

Policy: 622.6
Effective: 1 May 2026
Revised: 30 April 2025
Subject: **Harness Racing Heat Policy**
Reference: *Harness Animal Welfare Committee Meeting - 12 February 2009*
Regulatory Review Panel – 9 February 2011
HRNSW Board Meeting – 26 October 2011
HRNSW Board Meeting – 31 October 2017
HRNSW Board Meeting – 13 February 2018
HRNSW Board Meeting – 25 July 2019
HRNSW Board Meeting – 30 April 2026

HRNSW HEAT POLICY

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This Policy is in place to protect the welfare of horses and minimise the effects on participants during extreme weather days when racing is scheduled at a New South Wales harness racing tracks (venue).
- 1.2 Clauses 2.1 and 3.1 were amended in October 2011 to now make reference of the wet bulb globe temperature. The wet bulb globe temperature (WBGT) is a composite temperature used to estimate the effect of temperature, humidity, wind speed (wind chill) and solar radiation on humans. It is used by industrial hygienists, athletes, and the military to determine appropriate exposure levels to high temperatures.
- 1.3 The Policy is more detailed and specific than initially adopted and is divided into three parts, the first relates to Clubs/Stewards actions on race day, the second relates to trainers and their responsibilities and the third relates to the welfare of horses.
- 1.4 HRNSW expects all Officials and Trainers to adopt a “safety first” preference at all times when managing horses on extreme weather days.

2. STEWARDS/CLUBS POLICY

- 2.1 This Policy will apply on all race days where the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) has forecast or the ambient temperature, at a venue at which a race meeting is scheduled, to be 38°C or above, or the wet bulb globe temperature (WBGT) shade is 28°C or above.

Where practical the Chairman of Stewards and/or Manager of Integrity shall designate that the Policy apply to a race meeting on the day prior to the race meeting.

- 2.2 Stewards must take advice from the Official Veterinarian(s) in regards to the comfort levels existing prior to or during the conduct of any race meeting, and when considering whether to proceed or modify the program for that race meeting.

- 2.3 Modification of a race program might include the advancement or delay of a schedule if it appears likely that extreme weather conditions might ease or could be avoided.
- 2.4 Should the Stewards determine to continue the racing program, they may instruct that:
- a) An additional Official Veterinarian be provided;
 - b) Additional equipment be provided by the race club to assist the comfort of horses;
 - c) An Official Veterinarian be available post-race at a position for drivers to report concerns regarding a horse;
 - d) Drivers, if they become concerned at the condition of their horse post-race, proceed to the Official Veterinarian positioned on the track;
 - e) A specific (and/or air-conditioned) stall be set aside for recovery purposes;
 - f) The minimum period prior to the race for horses to be required on course may be reduced;
 - g) Pre- and post-race parades be amended as directed and the period horses are required in the parade area be minimised;
 - h) Where possible horses should be stabled out of the sun and in areas that are breezy or permit air flow;
 - i) Adequate wash bays and hoses are available to ensure rapid post-race cooling of horses;
 - j) Adequate drinking water is available to horses;
 - k) Race Club Officials should be informed to have ice, water, scrapers, sponges, towels and extra water hoses available. Race club staff should provide large bins and ensure that these are continually stocked with bags of ice and water to assist in the cooling of horses;
 - l) Ensure the swabbing stall interior is as cool as possible, by hosing the roof, allowing adequate ventilation and/or providing fans/air-conditioning;
 - m) (Where applicable) Tie-up stalls equipped with water misters and/or fans are enabled to permit horses to cool down throughout the day; and
 - n) Evaporative cooling, particularly sweating, is the most important means of dissipation of body heat for the exercising horse. The liberal application of cold water in shaded, well ventilated places will greatly assist the processes which enable horses to lose excessive body heat on hot days.
- 2.5 Horses can be assisted in cooling down after racing in hot weather by maximising the efficiency of evaporative cooling:
- a) “Wet and Walk” as water evaporates from the skin it removes body heat causing the horse to cool. Increasing air flow over the horse’s skin surface, by walking in shady, breezy areas, improves evaporation rates;
 - b) Horses may need to be hosed and scraped several times in between walking. Scraping of excess water from the coat stops the water acting as an insulating barrier and aids evaporation;
 - c) Bucketing or sponging ice cold water over the horse assists in the recovery of heat-affected horses;
 - d) In very humid and wind-still conditions, it may be difficult with the above methods for sweat and water to evaporate quickly enough for adequate body cooling. In these circumstances the use of air-conditioned stalls (which provide cool and dry air) and/or the use of fans (to improve air flow over the horse’s skin surface) should be made available;
 - e) Horses should be allowed to drink as much fresh, clean water of ambient temperature as they require after racing; and

- f) Horses must be allowed sufficient time to adequately cool down before being floated back to their stables.
- 2.6 The Official Veterinarian(s) will scrutinise all horses:
- a) Upon arrival on course, in particular horses identified as having travelled in excess of two hours to attend the meeting. Any horse observed to be showing signs of discomfort pre-race as a result of the hot/humid conditions should have its rectal temperature taken. If a horse is observed with an elevated rectal temperature pre-race (in excess of 38.5^o C) it should be monitored and consideration be given regarding its suitability to race;
 - b) Detained in the swabbing area (either pre- or post-race) to monitor horses that are sweating excessively or appearing distressed during the sampling procedure;
 - c) Immediately post-race, in particular for any horse where its driver becomes concerned about its condition; and
 - d) Subsequent to the race to ensure all horses have recovered appropriately to permit travel. No horse may leave the course without the approval of the Official Veterinarian.
- 2.7 The Official Veterinarian(s) will also closely monitor all horses for signs of heat stress:
- a) In the tie-up stall area prior to presentation in the parade ring;
 - b) In the parade ring pre-race;
 - c) On arrival at the milling area prior to the start;
 - d) On return to the stables post-race; and
 - e) While in the swabbing area (pre or post-race)
- 2.8 If the Official Veterinarian is concerned about a horse's condition pre-race, they shall immediately report their concerns to the Stewards.
- 2.9 Any horse found to be exhibiting signs of heat stress will be given appropriate treatment immediately.
- Appropriate treatment shall include:
- a) Repeated application of cool water to the entire body of the horse, followed by scraping of excess water from the horse;
 - b) Walking the horse in a breezy, shaded area between bouts of hosing;
 - c) Oral and/or intravenous fluid therapy if indicated;
 - d) Corticosteroid anti-inflammatory treatment if indicated;
 - e) Sedative drugs if indicated;
 - f) Use of air-conditioned stall if available;
 - g) Use of forced ventilation if available; and
 - h) Use of ice-water soaked towels applied to the horse's body and changed frequently as towels heat up
- 2.10 The Official Veterinarian should have an adequate supply of relevant resources on hand to provide emergency treatment to a horse.
- 2.11 Race clubs must ensure adequate running water is immediately available to thoroughly and repeatedly wet affected animals in order to maximise conductive/evaporative cooling. An adequate number of hoses should be provided for this purpose in the parade ring and the

race day stalls by the Club conducting the meeting. They must ensure that all relevant hoses are connected and have adequate water pressure.

- 2.12 **The Chairman of Stewards acting at any race meeting has the responsibility of obtaining the weather forecast conditions prior to the meeting and monitoring the New South Wales Thermal Comfort Observations as provided on the BOM website <http://www.bom.gov.au/products/IDN65179.shtml> throughout the meeting.**
- 2.13 The Chairman of Stewards, race club officials and licensees will take such action and provide such assistance as is necessary to ensure that the Official Veterinarian can properly fulfil their duties in accordance with this Policy.
- 2.14 **The Chairman of Stewards may issue directions to race club officials and licensees to properly give effect to this Policy.**

3. TRAINERS POLICY

- 3.1 Where the HRNSW Chairman of Stewards and/or Manager of Integrity have directed that the HRNSW Heat Policy shall apply at a race meeting, a Trainer may, **BEFORE** 9.00am on the day of the race meeting, seek permission from the Stewards to withdraw the horse from its engagement.

Upon approval to withdraw from its engagement, the horse will not be permitted to start in any race within a period of two clear days from the date of the race meeting.

A horse withdrawn from its engagement will be permitted to trial within the period of two clear days from the date of the race meeting, in circumstances where the forecast weather conditions for the trial would not also be the subject of this Policy.

Unless otherwise ordered by the HRNSW Chairman of Stewards and/or Manager of Integrity no additional penalty or embargo shall apply.

Any scratching following 9.00am on the day of the race meeting will be considered as a late scratching and the appropriate late scratching penalty will apply unless approval is granted by the Chairman of Stewards.

- 3.2 Upon application to the HRNSW Chairman of Stewards and/or Manager of Integrity a horse may be withdrawn prior to 9.00am on the day of the race meeting provided the Trainer can demonstrate that the prevailing weather conditions at the location of his registered stable on the day of the race meeting, or the day prior, or that transport to and/or from the venue of the race meeting will have a detrimental effect on the well-being of the horse. Additionally, a report from a Veterinarian supporting the application must be submitted.

Upon approval to withdraw from its engagement, the horse will not be permitted to start in any race within a period of two clear days from the date of the race meeting.

A horse withdrawn from its engagement will be permitted to trial within the period of two clear days from the date of the race meeting, in circumstances where the forecast weather conditions for the trial would not also be the subject of this Policy.

The Stewards will determine what, if any, additional penalty or embargo shall apply.

- 3.3 A horse may be withdrawn for heat stress on arrival at the track by order of the Stewards, in consultation with the On Course Veterinarian, Stewards and the Trainer.

Upon approval to withdraw from its engagement, the horse will not be permitted to start in any race within a period of two clear days from the date of the race meeting.

A horse withdrawn from its engagement will be permitted to trial within the period of two clear days from the date of the race meeting, in circumstances where the forecast weather conditions for the trial would not also be the subject of this Policy.

The Stewards will determine what, if any, additional penalty or embargo shall apply.

- 3.4 If the prevailing conditions are extreme on race day, all horses that have been floated in excess of one (1) hour should be checked by an Official Veterinarian on arrival at the track.
- 3.5 At the request of the Stewards or a Trainer, or their representative, any other horse may also be subject to pre-race Veterinary inspection.
- 3.6 At the discretion of the Stewards horses may not be required to parade and identification procedures shall be conducted in the stalls.
- 3.7 Horses may be sent out onto the track for their preliminary at the discretion of Stewards in lieu of normal 10 minute requirement.
- 3.8 Any Trainer who has any concerns regarding their horse's condition, post race, must immediately notify Stewards to enable Veterinary examination and, if necessary, assistance to be available.

4. HORSE WELFARE INFORMATION:

- 4.1 Horses naturally possess an effective cooling mechanism, which relies to a large extent on the evaporation of sweat from the skin. As sweat and water molecules evaporate from the skin these molecules absorb and remove body heat causing the horse to cool.
- 4.2 Occasionally, when there is an imbalance in the amount of body heat generated and heat able to be lost to the environment, a small proportion of horses show signs of heat stress or heat stroke. Metabolic heat syndrome after exercise is most likely to be seen on days when both ambient temperature and relative humidity are high, and wind speeds are low or absent. These conditions favour build up of body heat load and reduce shedding of body heat load to the environment.
- 4.3 Signs of heat stress include:
 - a) rapid shallow breathing (panting) with flared nostrils;
 - b) staggering gait/weakness;
 - c) agitated and distressed appearance;
 - d) impulsive kicking with hind limbs or striking out with front limbs; and
 - e) (occasionally) collapse.
- 4.4 A horse's susceptibility to heat stress is not influenced solely by prevailing weather conditions. Other risk factors for horses include:
 - a) travelling long distances prior to competition;
 - b) withholding drinking water prior to racing (this is not a recommended practice in hot weather);
 - c) horses with an excitable temperament;
 - d) horses not acclimatised to local weather conditions;
 - e) horses that are first starters, resuming from a spell, or early in their training program; and
 - f) horses that sweat excessively, or do not sweat adequately ("dry-coated").

- 4.5 In the event of a trainer being concerned by the manner in which a horse is coping with the prevailing weather conditions before its race (agitation, panting and/or excessive sweating) an approach should be made to the Stewards seeking to withdraw the horse from the race, whereby the Stewards may seek the opinion of the Official Veterinarian before considering such an application.

5. THE BUREAU OF METEOROLOGY (BOM) INFORMATION:

- 5.1 BOM, through its website, provides regularly updated weather information including thermal comfort and heat stress indicators using a calculated estimate of wet bulb global temperature (WBGT). True WBGT takes into account measured values for temperature, humidity, wind speed and solar radiation. The WBGT estimate that is provided by BOM uses actual measurements of temperature, and humidity combined with estimates of wind speed and solar radiation in calculating WBGT (the estimate assumes a moderately high solar radiation level and light wind conditions).
- 5.2 Where BOM does not provide forecasts or report weather information for a particular location the Chairman of Stewards will designate a location in proximity to the venue from which the relative BOM information will be used as a reference.