

JUMPS RACING IN AUSTRALIA



Animal Defenders
Office

Using the law to protect animals

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This Fact Sheet is for general information purposes and is not legal advice. It provides a brief overview only of this area of the law. If you require legal advice relating to your particular circumstances you should contact the ADO or another solicitor.

WHAT IS JUMPS RACING?

Jumps racing originated in Ireland in the 18th century, as an off-shoot of fox hunting, where hunters would race their horses from the church steeple of one town to that of another, usually over fences and ditches along the way.[1]



Picture: Colleen Petch, *The Australian*; Warrnambool VIC

It reached Australia by the late 1800s. Now there are two types of jumps racing here: hurdle racing, which involves padded or brush fences of around 1m tall, and steeplechase racing, where fences are 1.15-1.4m tall.[2] [3]

QUICK FACTS^[10]

- Jumps racing currently only operates regularly in Victoria.
- In 2024, 1 in every 24 horses died during a jumps race.
- Risk of death for horses in jumps racing is almost 19 times higher than in flat racing.
- The death toll may be higher as the racing industry is not required to report all associated injuries and deaths.
- Measures over the last 14 years to make jumps racing less unsafe have not worked.

JUMPS RACING AUSTRALIA

A report by the Federal Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare in 1991 recommended that jumps racing be phased out over a three-year period.[4] Nevertheless, **the industry still operates regularly in Victoria**. The industry makes money for some of its stakeholders.[5] For example, jumps racing offers prize money that is, per race, on a par with that offered in flat races.[3]

Flat races are run 'on the level', without any obstacles. They are the most common form of horse racing eg the Melbourne Cup.

Jumps racing was banned in New South Wales in 1997 when section 21C 'Steeplechasing and hurdle racing prohibited', was inserted in the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* (NSW). In Tasmania, the industry voluntarily discontinued the sport in 2007 due to declining local interest and economic value. For similar reasons, the jumps racing industry does not operate in Western Australia, Queensland, Northern Territory or the Australian Capital Territory.[6] Most recently, jumps racing was banned in South Australia under section 14AA which was inserted in the *Animal Welfare Act 1985* (SA). The ban commenced in July 2023.

Victoria

Jumps racing in Victoria is regulated under the Local Rules and Rules of Race Betting of Racing Victoria.[7] The sport was temporarily banned in 2009 after three horses died in the May Racing Carnival. However, it was reinstated the following year with amended welfare standards. Since then, on average, 3-4 horses reportedly die every year during jumps races.[8]



Wheeler Fortune, after being injured during a jumps race at Oakbank, South Australia.[8]



Picture: RSPCA SA

WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS?

Jumps racing is much more dangerous for horses than flat racing. A 2024 study in Victoria found that there were around 19 times as many fatalities, and around 18 times as many severe injuries, in jumps racing by comparison with flat racing.[9] An RSPCA audit of the 2024 season in Victoria also found that one in every 24 horses died during a jumps race, with one in every 10 horse starts in a jump race resulting in injury.[10]

The fate of horses when their time as jumps racers is over is also a matter of concern from an animal welfare perspective. Not all horses will live out the remainder of their lives in retirement; many may be euthanised before their time, or sent to abattoirs for slaughter.

DISCLAIMER

While all care has been taken in preparing the information on this fact sheet, it is not a substitute for legal advice. For any specific questions we recommend you seek legal advice. The Animal Defenders Office accepts no responsibility for any loss or damage suffered by people relying on the information contained in this fact sheet.

[1] Australian Jumping Racing Association, <https://australianjumpingracing.com/the-facts-about-jumps-racing> [accessed 24/10/2024]

[2] Boden, L. A., et al. 2007. "Risk Factors for Thoroughbred Racehorse Fatality in Jump Starts in Victoria, Australia (1989-2004)." *Equine Veterinary Journal* 39 (5): 422-428.

[3] Ruse, K, A Davison, and K Bridle. 2015. "Jump Horse Safety: Reconciling Public Debate and Australian Thoroughbred Jump Racing Data, 2012-2014." *Animals: An Open Access Journal from MDPI* 5 (4): 1072-1091.

[4] https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Significant_Reports/animalwelfarectte/welfareindustry/index [accessed 24/10/2024]

[5] ABC News, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-01/how-a-controversial-jumps-carnival-keeps-a-country-town-kicking/9713896> [accessed 24/10/2024]

[6] Australian Trainers Association, <http://www.austrainers.com.au/the-history-of-jumps-racing-in-the-states-of-australia-the-virtual-form-guide-national-12-may-2009/> [accessed 24/10/2024]

[7] Racing Victoria, <https://www.racingvictoria.com.au/the-sport/racing/rules-of-racing> [accessed 22/10/2024]

[8] ABC News, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-04/horse-racing-safety-questioned-following-jumps-racing-deaths/10060198> [accessed 24/10/2024]

[9] Boden, L. A., et al. 2006. "Risk of Fatality and Causes of Death of Thoroughbred Horses Associated with Racing in Victoria, Australia: 1989-2004." *Equine Veterinary Journal* 38 (4): 312-318.

[10] RSPCA Victoria, <https://rspcavic.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Audit-of-jumps-racing-horse-falls-fatalities-and-injuries-in-Victoria.pdf> [accessed 22/10/2024]