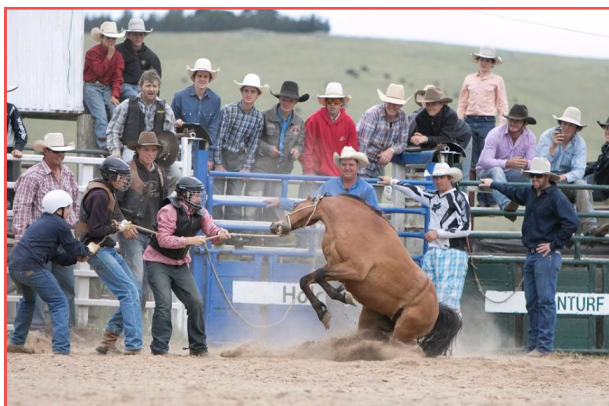


What is a rodeo?

A rodeo is a form of so-called 'entertainment' where cows, bulls and horses are taunted with equipment into displaying supposedly 'wild' behaviours for an audience.

Are there rodeos in Australia?

Yes.
Rodeos are held in all States and in the Northern Territory.



Bungendore Rodeo, NSW

About us

The Animal Defenders Office (ADO) is an accredited, not-for-profit community legal centre that specialises in animal law. Our mission is to use the law to protect animals. This includes:

- ◆ providing free advice about animals and the law;
- ◆ increasing public awareness about how the law affects animals; and
- ◆ working to reform the law to improve protection for animals.

How to help

The ADO relies solely on the generosity of the public to stay in operation. We do not receive any government funding, and all our lawyers and officers are volunteers.

If you would like to donate, please go to our website at www.ado.org.au.

Thank you

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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 on this fact sheet.

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Rodeos, animal welfare, and the law

Animal Defenders Office
Information Sheet



Cooma Rodeo, NSW



Animal Defenders
Office

Using the law to protect animals

Are there animal welfare concerns with rodeos?

There are animal welfare concerns during both the training for and conduct of rodeos. During the actual events, serious welfare issues relate to the use of flank or bucking straps, electric prods,¹ spurs, and rough roping and handling of the animals. These practices can lead to injuries ranging from broken bones, snapped necks, ripped tendons and ligaments, and torn tails, to punctured lungs, haemorrhaging, and other internal organ damage. Risk of physical harm is only one aspect, as rodeo animals show signs of fear and distress, especially during training sessions and calves used in roping events.²

Are rodeos banned anywhere?

Yes, rodeos, or at least the use of certain animals in rodeos, are banned in some Australian jurisdictions.

Rodeos are **banned completely in the Australian Capital Territory** (“ACT”). A person commits a criminal offence if the person conducts or takes part in a rodeo in the ACT (*Animal Welfare Act 1992* (ACT) s 18(1)). The offence is punishable by imprisonment for one year or a penalty of up to \$16,000, or both.

Victoria and South Australia have banned the use of animals under 200 kg in rodeos, which effectively prohibits the use of calves in roping events (*Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 2019* (VIC) reg 82; *Animal Welfare Regulations 2012* (SA) reg 19(1)(a)).

How are rodeos regulated in NSW?

The treatment of rodeo animals would be considered animal cruelty under NSW animal welfare law, so the law specifically **exempts** rodeos from animal cruelty offences.³ This legal exemption from animal cruelty laws has been highlighted in a study examining the inconsistencies and inadequacies of the regulation of the popular rodeo event of calf roping across Australia.⁴

The exemption from animal cruelty laws applies, however, only if the rodeo is conducted in accordance with the ‘relevant Code of Practice’ (reg 44(3)).

RODEOS—THE CODE

In NSW the relevant code is the ‘Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals Used in Rodeo Events’ (“the Code”). The Code was approved in 1988 by the NSW Animal Welfare Advisory Council.

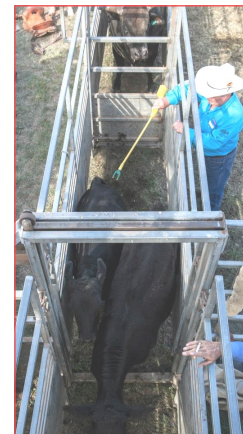
The Code specifically states that it is ‘based on knowledge available at the time of publication and should **be reviewed at intervals of no longer than 2 years** to maintain the highest possible standards.’

After over 35 years, **no such review has occurred.**

RODEOS—PRODDING

According to the Code: ‘No animal shall be ... cruelly prodded’ (3.10). The Code does not define what ‘cruelly’ means in this context.

The Code also states that ‘Standard electric prods shall be used as little as possible ... Cattle may only be prodded in the shoulder or rump. A prod may only be used instantaneously on the shoulder of a bucking horse to clear it from the chute on opening of the gate...’ (3.11). If cattle or horses were ‘cruelly prodded’ or the prod was used excessively or not on the specified parts of the body, it could be argued that the Code may have been breached.



Queanbeyan rodeo, NSW

A recent Australian study highlights the need for tougher laws to prohibit the use of electrical devices on rodeo horses.⁵

RODEOS—CALF ROPING

The Code states that ‘Rodeo associations are to ensure that arrangements are made for the **phasing out by 20 June 1989, of calf-roping** in a form which permits the abrupt stopping of calves when roped’ (4.23).



Cooma rodeo, NSW

The Code also says: ‘Jerking down refers to the 180° flipping over of a calf onto its back which may occur when it is roped. No animal may be jerked down, and a contestant who jerks down an animal will be disqualified’ (4.21).

Despite industry claims of using certain rope devices that reduce ‘abrupt stopping’ of calves, to this day most calf-roping in NSW involves jerking down and contestants are not disqualified or fined for doing it.



Queanbeyan rodeo, NSW

REFERENCES:

1. ‘What are the animal welfare issues with rodeos?’ [RSPCA Knowledgebase](#), last updated 15 May 2024.
2. Dixon S et al (2023) ‘Behaviours expressed by rodeo calves during different phases of roping’ *Animals* 13(3), 343.
3. *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* (NSW): specific offences for ‘animal baiting’ (s 18), bull fighting (s 18A), and certain animal-catching activities where an animal is released from confinement to be chased, caught or confined (s 20). These offences are exempted in the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulation 2025* (NSW), reg 44.
4. Stonebridge M (2022) ‘The legality of calf roping in Australia: A Ford vs Wiley proportionality analysis’ *University of Queensland Law Journal* 41(1):59-88.
5. Stonebridge M et al (2024) ‘The use of electric prodders on rodeo horses in Australia: Regulatory inconsistency and potential illegality’ *UNSW Law Journal* 47(3): 916-939.

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