

NEW SOUTH WALES

HARNESS RACING

APPEAL PANEL

APPEAL PANEL MEMBERS

**Hon W Haylen KC
D Kane
B Judd**

DECISION

21 January 2026

**APPELLANT BLAKE MICALLEF
RESPONDENT HRNSW**

AUSTRALIAN HARNESS RACING RULES

163(1)(a)(iii)

DECISION

The Appeal Panel makes the following orders:

- 1. The appeal is dismissed and the Stewards penalty of 7 days suspension is confirmed;**
- 2. The appeal fee is forfeited.**

1. On 6th January 2026 Harness Racing NSW Stewards opened an inquiry in relation to an incident occurring in race 2 held at Temora Trotting Club that day. Mr Micallef was driving the horse Alwaysatthebeach and Mr Strong was driving the horse Im Princess Nelly. Passing across the 500 metres for the final time it was observed that Mr Strong was racing in a one-out wide line in a one-out two back position and to his immediate inside racing along the marker line and four back along the marker line was Mr Micallef driving Alwaysatthebeach. On passing the 500 metres it appeared that Mr Micallef shifted his runner from a marker line position to a one-wide position, engaging in a jostle with Mr Strong on his outside and continuing with that shift out wide, placing Mr Strong's horse under pressure that was subsequently checked and raced roughly. It was felt that Mr Micallef had shifted quite abruptly and continued with this jostle for some distance and subsequently placed Mr Strong's horse under pressure, resulting in that horse being checked and racing roughly. It was thought that the incident was brought about by Mr Micallef shifting off the track when jostling.
2. Mr Strong told Stewards that his horse "was gone" and that Mr Micallef just came out and pushed it. There was slight contact with his horse and it went slightly rough. He had not got out to a full three wide position. While viewing video of the incident he was surprised how much of his horse's back legs flicked out past the gig wheels and could have contributed to the interference and "Mr Micallef's" driving.
3. During the Stewards inquiry, Mr Micallef raised a number of matters in support of his case and denied that his horse and driving had caused the jostling. He also noted that he had obtained a two wide position and that he did not move once having secured that position. He also asserted that Mr Strong had obtained a three wide position.
4. Following the lengthy discussion mentioned above, the Stewards charged Mr Micallef with a breach of AHRR 163(1)(a)(iii), "a driver shall not cause or contribute to any interference." The particulars were that Mr Micallef, being the driver of Alwaysatthebeach, when shifting that mare wider racing down the back straight on the final occasion, you have done so when you have had Im Princess Nellie racing to your outside, and that runner was checked and raced roughly. Mr Micallef pleaded not guilty to that charge. The Stewards noted that he had got to a true two-wide position before the incident and that he had not been able to shift Mr Strong to a true three-wide position, and that was why that the Stewards had decided that the incident occurred.

5. In setting a penalty the Stewards noted that Guidelines covered the appropriate penalty and here the starting point was 21 days suspension when a horse is checked and raced roughly in a similar situation, as had occurred that night. Mr Micalleff's good record was taken into account leading to a discount of 14 days and setting a period of 7 days suspension of his licence to drive in races.
6. Mr Micallef has appealed against that penalty and asserts that he had not been responsible for the jostling that resulted in Im Princess Nellie being checked and racing roughly. The arguments put to the Stewards were repeated and further possibilities were canvassed. HRNSW presented 9 screenshots to show that during the period of time that the jostling was taking place Mr Micalleff's submissions were not accurate or tenable. Further, video coverage of the race enabled the parties to scrutinise the important periods of the race. Again, that coverage did not assist Mr Micalleff's submissions. In light of these matters the Appeal Panel is satisfied that HRNSW has established its case against Mr Micalleff and that the Appeal be dismissed.
7. The orders of the Panel are as follows: (1) the Appeal is dismissed and the Stewards penalty of 7 days suspension is confirmed, and, (2) the Appeal fee is forfeited.

The Hon. Wayne Haylen KC - Principal Member

Mr Darren Kane – Panel Member

Mr Brian Judd – Panel Member

21 January 2026