

Minimum Welfare Standards for Horses

This summary has been compiled from the Australian Horse Welfare Protocol. It is to be used as a quick reference guide when managing a temporary equine evacuation centre at a public equestrian facility. The full protocol, in conjunction with the relevant state legislation and advice from a subject matter expert must be referred to when clarification or further information is required.

It is acknowledged that disaster situations can heavily impact the ability of individuals and statutory authorities in fulfilling their animal welfare responsibilities. Therefore this document does not intend to be legally binding, but rather serve as a guiding document. However when these basic needs cannot be met and are causing undue suffering, consideration must be given to relocate, surrender or euthanize the animal.

OVERVIEW OF NEEDS

The basic needs of horses, irrespective of the husbandry system or horse activity, include:

- Access to food, water and shelter
- Freedom of movement to stand, stretch, turn around, walk forward, lie down and roll
- Regular exercise (if not kept in paddock conditions)
- Social contact with other horses
- Accommodation that neither harms nor causes undue strain or discomfort
- Protection from disease, and regular inspections to assess the need for attention to feet, teeth and parasite control
- Rapid identification and treatment of injury and disease

RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAINTAINING STANDARDS

The owner is ultimately responsible for the welfare of their animal and maintaining these standards.

In an evacuation centre, the ground committee of the public equestrian facility may enforce these and/or additional standards. Where these standards are not met due to the extenuating circumstances, they may be able to provide or direct the owner to other avenues of assistance. However they are also within their right to request that the animal is removed from the grounds or surrendered to the authorities.

When the animal has been surrendered to the local authorities, that authority become responsible for maintaining these or their relevant workplace standards.

SUMMARY OF MINIMUM STANDARDS

Supervision

Horses confined in stables and yards are to be inspected at least twice daily.

The person responsible for supervising the animal must be able to identify signs of ill health. They must also have access to a registered veterinary practitioner to diagnose and treat any serious illness/ injury or access to a person able to humanely destroy the horse to prevent further suffering.

Water

Horses must have free access to an adequate supply of good quality water. Water containers must be of a design that does not cause injury to the animal.

Water volume requirements vary widely depending on age, bodyweight, air temperature/humidity, work requirements, state of health and type of diet of the horse. The basic maintenance requirement is estimated to be approximately 52 ml per kg bodyweight per day.

Feed

Horses must be provided with a diet of sufficient quantity and quality to maintain their health and meet their physiological requirements. They must not be deprived of food more than 12hrs.

Exercise

Stabled or yarded horses must be exercised daily, except where the exercise may be detrimental to the health and welfare of the horse.

In an evacuation centre, leading in hand is likely to be the most practical form of exercise.

Yards & Shelter

Horses should be accommodated in individual yards, with the exception of mares and foals.

Yards and stables must have sufficient room to allow the horse to stand freely in the normal position with the head fully raised, walk forward and turn, lie down, roll, stretch and groom themselves without restrictions.

Stable size should be not less than 12m² with a height of 2.4m for an average sized horse.

Yards should be cleaned of waste products, dirty/stale food and water on a daily basis

Horses must have access to sufficient shade or shelter in relation to the weather conditions.

Rugging must be appropriate for the weather conditions and not result in heat stress to the animal.

Identification

When a public equestrian facility is opened as an evacuation centre, a record of all horses kept on the grounds and the details of their owner must be kept.

Where horses are kept at an unoccupied premises, the contact details of the person in charge of the animal should be clearly displayed or readily accessible.

Transport

Where possible, horses must be transported to and from the facility in accordance with the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy - Land Transport of Livestock (Horses).