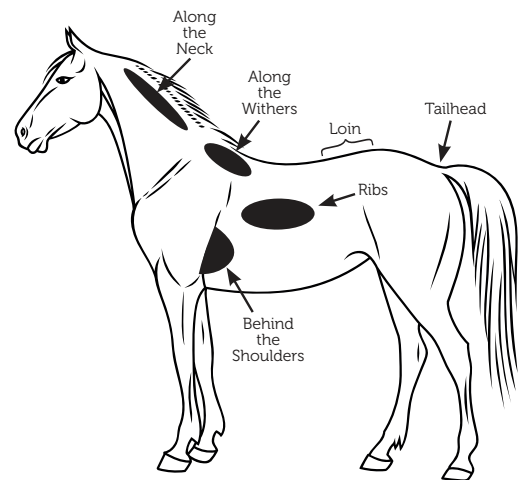
Body condition scoring provides a useful and objective method of monitoring body condition. Body condition, expressed as fatness, is the most reliable indicator of the suitability of a horse's diet and health.

METHOD OF ESTIMATION

1. Assess visually and by feel, the horse's pelvis and rump, back and ribs and neck. During winter, a long heavy hair coat complicates visual appraisal. You need to run your hands over the horse to get an accurate score.
2. Give those areas individual scores using a scale of 0 (very poor) to 5 (very fat).
3. Intermediate assessments can be given half scores.

CONDITION SCORING

Condition scoring of horses involves an assessment of certain parts of a horse's body for 'fatness'. The most commonly used sites are along the neck, along the withers, the loin, tailhead, ribs and behind the shoulder as shown below.



WHAT IS THE BEST SCORE FOR MY HORSE?

Type of horse	Suggested score
Young, growing horse	3
Pregnant or lactating mare	4
Breeding stallion	3-4
Performance horse	3
Idle horse	3

Poor body condition is not always due to lack of feed; it could be related to:

- parasite infestations
- poor dental health
- chronic injury or illness
- advanced age or
- lack of mobility affecting the horse's ability to forage.

Appendix C - Horse welfare in an emergency

Floods and bushfire emergencies are a regular occurrence in Australia and there is much that horse owners can do to reduce the risk of fire and flood on their property.

Your long-term preparation should include:

- Identifying your horse with a microchip
- Training your horse to load easily on a float and truck
- Development of an emergency plan that includes your horses

Your pre-emptive action, in the face of immediate danger, should include:

- Movement of horses to a safer area
- If you cannot float them out, then open internal gates on the property
- Removal of rugs and halters
- Write your name and telephone number on their hooves or hide if possible
- Carry an emergency kit that includes photos and proof of identification of your horse, feed and feeders, horse first aid kit.

Your local Department of Agriculture and fire authority has information to assist horse-owners.

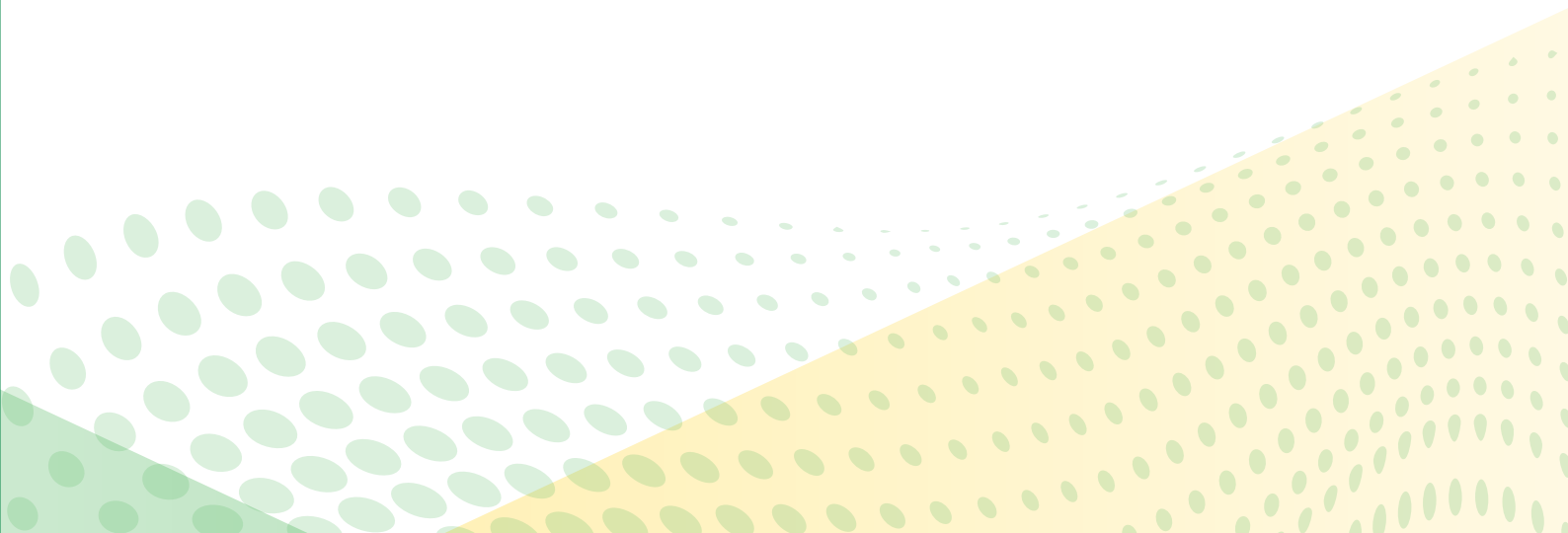
For example:

South Australia - Looking after horses in bushfires [click here](#)

Agriculture Victoria - Horses and Floods [click here](#)

CFA Victoria - Horses and Bushfires [click here](#)

SES NSW - Get Ready [click here](#)





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