

Introducing the New EWA Horse Welfare Officer Role

Retaining a social licence to operate for equestrian sports is a high priority if we are to have longevity and sustainability into the future. With recent press focus on other horse related sports being unfavourable, it is not inconceivable that the same lens may be soon focused on our sports as well. EWA and the EWA Horse Welfare Committee feels that it is imperative that we act now to demonstrate a clear focus on the wellbeing of all our equine partners at our sanctioned competitions and events.

The EWA Horse Welfare Committee has recommended the implementation of a new role to be filled and on the ground at all EWA competitions and events, The Horse Welfare Officer.

This role, it's responsibilities and purpose, is based around the job description and processes found in the Horse Wellbeing Toolkit, prepared by the AHIC. Download the document here:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d0c29095ac0ce0001b2c999/t/5d8c0a623e73ce4ee319a9ef/1569458800209/HOR0288_Horse_welfare_and_well-being_toolkit_WEB.pdf

The Horse Welfare Officer is a newly created role to be introduced voluntarily at all EWA sanctioned competitions and events starting in 2021.

The purpose of the role is to provide a highly visible presence onsite at all times that demonstrates to the competitors and spectators our focus on the importance of correct and appropriate horse welfare at EWA events. The visibility of the role, (through wearing a coloured high vis vest with Welfare Officer branding), will provide:

1. A deterrent to prevent a welfare breach occurring.
2. A point of contact should a member or spectator witness something of concern.

The Horse Welfare Officer is a volunteer role that can be performed by any adult after a short induction, (see attached documents). They should be seen as an assistant to the stewards, judges, TD's and OC's. Their position does not in any way supersede or replace the current chain of authority at a competition. They do not have the authority to

Equestrian Western Australia gratefully acknowledges the proud support from Major, Strategic and Corporate Partners.

reprimand competitors, disqualify riders, issue yellow cards or penalise competitors in any way. Their role is one of being a visible deterrent, assisting with recording of any complaints, and ensuring the correct process and communication lines are followed should a complaint wish to be made, be approachable as a point of contact for concerns to be raised.

It is important to understand that this role is an ancillary position, to assist the current governance structure already in place at a competition or event. Any complaint or incident report must still follow the standard EA complaints procedure, as outlined in EA/EWA Policies and Bylaws and the event rules.

<https://www.wa.equestrian.org.au/ewa/policies-bylaws>

For 2021, implementation of the role is voluntary for organising committees, but it is highly recommended by EWA. It is hoped after a trial period here in WA, the sports committees will take the role to their national committees for introduction into the national rules for each sport.

EWA will support any club or organising committee who wishes to introduce this role through providing of a high vis vest (to be retained by the club/ OC) with “Welfare Officer” on the back, and the documents attached to assist with induction of volunteers to the role, and resources for the Officer to have access to on the day.

EWA takes any welfare complaint seriously. It is the hope of the Horse Welfare Committee that simply having a dedicated Horse Welfare Officer onsite will be enough of a deterrent to prevent any welfare breaches from occurring, particularly in areas away from the eyes of stewards or judges who will be busy fulfilling their roles. If an incident should occur, having the Officer onsite to assist with guiding the person making the complaint through the correct procedure and assisting with recording an accurate report will see these incidents being dealt with appropriately and according to the rules.

https://www.equestrian.org.au/sites/default/files/Equestrian_Australia_Member_Protection_Policy_updated23112017_2.pdf

It is always the responsibility of the rider/ competitor/ horse owner to ensure that the needs of their horse are being met appropriately, and that the rules of the sport and EA Code of Conduct are being followed at all times.

Equestrian Western Australia gratefully acknowledges the proud support from Major, Strategic and Corporate Partners.

Example scenarios of how the role may function at an event:

At a Show Horse event, the Horse Welfare Officer is a member of the organising committee. They have been briefed on the correct chain of authority for the day, and are aware of who to bring any welfare complaints to on the day as first point of call, and where the complaint forms are located should the issue not be resolved on the day.

The Horse Welfare Officer is wearing their brightly coloured vest, and routinely walks through the stables, float parking and warm up arenas. A groom has been lunging a difficult horse for over 40 minutes. The horse is heavily sweating, and appears to be getting more stressed, rather than less as the time wears on. The groom sees the Welfare Officer coming near, and so decides to stop lunging and take the horse back to the stable.

At a Dressage event, the Horse Welfare Officer role is being fulfilled by a volunteer who is also the test sheet runner. They have been briefed on the role by going through the induction forms, and are aware of the proper chain of authority, and has been provided with phone numbers for the event secretary, the head judge and the chief steward. They are routinely walking through the float parking and stables in between collecting tests.

The Horse Welfare Officer is approached by a spectator who is concerned they have witnessed a rider using inappropriate tack warming up their horse away from the official warm up, but still on the grounds. The Horse Welfare Officer calls the Chief Steward and alerts them to the possible rule breach, and the Steward go to check what is occurring. The rider is cautioned, and asked to remove the tack immediately, which they do.

At an Eventing competition, a rider returns from their jumping round feeling very disappointed, and unfortunately decides to take it out on their horse. A fellow competitor nearby witnesses the incident, and films it on their phone. They locate the Horse Welfare Officer, stating they would like to lodge a complaint about the incident.

The Horse Welfare Officer takes down the details of the incident on an official EWA Complaints form, including phone numbers of eye witnesses for the TD and Ground Jury and informs them as soon as possible, as TD and Ground Jury are currently occupied supervising the cross country course.

Equestrian Western Australia gratefully acknowledges the proud support from Major, Strategic and Corporate Partners.