

2014/17: Should horse racing be banned in Australia?

What they said...

'I do have a soft spot for some horses. But it is business and I can't afford to get too attached'

Peter Moody, Black Caviar's trainer

'The deaths of both horses are nothing more than freakish events that could not be stopped or predicted'

Ryan Reynolds for the Geelong Advertiser

The issue at a glance

This year, 2014, the annual Melbourne Cup was held on Tuesday, November 4.

Shortly after the race two of the horses which had competed died. The favourite, Admire Rakti, collapsed in a cooling-down stall, apparently having suffered heart failure. Seventh place-getter, Araldo, had to be euthanised when he shattered his hind cannon bone after shying at a flag while being led from the track.

This is the second consecutive year in which at least one horse has died after the Melbourne Cup. (Verema broke down in the back straight in 2013.)

A spokesperson for the Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses, Ward Young, has claimed there have been more than 100 horse deaths during or immediately after races in the past year.

A number of animal welfare groups are now calling horse racing unduly cruel and arguing it should be banned in Australia.

Background

(The information which follows was taken abbreviated from the Wikipedia entry titled 'Thoroughbred racing in Australia'.

The full text of the entry can be read at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thoroughbred_racing_in_Australia)

Thoroughbred horse racing in Australia

Thoroughbred horse racing is an important spectator sport in Australia, and gambling on horse races is a popular pastime with A\$14.3 billion wagered in 2009/10[1] with bookmakers and the Totalisator Agency Board (TAB). The two forms of Thoroughbred horseracing in Australia are flat racing, and races over fences or hurdles in Victoria and South Australia. Thoroughbred racing is the third most attended spectator sport in Australia, behind Australian rules football and rugby league, with almost two million admissions to 360 registered racecourses throughout Australia in 2009/10. Horseracing commenced soon after European settlement, and is now well-appointed with automatic totalizators, starting gates and photo finish cameras on nearly all Australian racecourses.

On an international scale Australia has more racecourses than any other nation. It is second to the United States in the number of horses starting in races each year. Australia is third, after the United States and Japan for the amount of prize money that is distributed annually.

Racing in Australia is administered by the Australian Racing Board, with each state's Principal Racing Authority agreeing to abide by, and to enforce, the Australian Rules of Racing.

Besides being a spectator sport, horseracing is also an industry, which provides full- or part-time employment for almost 250,000 people, the equivalent of 77,000 jobs. About 300,000 people have a direct interest as individual owners of, or members of syndicates which own, the 30,000 horses in training in Australia. There are bookmakers, over 3,600 registered trainers and more than 1,000 jockeys, plus farriers and veterinarians involved at race meetings alone. Race meetings are organised by approximately 374 race clubs that conduct about 2,694 meetings on 360 racecourses around Australia for over \$427,245,000 in prize money.

Public interest in Thoroughbred racing, especially during the main spring and autumn racing carnivals, has been growing in recent years with over 100,000 attracted to the running of the Melbourne Cup, the Victoria Derby and the VRC Oaks race meets. The Golden Slipper Stakes, Caulfield Cup and W S Cox Plate are also major attractions.

History of Racing in Australia

The first horses that came to Australia arrived on the "Lady Penrhyn" with the First Fleet on 26 January

1788. It is thought that they consisted of one stallion, one colt, three mares and two fillies from Cape Town, South Africa. (Young) Rockingham was one of the first bloodhorses to be imported into Australia, c.1797. In 1802, the stallion Northumberland and an English mare were imported, followed shortly thereafter by Washington, a stallion from America. (Old) Hector, was an important Arabian horse that was imported to Australia c.1803 and whose bloodlines have survived in Australian Thoroughbred pedigrees. Northumberland and Hector were the two leading sires in Australia until 1820. These sires and a number of other Arabian stallions contributed to the breeding up of the bloodhorse population prior to 1825. Manto, imported in 1825, was the first General Stud Book recorded Thoroughbred mare known by name to arrive in Australia. Her family is still producing winners. In 1826 the Thoroughbred stallion Peter Fin, and mares Cutty Sark and Spaewife, were imported.

The first recorded public auction of bloodstock took place in 1805. After the 1830s more English bred horses were imported for racing, as more racing clubs were formed in the country areas of New South Wales.

Malua, foaled in 1879, was the most versatile Australian Thoroughbred racehorse, winning classic races on the flat and the VRC Grand National Hurdle before becoming a good sire. The New Zealand bred Carbine was one of the early champions of the Australian turf, and was later inducted into the Australian Racing Hall of Fame and the New Zealand Racing Hall of Fame. His descendants, the New Zealand bred horses, Phar Lap and Tulloch (the first horse to win more than £100,000 in Australia) also became champions of the Australian turf. Bernborough, Kingston Town, Heroic and Makybe Diva (bred in England) were other champions that have been inducted into the Australian Racing Hall of Fame. On 31 March 2011 Black Caviar was rated the best Thoroughbred racehorse in the world by Timeform (with a 135 rating) for the period of 1 October 2010 to 27 March 2011.

Australian Thoroughbred breeding has long been involved in the importation of horses, especially from Europe and later the United States. Initially the British importations were identified on records with (imp) or an asterisk (*) added as a suffix to indicate that they were not locally bred. With the advent of importations from other countries and the use of shuttle stallions that stand at stud in Australia during the northern hemisphere's winter, these suffixes were replaced by an abbreviated country suffix. These took the format of, e.g., (USA), (GB), (IRE) and (FR) etc.

Australian-bred stallions exported to America have proved very successful at stud there. Some of these exported horses include: Bernborough, Shannon, Sailor's Guide, Noholme, Tobin Bronze and Royal Gem. Throughout its history, horseracing has become part of the Australian culture and has developed a rich and colourful language.

Internet information

In 2013 the Coalition for the Protection of Horses posted a section on its Internet site titled '18,000 horses killed every year?'

The piece investigates the number of horses put down and often, apparently slaughtered, every year. The full text of this document can be found at <http://www.horseracingkills.com/features/18000-horses-killed-every-year/>

On October 29, 2014, The Conversation published an opinion piece by Paul McGreevy, Professor of Animal Behaviour and Animal Welfare Science at University of Sydney, titled 'Whips hurt horses – if my leg's anything to go by'. The piece argues that despite limiting regulations and padding whips still inflict pain on horses. The full text of this comment can be found at <http://theconversation.com/whips-hurt-horses-if-my-legs-anything-to-go-by-33470>

On October 30, 2014, the Guardian published an analysis by Jonathan Horn titled 'Has horse racing lost its way in a changing Australia?' The article looks at trends around the world and suggests Australian horse-racing may be about to experience a decline.

The full text of this article can be accessed at <http://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2014/oct/31/has-horse-racing-lost-its-way-in-a-changing-australia>

On November 4, 2014, Crikey published an opinion piece by Bernard Keane titled 'The official, Pythonesque response to Melbourne Cup deaths'. The piece quotes and is critical of the official response to two horse deaths after the 2014 Melbourne Cup.

It can be accessed at <http://www.crikey.com.au/2014/11/05/the-official-pythonesque-response-to-melbourne-cup-deaths/>

On November 5, 2014, racenet.com.au published a comment defending horse racing by Nic Ashman titled 'Vets defend Australian racing's horse welfare practices'

The full text can be found at <http://www.racenet.com.au/news/105831/Vets-defend-Australian-racing%27s-horse-welfare-practices>

On November 6, 2014, The Conversation ran a comment by Chris Whitton, the Head of the Equine Centre, Associate Professor of Equine Medicine and Surgery at University of Melbourne. The piece is titled 'Sudden deaths are rare in racing despite the Melbourne Cup tragedy'. The piece looks at the number of horse deaths associated with horse racing and the probable causes.

The full text can be accessed at <http://theconversation.com/sudden-deaths-are-rare-in-racing-despite-the-melbourne-cup-tragedy-33789>

On November 8, 2014, The Dubbo Photo News published an opinion piece by Hugh Beveridge titled 'Hold your horses on knee-jerk calls for bans'. The piece argues that calls for banning horse racing are extreme and unnecessary.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.dubbophotonews.com.au/index.php/dpn/categories/opinion-analysis/item/3656-hold-your-horses-on-knee-jerk-calls-for-bans>

On November 10, 2014, The Cairns Post ran an opinion piece by Rhys O'Neill titled 'Racing ban after Melbourne Cup deaths just not horse sense'

The comment argues that horses are raced with a mixture of care and genuine affection. The full text of the article can be found at <http://www.cairnspost.com.au/news/opinion/racing-ban-after-melbourne-cup-deaths-just-not-horse-sense/story-fnjpuw13-1227118231202>

Animals Australia has a video on its Internet site titled 'horse racing kills'. The video looks at the number and causes of horse deaths associated with racing. It can be found at <http://www.animalsaustralia.org/media/videos.php?vid=horseracing>

On November 17, 2014, The Conversation ran an opinion piece by Peta Hitchens a researcher, Animal Welfare & Epidemiology at Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences titled 'We need to prevent further jockey deaths in horse racing'

The piece looks at a number of measures that might be employed to reduce the number of racing-related deaths among jockeys.

The full text can be accessed at <http://theconversation.com/we-need-to-prevent-further-jockey-deaths-in-horse-racing-34003>

Arguments in favour of banning horse racing

1. Fatal injuries to horses occur on the track

Racing poses a significant risk of horse fatalities. The Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses (CPR) claims that in the last twelve months in Australia, 125 horses have been killed on Australian race tracks. Horses are large and powerful animals with a sensitive and explosive flight response to perceived danger which puts them by nature at risk of injury and even death at any time whether they are racing or left alone in a paddock. In addition it is argued that racing is an inherently stressful activity for horses and thus one where they are at risk of death.

Commonly identified causes of sudden deaths include bleeding into the lungs – Exercise Induced Pulmonary Haemorrhage (EIPH) – and heart failure. The exertion of the races leads a large proportion of horses to bleed into their lungs and windpipe. A study carried out by the University of Melbourne found that 50% of race horses had blood in the windpipe, and 90% had blood deeper in the lungs.

The rate of sudden deaths on Victorian Thoroughbred racetracks over the past ten years is 0.06 per 1,000 flat race starts. This equates to one to two sudden deaths per year in Victoria.

The rate of limb injuries in flat racing resulting in euthanasia on Victorian race tracks over the same period is 0.4 per 1,000 starts.

In an article published in *The Conversation* on November 5, 2014, Chris Whitton, head of the Equine Centre and Associate Professor of Equine Medicine and Surgery at University of Melbourne has stated, 'Many limb injuries in racehorses can heal with time or be repaired with surgery but recovery depends on the severity of the injury. Complex fractures, where stability of the limb is lost, may not be repairable because horses need to be able to bear full weight on all four limbs immediately following surgery and this can be difficult or impossible to achieve.'

2. Horse racing is cruel to horses

It has been claimed that even where the results are not the immediate death of the animal, horse racing is cruel to horses.

The exertion that is demanded of race horses often results in bleeding into the lungs. At its worst this can cause death, but even when less severe it indicates that the animal has been put under serious and disabling physical stress.

Animals Australia has noted that racehorses are fed a high concentrate diet (grains) during training, rather than extended grazing, which often leads to horses getting gastric ulcers. A study of racehorses at Randwick found that 89% had stomach ulcers, and many of the horses had deep, bleeding ulcers within 8 weeks of the commencement of their training.

Ward Young, the president of the Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses (CPR), has stated, 'Add in the use of the whip and the fact that a horse can be beaten an unlimited amount of times toward the end of a race, and then the glamour of racing doesn't seem like what it's advertised by the racing industry around Spring Carnival.'

In an article published in *The Conversation* on October 29, 2014, Paul McGreevy, Professor of Animal Behaviour and Animal Welfare Science at the University of Sydney, stated 'My analysis of high-speed videography shows that the padding [on whips] fails to protect horses in 64% of strikes. It also shows that 70% of whip strikes are delivered "backhand", so are not counted under rules limiting the number of strikes.'

It has also been claimed that handicapping horses is inherently cruel as it puts their cardiac and respiratory systems under greater strain. In a comment published in *Crikey* on November 4, 2014, Ken Lambert stated, 'The idea of handicapping is peculiarly Oz...lead in the saddlebags of the better performer to bring it back to the field, rather than matching performers on a WFA basis. In the case of the unfortunate Japanese horse, loading on top weight and running it two miles has killed it.'

Animals Australia also claims that many horses are raced prematurely as two year olds before they are physically able to sustain the strain. They also claim that being stalled individually means that many animals develop damaging nervous habits. Former police horse trainer, Scott Brodie, the retraining manager at the Racing NSW-backed NSW Thoroughbred Rehabilitation Trust, has claimed that all horses suffer from separation anxiety. 'They are herd animals.'

3. Horse racing discards many animals that are then killed

It has been claimed many more horses die as a result of horse racing than those killed or injured on the track.

RSPCA Victoria President, Dr Hugh Wirth, has noted that the Australian race horse industry currently breeds some 15,000 potential racehorses a year. Animals Australia claims the figure is higher at 18,000 per year. This is many more than the industry requires and many more than are likely to be successful.

Dr Wirth has stated, 'We are breeding lots and lots and lots of horses. Some of them fall by the wayside for things that should never happen and that causes wastage.'

Some of these horses that are either unsuccessful or surplus to requirements are rehomed; however, some are sold to knackeries, usually for pet food. Auctioneer John Moyle estimated in 2012, that some 20% of the horses he sold were bought for slaughter.

The Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses(CPR) has claimed that some 13,000 horses are put down annually, most at knackeries.

Federal and state authorities do not give out regular information on how many horses are ordinarily slaughtered for human and animal consumption across the country.

A federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry webpage, which was removed in late November, 2012, put the number at between 30,000 and 40,000 a year. However, a United Nations Food

and Agriculture Organisation estimate suggests the figure was as high as 94,000 in 2011 alone. Critics state that many thousands of these slaughtered animals are rejects from the racing industry.

Young from CPR has stated, 'The racing industry needs to realise by breeding these animals and by profiting from them while they're racing, they owe a responsibility to that animal to look after it for its entire life, not just its life while racing.'

We believe that a superannuation fund, if you like, needs to be established, so part of the prize money that a horse earns and other horses earn is contributed to ensuring that horse doesn't go to slaughter when it can no longer earn money.'

CPR wants a mandatory retirement plan for former racehorses and has put a proposal to the Australian Racing Board to spend one per cent of its funds on such a plan. The proposal has been rejected.

4. Horse racing is hazardous for jockeys

It is claimed that horse racing is dangerous for jockeys as well as for the horses. In October two female jockeys died as a result of injuries sustained on the track. Caitlin Forrest who died in hospital after a four-horse fall at Murray Bridge, in South Australia; while, a day later Carly-Mae Pye's life support was turned off after falling during a jump out at Callaghan Park in Queensland.

It has been estimated that in Australia there is about one fall for every 240 race rides, and one-third of those falls result in a substantive injury. The sport is considered to be one of the more dangerous occupations, stabilising at about 1.4 deaths per year nationally.

It has also been argued that risks to horses and risks to jockeys are related, in that where a horse falters, falls or breaks down the jockey is then very likely to be injured.

A recent study funded by the California Horse Racing Board identified catastrophic injury or sudden death of the horse as the most common reason for a jockey fall in Thoroughbred (29%) and Quarter Horse (44%) racing. About two-thirds of such falls result in injury of the jockey, and this proportion is significantly more than for jockey falls caused by other reasons.

It has also been claimed that the weight-control diets, saunas, enemas and other measures that jockeys use to reduce their weight have adverse health effects.

A 2010 study of jockeys conducted at the School of Health and Human Performance at Dublin City University concluded that the 'chronically weight restricted lifestyle' of riders 'may convey both long and short-term health risks to jockeys' and represented "a major health and safety concern to the racing industry.'

5. The racing industry is primarily interested in profit

Critics claim that the primary purpose of the racing industry is to make money for those involved and that the horses are essentially a means to that end.

Bernard Keane, writing in Crikey on November 5, 2014, stated, 'One suspects the racing industry loves horses in the same way the car racing industry loves motor vehicles?—?as splendid assets that can, with the right attention and control, make lots of money, but which are easily replaced if destroyed.'

The Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses (CPR) argues that the number of horses that are routinely slaughtered in Australia because they are not successful demonstrates that the industry is primarily concerned with profits. The CPR has stated, 'It is a well known and accepted fact that failed and injured racehorses who no longer have the potential to return a profit have very little commercial value, and therefore are mostly discarded.'

Research conducted by CPR at Echuca Saleyards and Pakenham Saleyards indicates that between 75% and 85% of all racehorses (Thoroughbreds and Standardbreds) are bought by known kill buyers.

Ex-racehorses are also extremely cheap to purchase which means they can also be cheaply replaced. It is not uncommon for ex-racehorses to return to the saleyard only to be eventually bought by a kill buyer.

Black Caviar's trainer Peter Moody, who has claimed he is 'an avid horse lover', has subsequently admitted, 'I do have a soft spot for some horses. But it is business and I can't afford to get too attached.'

Arguments against banning horse racing

1. Very few horses die as a result of horse racing

It has been claimed that the horse fatalities that occur due to racing are very few and that the sport does not place animals at an unacceptable risk.

Racing Victoria's chief veterinarian, Brian Stewart, has stated, 'It is undeniable that we have fatalities in

racing. They're very low, they're not common.'

In an opinion piece published on news.com.au on November 5, 2014, it was stated, 'There are some 30,000 thoroughbred racehorses in work, and 20,000 races in any given year to make the billion dollar machine tick over. That means just 0.4 per cent of horses die each year. Another way of looking at that is that one horse dies every 160 races.'

Similarly low figures have been given by Chris Whitton, the head of the Equine Centre and Associate Professor of Equine Medicine and Surgery at the University of Melbourne. In an article published in The Conversation on November 6, 2014, Dr Whitton stated, 'Because of careful data collection we know that the rate of sudden deaths on Victorian Thoroughbred racetracks over the past ten years is 0.06 per 1,000 flat race starts. This equates to one to two sudden deaths per year in Victoria.'

The rate of limb injuries in flat racing resulting in euthanasia on Victorian race tracks over the same period is 0.4 per 1,000 starts.'

Dr Whitton has explained what causes such fatalities. 'These are big animals, they are very powerful animals, they have a heightened flight response to stimuli. Things can go wrong very easily, very rapidly at any time.'

There is inherent risk in racing but there is inherent risk in having a horse full stop. You cannot avoid that with horses, it is just the nature of the animal. In modern society we have this unrealistic view that there is no risk in anything we do.'

Referring specifically to the deaths which occurred after the 2014 Melbourne Cup, defenders of the race have argued that both were unusual accidents which it would have been difficult to predict or prevent.

In an opinion piece published in The Geelong Advertiser on November 6, 2014, Ryan Reynolds stated, 'The deaths of both horses are nothing more than freakish events that could not be stopped or predicted — just like a horse on a farm dying from a snake bite, or a brumby in the wild dying of dehydration.'

2. There are measures in place to reduce risk and distress to horses

It is argued that not only is the risk of horses dying as a result of horse racing low, there are measures constantly being put in place and overseen to ensure that hazards and distress to the horses are kept to a minimum.

The chief executive of Racing Victoria, Bernard Saundry has stated, 'The inference that horse racing kills its equine athletes is misleading and very disappointing for the many people within our industry who have spent the best part of a lifetime caring for horses.'

The average fatality rate in Victorian thoroughbred racing is the lowest in world racing and we are working hard to reduce it even further through stricter medication controls, significant investments in improving tracks and training facilities and the funding of major research studies.'

Similarly, Racing and Waging Western Australia (RWWA) states on its Internet site, 'The Australian racing industry is committed to the welfare of the Australian racehorse.'

The Australian Rules of Racing contain provisions [to ensure this].

As an example of the provisions of the Australian Rules of Racing, RWWA states, 'The housing, feeding and training of racehorses should be consistent with good horsemanship and must not compromise their welfare. Any practices whether in stables, training or racing which are inconsistent with contemporary standards of husbandry should not be tolerated.'

With particular reference to one of the horse deaths at the 2014 Melbourne Cup, Victorian racing officials have introduced measures to prevent a recurrence of the post-race incident which led to the injury and subsequent death of Araldo.

A meeting between stewards and the Victorian Jockeys Association resolved to restrict the size of flags that can be brought to a racecourse. Also, for the remaining Group One races of the Spring Carnival, horses will come back into the mounting yard through the clock tower gate to avoid dangerous congestion.

3. There would be far fewer horses without horse racing

It has been claimed that those who see breeders, owners, trainers and jockeys as in some sense the enemies of the horses with whom they work have misread the situation.

Those who work in the racing industry generally love the animals with which they deal. The animals that they tend, ride and train would not even be in existence without the racing industry.

In an editorial published on November 5, 2014, it was stated, 'What racing brings in the love of the sport,

improved bloodlines, in providing a living for thousands of people is incalculable. Included in this are the lives of horses who would not otherwise be born. They are not bred to be sacrificed. They race to win and retire.'

It has been claimed that rather than finishing at a knackery, many of those horses that retire from horse racing find homes within the community in a variety of other capacities.

In 2002-3, Professor Paul McGreevy, Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Sydney, studied the fate of retired racehorses in Australia and found that of 1,333 horses that left a racing stable, 63% stayed in the industry with 243 (18%) going to stud, 229 (17%) moving to another trainer, 150 (11%) spelling, and 221 (17%) sold at auction. Of the 490 horses that left racing, 324 went to other careers, with a small portion being unspecified, dead or at a knackery.

A more recent study commissioned in 2013 from consultant Renee Geelen by the Australian Racing Board produced similar results. Of those horses that had completed their racing career, 45 per cent were at stud, 31 per cent were sold or gifted as pleasure horses, 14 per cent were returned to the owner and 7 per cent died or were euthanised by a vet. (It is claimed only .4 per cent were sent to the knackery.)

Statistics such as these fuel claims that the 15,000 odd Thoroughbred horses born annually replace those who are retired and that these animals then find places within the larger horse-owning community.

Supporters of the horse racing industry claim that without it there would simply be far fewer horses in existence in Australia.

(It should be noted that neither the McGreevy nor Geelen surveys was comprehensive as each was based on limited and not necessarily representative samples.)

4. The horse racing industry is economically important

On October 1, 2014, The People and Environment Blog invited consultant Renee Geelen to comment on various aspects of the horse racing industry. In 2013 Geelen was commissioned by the Australian Racing Board to undertake a survey of retired horses.

Geelen stated, 'The Australian racing industry is the second largest in the world (after the USA) with more than \$520million in prize money on offer every year. Over 70,000 people own shares in more than 32,000 racehorses and the range of ownership is huge. Some syndicates have more than 100 people involved in one horse, while bigger owners have more than 500 horses in work...

A racehorse costs about \$30,000 a year to keep in training, and that money employs the strappers, trainers, riders, vets, farriers, feed companies and many others that look after the horse's every need.'

On its Internet site, the Australian Quarter Horse Racing Development Pty Ld (AQHRD) has stated, 'The contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the horse industry is estimated at over \$6.3 billion, and if the value of volunteer labour is also included this pushes the contribution of the industry to almost \$8 billion

Animal-related expenditures contribute a little under half of the overall contribution to GDP, at \$3.1 billion — this expenditure is divided fairly evenly between animal husbandry, feed, stabling and accommodation and training

Business-related expenditures contribute \$2.4 billion — well over half is labour expenditure.'

AQHRD has also noted, 'Wagering on horse racing alone contributes almost \$1 billion to state government revenue; and based on an average tax rate of 25 per cent income taxes on labour would contribute \$100 million in federal government revenue.'

Referring specifically to the Melbourne Cup and the Spring Racing Carnival, University of New South Wales economist Tim Harcourt has stated, 'There's a lot of ... business that comes out of the Melbourne Cup; they reckon about \$1.7 billion comes from networking events.'

5. Horse racing is very popular and culturally significant in Australia

It has been noted that horse racing gives a great deal of enjoyment to many Australians and that it has been an important aspect of the Australian cultural and social scene for over two hundred years.

In 2010, on the bicentenary of horse racing in Australia, Racing New South Wales stated, 'Every nation has its own distinctive cultural identity and the literature, films and art of that country, both draw from and shape that identity.

In Australia's case, the highs and lows of racing, the courage and beauty of the thoroughbred, and the eclectic cast of personalities who consort at the racetrack are a constant refrain in our national story.'

Horsereading.com.au includes on its Internet site the following overview of the importance of horse racing in Australia, 'The Australian horse racing calendar consists of 19,376 horse races that are held across 2,694 race meetings each year... The country has a staggering 194,736 race starters, made up of 31,776 individual runners, competing on Australia's 367 racecourses each year.

Australia's most coveted race is the annual Melbourne Cup, which takes place on the first Tuesday of November each year and is worth an incredible \$6 million. Every year this historic event, which began in 1861, attracts crowds in excess of 100,000 people. 2003's Melbourne Cup holds the record for the highest number of attendees, with 122,736 people gathering to watch Makybe Diva win her first of three consecutive Melbourne Cup titles.'

Further implications

It seems highly unlikely that calls to ban horse racing in Australia will be successful. The sport is economically and socially important and remains popular with racegoers and punters. Calls to have racing generally banned are very recent and seem to have been in large part triggered by high profile horse deaths at two consecutive Melbourne Cups. There has, however, been a concerted campaign to have jumps racing abolished over many years. This form of racing is only conducted in Victoria and South Australia and attracts lesser crowds. It has a significantly higher fatality and injury rate. It seems likely that if any racing-related sport is to be immanently banned it will be this. Though in the aftermath of the current controversy that may be less likely as flat racing compares well to jumps racing from a safety point of view and is therefore easier to defend. There may also be concern within the industry that were jumps racing to be banned, then animal liberationists would be motivated and free to direct their full attention toward flats racing.

Despite claims that the two horse deaths after the Melbourne Cup were 'freakish', it is likely that there will be even greater efforts to ensure that risks are minimized in subsequent years. Such highly publicised fatalities are very unfortunate for the industry, particularly from a public relations viewpoint. Within a day of Araldo's death, Victorian race officials had moved to restrict the size of the flags that can be brought onto the track.

The future of the industry appears to lie with ever more sophisticated measures to gauge the wellbeing of a horse prior to racing.

The further question of what happens to the thousands of horses annually retired from the industry remains a vexed one. In the absence of secure figures on the number of horses that end their lives at knackeries it is difficult to speak confidently of the dimensions of the problem. There is a livestock identification scheme operating in Australia which enables the full tracking of tagged animals up to their slaughter. It has been argued that a similar program should be put in place for horses, especially those previously used for racing, so that their ultimate fates can be determined with greater certainty. It might also be in the industry's best interests to respond positively to the call from the Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses for a retirement fund to be established to secure the futures of unwanted racehorses.

Internationally horse racing is in decline.

Part of the problem for horseracing is the proliferation of other forms of gambling and the ease with which modern technology allows bets to be placed on almost anything. The increasing urbanisation of the United States and Australia, which has reduced followers immediate contact with and knowledge of horses, is said to be likely to cause a further decline. Equally, the urbanisation of the Australian population is likely to make people more sensitive to horse deaths. The public perception of the sport is likely to have been tarnished by the recent high profile fatalities. Questions about jockey welfare and remuneration also have to be addressed. Jockeys are not the well-paid superstars that most prominent sports men and women are and yet the risks they individually face are said to be greater than those confronted by professional boxers.

Newspaper items used in the compilation of this issue outline

The Age: October 29, 2014, page 49, comment by Andrew Lemon, 'Cruelty issue aside, much to be said for horse racing'.

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/cruelty-issue-aside-much-to-be-said-for-horse-racing-20141028-11cujf.html>

Herald-Sun: November 7, 2014, page 23, comment by Tom Elliott, 'Dead horses are a sad fact of life'.

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/dont-get-carried-away-by-dead-horses/story-fni0ffsx-1227116202990?nk=dff51978d61cc0303d1846c1232a2675>

Herald-Sun: November 6, 2014, page 30, editorial, 'For the love of racehorses'.

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/for-the-love-of-racehorses/story-fni0ffsx-1227113883950>

The Age: November 6, 2014, page 8, comment by Patrick Bartley, 'Horses suffer, but so do the connections'.

<http://www.theage.com.au/sport/horseracing/melbourne-cup-2014-when-horses-suffer-so-do-the-connections-20141105-11h5f9.html>

The Age: November 2, 2014, page 35, comment by Kevin Summers, 'Spare a thought for the horses that don't win'.

<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/spare-a-thought-for-the-horses-that-dont-win-20141030-11ejgd.html>

Herald-Sun: November 10, 2014, page 24, comment (ref to Melbourne Cup deaths) by Rita Panahi, 'Race critics should get off their high horses'.

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/race-critics-should-get-off-their-high-horses/story-fni0fhh1-1227117462900>