

REPORT TO ACCOMPANY THE CODE OF WELFARE: RODEOS

Introduction

1. The Animal Welfare (Rodeos) Code of Welfare 2003 has been reviewed by the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC), pursuant to the Animal Welfare Act 1999 (the Act). This report accompanies the Code of Welfare: Rodeos (the code) recommended by NAWAC to the Minister, as required by section 74 of the Act.

The report notes:

- the reasons for NAWAC's recommendations;
- the nature of any significant differences of opinion about the code, or any provision of it, that have been shown by the submissions; and
- the nature of any significant differences of opinion about the code, or any provision of it, that have occurred within NAWAC.

In providing this report, NAWAC notes that it fully considered all submissions it received and reviewed relevant scientific literature, and that there was debate among NAWAC members on many points. This report is not required to, and does not attempt to, show every detail of the analysis and discussions that took place.

2. The code is the outcome of NAWAC's review of the current code according to section 78(1) of the Act, which requires codes of welfare to be reviewed at intervals of not more than 10 years.
3. There are a number of minimum standards where the animal welfare implications are self-evident and require no explanation for their inclusion. NAWAC has decided that it will not provide comment on these minimum standards or recommended best practices, but will provide explanations on minimum standards which it believes are complex or controversial or on which it received submissions with significant differences of opinion. Minimum standards as drafted may have been amended for a number of reasons, including to make them legally robust, to ensure a more effective coverage of the issue, or to change from a recommended best practice to a minimum standard (or vice versa).
4. It should be noted that the Act does not define "significant differences". While there were a variety of opinions expressed in the submissions, NAWAC did not consider that all differences necessarily represented significant differences of opinion. NAWAC has taken the view that significant differences are either where there are large numbers of submissions which are contrary to a minimum standard in the Code, or where a submission puts forward a justification based on scientific evidence or good practice for a different or alternative minimum standard. NAWAC notes that some individuals or organisations may interpret "significant differences" in a way that varies from the NAWAC view.

5. The Code applies to all persons responsible for the welfare of all animals used in rodeos, and includes animals used in training and animals used in rodeo schools.

Why do we need a code of welfare for rodeos?

6. The majority of rodeos are run under the auspices of the New Zealand Rodeo Cowboys Association (NZRCA) which was formed 60 years ago and oversees 35 rodeos annually. It has a membership of approximately 800. As well as overseeing rodeos, the Association also runs training schools to teach contestants (cowboys) the skills required to compete in rodeos. A small, undetermined number of steer riding events are run at country shows but it is believed that this is very much of a minor nature. Bull Riding New Zealand Inc also runs bull-riding competitions. All such activities would be subject to this code.
7. The Act specifies that owners and persons in charge of animals (including animals used in rodeos) must meet the needs of animals in their care. It does not specify how to meet these needs. Nor does it describe how those responsible for ensuring compliance with the Act might determine whether or not these needs have been met. Additionally, the Act functions to avoid unnecessary or unreasonable pain or distress being caused to animals but does not list the areas or practices in which this might be a concern and the ways in which it might be avoided. This is the function of the codes of welfare.
8. It is essential that owners and persons in charge of animals used in rodeos know what the needs of the animals in their care are, and how these needs can be met, in order that they can act lawfully and so that the welfare needs of their animals are met. This code of welfare for animals used in rodeos fulfils this requirement and constitutes the Government's statement of policy in this regard. It sets out the Government's expectations regarding appropriate treatment of animals used in rodeos and identifies what is considered to be inappropriate treatment of these animals. It is expected that persons responsible for the welfare of animals used in rodeos will use this code as guide to best practice and that those required to ensure compliance with the Act will use it to assist in identifying unacceptable practices.
9. Key needs are described in the areas of stockmanship; food and water; selecting and handling animals; the arena; gear; saddle and bareback bronc riding; bull and steer riding; rope and tie; team roping; steer wrestling; calf riding; barrel racing; health, injury and disease; and emergency humane destruction.

Code preparation and public submissions

10. The Act requires NAWAC to review the existing rodeos code of welfare within ten years of issue. In addition, as required by the Act, representatives (Bull Riding New Zealand Inc, the New Zealand Rodeo Cowboys Association, New Zealand Veterinary Association and the Royal Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals) of those likely to be affected by the code were consulted during the review and before public notification.

11. NAWAC wishes to point out that it decided not to make any final decisions on the code until it had received submissions. The code is required to be publicly consulted, and for NAWAC to come to any conclusion prior to this consultation would have meant that NAWAC was not following due process by acting in a predetermined manner.
12. The code was publicly notified on 12 October 2012 by notices in the major newspapers in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin. In addition, it was sent to specific interested groups. The closing date for submissions was 26 November 2012.
13. A total of 30 full submissions were received during the public consultation period. In addition 368 Save Animals from Exploitation (SAFE) related emails were received with the same or similar message and 8 Canterbury Rodeo Supporter letters were received. All submissions were read in their entirety and taken into account. A summary of the submissions received on the draft code was prepared and NAWAC's responses to the submissions were noted.
14. All submissions were carefully considered by a subcommittee of three members appointed by NAWAC to review the code. The subcommittee reviewed the code in detail and all the submissions received on it. The subcommittee met for one full day in March 2013. Throughout the period the code was under review, subcommittee members worked in collaboration by email, and in consultation with MPI Animal Welfare staff.
15. Several members of NAWAC, including all those on the subcommittee, also visited rodeo events and consulted with the industry on some parts of the rodeos code. The subcommittee reported the code back to NAWAC on 15 May 2013 and 14 August 2013 for final consideration and approval for recommendation to the Minister. The code was subsequently peer reviewed by Dr Cia Johnson, an expert in animal welfare science and with specific rodeo experience, who is a staff member of the American Veterinary Medical Association's Animal Welfare Division.

Key Issues

16. The following key issues represent the significant concerns raised from the public consultation on the draft code.
 - Societal views on the use of animals in rodeos
 - Is the use of animals in rodeos ethical?*
 - How many animals are injured in rodeos?*
 - What requirements do other countries have for rodeo events?*
 - Stockmanship
 - How is animal welfare monitored and assessed at rodeos?*
 - Selecting and accepting animals for rodeo

Should only contract animals be used for rodeos?

- Gear

Is the use of spurs on bucking animals necessary?

- Specific Events

How can calf welfare be protected in the rope and tie event?

How do the children's events impact the animals?

- Health, injury and disease

Should fireworks be used in rodeo events?

17. Societal views on use of animals in rodeos

(a) *Is the use of animals in rodeos ethical?*

Many of the issues raised in submissions were similar to those raised during the consultation of the Animal Welfare (Rodeos) Code of Welfare 2003. Opposing submissions called for either the banning of rodeos or individual rodeo events, and objected to the use of animals in rodeos. The contention was that rodeos are:

- not relevant to New Zealand culture or society,
- incompatible with New Zealand's clean green image and reputation as a leader in animal welfare,
- not traditional,
- not necessary,
- provide little economic value to New Zealand.

Discussion was held on these issues and NAWAC recognises that there are arguments for and against each one, none of which could be resolved unequivocally. A number of submitters called for the banning of rodeos, phasing out of rodeos or at least banning individual events. While NAWAC recognises that rodeo events have a limited relevance to farming practices in New Zealand, the skills that are a necessary part of competing in rodeos may have application to those rural people involved in extensive farming situations such as large sheep and cattle stations. Rodeo is one of many competitive activities involving animals that are significant to rural communities and rural cohesion, such as A & P shows, racing, polo, shearing competitions, hunting, pony club, eventing and dog trials. Although rodeos, on the whole, tend to attract a rural audience, there is also an urban following, and many small towns where rodeos are mainly held derive a significant income from holding an annual rodeo.

Opposing submissions also stated that animals in rodeos were goaded or coerced into participating and hence, the practice was contrary to the Animal Welfare Act as the Act requires that animals be physically handled in a manner that does not cause them unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress. Many of the submissions also raised the now recognised associated link between animal abuse and abuse of children and other members of society and linked that to the performance of rodeos teaching people disrespect for animals and people. There were also

concerns noted about children's events and submissions stated that these events are sending the wrong messages about the treatment of animals to children, thus encouraging them to treat animals with disrespect as they grow older.

Submissions opposing rodeos focused on the calf roping as the event that caused the animals the most harm, stress and injury. However, concerns were also noted in the submissions about the other events that are conducted at a rodeo. Most of the submissions also noted that the code is necessary as rodeos continue to be held, but questioned the future of this sport in New Zealand given the above concerns. Questions were also raised about the self regulation of this industry and the enforcement of the standards set in the code.

NAWAC noted the care taken to avoid animal abuse and to avoid infliction of pain and distress by long established rules and procedures. NAWAC recognises that certain events may have more potential to cause pain and suffering, such as the roping of calves in the rope and tie event, so the committee has therefore recommended a number of minimum standards that regulate such activities and which aim to reduce or prevent the risk of pain and suffering occurring. These include minimum weights, minimum ages and the maximum number of times an animal can be used in rodeo events. There are also industry enforced rules that mean contestants not meeting the requirements of industry rules are disqualified from the competition.

NAWAC does continue to have reservations about the performance of rodeos, and in particular, the events using younger animals. The committee is aware that rodeo events using calves have been banned in a number of countries due to the perceived physical and psychological stresses that they place on the animals. At the present time NAWAC believes that given the application of the minimum standards and recommended best practices as included in this code, that there are sufficient safeguards in place to protect animals used in rodeos. Nevertheless, NAWAC wishes to encourage those involved to give ongoing careful consideration to these matters.

It should also be noted that the general principles of the use of animals in entertainment, including rodeo events, and the associated welfare issues will be considered by NAWAC in future and this may result in changes and further restrictions to ensure that such activities remain ethically acceptable to New Zealanders.

(b) *How many animals are injured in rodeos?*

Reports from the USA indicate that there are few injuries associated with the modern rodeo. For example, one minor injury out of 915 calf roping runs (August-September 1994), 15 injuries from 27,767 animal runs at 19 rodeos (1998-1999) and 15 injuries from 26,584 animal runs at 21 rodeos (1998-2000) (Furman, 2001).

Recent surveys reflect a similar level of injuries. A survey by veterinarians independently contracted to be present at Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association events in the USA in 2009 recorded 28 injuries in 75,472 rodeo

exposures, giving an injury rate of 0.00037%. A survey of Australian Professional Rodeo Association rodeos held in Victoria from 2005 to 2012 found an overall injury rate of just 0.072 %, that is less than one injury for every 1405 times an animal is used in competition. Based on severity of injury, that is where veterinary attention was needed, the injury frequency is 0.036 %, or one injury in every 2810 times an animal is used, including transport, yarding and in competition.

NAWAC therefore considers that there is not a high risk of injury to rodeo animals. However, the committee considers that every effort should be made to minimise the risk of injury to these animals. As rodeos are a form of entertainment there is an ethical obligation on society to ensure that the welfare of these animals is paramount. For this reason, NAWAC considers that the review of the code of welfare for rodeos is important to ensure that standards are in place to maintain the welfare of rodeo animals.

(c) *What requirements do other countries have for rodeo events?*

Worldwide, many countries have different legislation and requirements on rodeo events. In Australia, rodeo has now been banned in the ACT, with other states having differing restrictions on rodeo events. Some local and state governments in North America have banned or restricted rodeos, certain rodeo events, or types of equipment. The restrictions on rodeo events also differ throughout Europe, with different European nations placing restrictions on certain practices. Rodeos have been banned in some countries, such as the UK and the Netherlands.

18. Stockmanship

(b) *How is animal welfare monitored and assessed at rodeos?*

A number of submissions noted that a veterinarian should be present at rodeos, have access to all areas holding animals, check the gear that will come into contact with the animals prior to competing to ensure that it will not cause pain or injury to the animals and have the last say on all animal welfare decisions. A number of submissions also noted that the industry plays a role in self regulating animal welfare standards at rodeos and questioned if this was appropriate method of ensuring that standards were maintained.

NAWAC is in agreement that a veterinarian should be present throughout the rodeo. As with other sporting activities involving animals such as horse racing and three-day eventing, where there is a greater risk of injury, a veterinarian needs to be present. While the veterinary reports collected over the past years indicate a very low number of injuries, NAWAC still believes that a veterinarian should be present to provide an independent professional opinion and as rodeos provide entertainment, there is a greater responsibility to ensure welfare support. In recognition of this, NAWAC has included a minimum standard that requires a veterinarian that is experienced in treating horses and cattle to be present at the rodeo at all times. NAWAC has also included a minimum standard in the code stating that a veterinarian must check all animals prior to the commencement of the rodeo.

NAWAC believes that the concept of an animal welfare officer and the officer's role in identifying issues such as injury, body condition score, or activities that could harm animals at the event, is a sound one. By identifying such a role, it highlights and reinforces that animals have to be treated appropriately and with due care. The animal welfare officer works in conjunction with the veterinarian and both need to agree that an animal is fit to compete before it is used in competition. If either the veterinarian or the animal welfare officer considers the animal unfit to compete, the animal is retracted. This is already an industry rule and is included as a minimum standard in this code.

It is the rodeo organiser's role to ensure that contestants are conversant with the code. In addition, both the organiser and the animal welfare officer(s) must be competent to assess the welfare of animals used in the rodeo. More than one animal welfare officer can be present at each rodeo, but a minimum standard has been added to reflect that there must be at least one animal welfare officer present at every rodeo.

19. Selecting and accepting animals for rodeo

(a) *Should only contract animals be used for rodeo?*

Contract animals are animals which have been exposed to the event in which they will be used or trained to the techniques that are used in rodeo and so have prior experience of a rodeo event. They can be stock that are hired from a stock contractor or they may be owned by the club. Recent studies using calves have shown that they do become accustomed to being roped and tied, and show less increase in cortisol after being used in events in three concurrent weeks (Comeaux, 2012).

As less stress is experienced by contract stock than non-contract stock when being used in rodeos, NAWAC would like to see the industry working towards the use of contract stock only in rodeos in future. NAWAC acknowledge that this would not be financially viable at the present time, and, if contract stock only were currently required to be used, some events would not be able to take place as more contract stock would be required than are available in New Zealand. However, a recommended best practice has also been added to the code to state that only contract animals should be used in rodeo events.

In light of the increased impact that rodeo activities have on non-contract cattle, NAWAC have included a minimum standard stating that on each day, contract cattle must not be used on more than 3 occasions and non-contract cattle on no more than 2 occasions (including practice for the event and the event itself). This is, in fact, current industry practice.

20. Gear

(a) *Is the use of spurs on bucking animals necessary?*

A number of submissions called for the use of spurs to be prohibited at rodeo events. Spurs used in rodeos can be of different types and the rowel, which presses against the bull's or horse's skin, may be either locked, or able to rotate to some

degree, or be able to rotate freely. The locked rowels have a harsher effect than the non-locked rowels as they do not move against the animal's flesh. The competitors use the spurs as another point of contact (with the seat and handhold) to remain on bucking animals, and removing the spurs would make it hard for the contestant to remain seated on the bull or horse.

NAWAC is satisfied that the spurs used on the animals in the bucking events are adequately dulled and rotate sufficiently that they will not cause the animals undue pain or distress. NAWAC has therefore added minimum standards stating that rowels that are able to be locked must not be used in any event, and that partially locked rowels must not be used in the saddle or bareback bronc riding events. The committee has also included an example indicator providing the minimum dimensions to which the rowels need to conform to ensure that they do not place unnecessary physical stress on the skin of the animals. These minimum rowel dimensions are, in fact, also the current industry standard.

21. Specific Events

(a) *How can calf welfare be protected in the rope and tie event?*

A number of submitters believed this event to be particularly stressful and that calves were at a high risk of being injured. There have been few published studies investigating the welfare of calves in the rope and tie event. The studies that have been performed have indicated no detrimental physiological damage sustained by the calves as a result of the event (Fisher 2003). In this study the calves used in the rope and tie event showed short term head shaking and sham chewing behaviour following the event, which was thought to be an attempt to clear arena dirt from their mouth, but sustained no behavioural signs indicating injury or distress, and no physical injury or physiological damage. The study concluded that the measurements used did not identify any significant compromise to the welfare of the calves (Fisher 2003). Other reports suggest a similar low level of injury in calf roping events (Wallace and McKnight 1987) which agree with the low levels represented in the statistics gathered by the NZRCA over several years. Veterinary records from NZRCA rodeo events show that the injury rate in calf roping and calf riding events was 4 injuries out of 2273 calves (over 4 years) (MAF 2003). These figures apply to calves used in both events and calves used for roping can be used more than once, so actual injuries against actual number of times used will be less than these figures.

NAWAC asked for comment on calf roping during public consultation. In light of the submissions on this rodeo event, there was significant debate within NAWAC, with some members stating preferences that this event be discontinued. However, in the absence of evidence that this event causes the calves significant pain and distress, not all committee members agreed that this event should be discontinued.

There was also debate about the weight, and hence maturity, of the calves used in the rope and tie event. Some submissions asked that the weight of the calves used in this event be increased, while other submissions stated that increasing the weight of the calves in this event would increase the amount of physical stress that

was placed on them. After much debate, specifically on the likely effects of the calf coming to an abrupt halt when successfully roped, NAWAC decided that to increase the weights of the calves would not necessarily decrease the impact that the event had on them. NAWAC therefore considered that the weight of the calves used in this event should remain at their present level.

NAWAC decided to introduce further requirements to this event to ensure that the welfare of the calf is upheld and the committee has added further minimum standards around this event. These include the requirement that calves must be handled using the minimum force and in a way that minimises pain and distress at all times during the event. NAWAC does however, wish to make it known that it is aware that a number of countries have now prohibited this event from an ethical viewpoint and as a result of welfare concerns for the calves. Should NAWAC consider that this event, at some point in the future, is ethically unacceptable to New Zealanders, then NAWAC may again consider the requirements placed around the performance of this event.

(b) *How do the children's events impact the animals?*

A number of submitters stated that allowing children to compete in rodeos does not teach them respect for animals and reinforces the notion that animals are inferior and to be exploited for entertainment. However, rodeos tend to be family affairs with often a number of family members participating in different events and children tend to become involved in rodeo and learn how to treat animals through older family members. The classes for the smaller children provides them with the opportunity to be involved in rodeo from an early age.

Children's events in rodeo include both calf riding and sheep riding or 'mutton busting'. The welfare of the animals in both of these events was discussed at length by NAWAC. One of the main areas of discussion was the weight of the calves used in the calf riding event and if the calves were of a size that could support the children without undue physical stress being placed on the animals.

After careful scrutiny, the calf riding event was considered by NAWAC to be using calves that were of a sufficient weight and maturity that they would not be subjected to unreasonable pain or distress in this event and that to increase the weight of the calf could significantly decrease the safety of the young competitors. However, it is important that the weight of the competitor is centred in an appropriate position on the back of the calf and so minimum standards have been added in the code to state that the rider's weight must be kept behind the shoulder of the calf at all times, and that the calf must not be ridden backwards. These minimum standards are intended to reduce the risk of putting a large amount of pressure on the forelegs of the calf during the event.

NAWAC considered however that the use of sheep at rodeo events had some inherent problems that could compromise the welfare of the animals. Sheep used at rodeos can be at an increased risk of developing problems as a result of overheating while being held for rodeo events because of their wool covering. In addition, the anatomy and biomechanical structure of sheep is different to that of

cattle and so riding of sheep by children is associated with an increased risk of placing too much pressure on the skeleton of the sheep, potentially causing it injury. For this reason, NAWAC considers that the potential to cause injury to the sheep is high in this event, and so has added a minimum standard stating that only horses and cattle are to be used in rodeo events, hence disallowing the use of sheep for this purpose.

Information has also been added to the code that children need to be supervised at all times around animals to ensure that the welfare of the animals is not compromised.

22. Health, injury and disease

(a) *Should fireworks be used in rodeo events?*

Fireworks and pyrotechnics have, in the past, been used at some rodeo events where they are used to add interest to the event. The loud noise resulting from fireworks is well established as a stressor in companion animals (Bolster 2012; Dale et al., 2010) and unexpected noise and movement will cause the fight or flight response in both horses and cattle (Lanier, 2000; Christensen, 2005).

NAWAC considers that the use of fireworks is not essential to the rodeo event and causes unnecessary stress to the animals. A minimum standard has been added to the code to state that fireworks, pyrotechnics and gas fired explosions of any type must not be used at rodeos.

The nature of any significant differences

- 23.** All significant differences of opinion about the code, or any of its provisions, have been set out above or in NAWAC's response to submissions.
- 24.** Significant differences of opinion about the code, or any of its provisions, were recorded within NAWAC. There was extensive discussion about the rope and tie event and NAWAC was divided about whether this event should be discontinued. However, as outlined above, in the absence of evidence that this event causes the calves significant pain and distress, NAWAC reached a majority decision on the recommendations set out in the draft code and in Section 21 above.

Dr John Hellström

Chair, National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee
5 September 2013

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