



Challenges and Solutions to Support Good Equine Welfare Practice in Ireland





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Contents

Chapter 1	5
Introduction	
Chapter 2	7
The Equine Industry in Ireland	
Chapter 3	13
Engaging with Industry	
Chapter 4	19
Disposal of Horses	
Chapter 5	23
Fairs and Markets	
Chapter 6	27
Case Study of On-Farm Equine Welfare	
Chapter 7	31
Solutions at Work in Ireland	
Chapter 8	35
Identified Solutions and Future Directions	
Bibliography	38
Acknowledgements	39



Chapter 1

Introduction

This report presents the key findings from a three-year study entitled *The UCD Review of Equine Welfare in Ireland 2007-2009*. The key objective of the research was to record a snapshot of current threats to horse welfare on the island of Ireland, by considering stakeholder perceptions and recording actual events. Furthermore, the authors were interested in solutions, by considering current success stories and identifying new strategies to support best practice and inform the development of relevant policy.

From the outset, stakeholder participation was considered to be the key to collecting relevant data. Individuals were drawn from stakeholder groups in government, industry and animal welfare sectors. The authors firmly believed that a collaborative approach would support the development of practical, implementable solutions to the challenges identified.

This research was conducted by a multidisciplinary research team from University College Dublin (the UCD School of Agriculture, Food Science and Veterinary Medicine and the UCD Geary Institute):

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Professor Simon More, Chair of Veterinary Epidemiology and Risk Analysis

Professor Patrick Wall, Chair of Public Health

The report consists of eight chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on the equine industry, providing an overall context to the infrastructure supporting the different sectors of the industry. The methodological approach that was adopted to support stakeholder participation, and the key concerns for equine welfare as reported by stakeholders, are presented in Chapter 3. The fourth chapter reports on one of the key challenges identified by stakeholders as affecting horse welfare on the island of Ireland, namely the disposal of horses. The second key challenge identified by stakeholders, namely unregulated fairs and markets, is presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 considers a real life case-study of the welfare of horses on Irish farms, as part of the breeding and dealing sector of the industry, again reflecting concerns expressed by some stakeholders. Chapter 7 considers initiatives that have already been taken to address challenges to horse welfare. The final chapter outlines the main recommendations of the research and looks towards future initiatives to promote best practice.



Chapter 2

The Equine Industry in Ireland



CONTEXT

The horse is culturally important within the island of Ireland, ranging from Connemara ponies synonymous with the West Coast to urban horses, top-class Thoroughbred (TB) race-horses and famous show-jumpers, bred and trained in Ireland. In addition to their cultural value, horses represent an economically significant industry, which can be broadly categorised into two industry sectors: TB and Sports/Leisure.

Ireland is acknowledged as a world leader in equine-related activities, both in the TB and Sports/Leisure horse sectors. In recent years, the horse industry has experienced a vibrant period, reflected by an exponential growth particularly in the numbers of TB horses being bred and returns for horse sales at public auction.

The economic downturn has, however, had a dramatic impact on the industry with consequences for horse owners, breeders, trainers, animal welfare charities and other stakeholders. Industry structures and regulatory controls each play a critical role in the current economic climate, to underpin the stabilisation and future development of the industry and to support best practice for equine health and welfare.

- *The horse is culturally important within the island of Ireland, ranging from Connemara ponies synonymous with the West Coast to urban horses and equestrian athletes.*
- *Industry structures and regulatory controls each play a critical role in the current economic climate, to underpin the stabilisation and future development of the industry and to support best practice for equine health and welfare.*

THE EQUINE INDUSTRY

Governance

Two organisations provide the main structure for the industry in Ireland:

1. Horse Racing Ireland (HRI), in conjunction with the Racing Regulatory Authority (The Turf Club), provides the structural framework for the thoroughbred (TB) racing industry, and is responsible for developing and promoting horse racing in Ireland.
2. Horse Sport Ireland (HSI) is an umbrella body responsible for the strategic development and promotion of the Irish sport horse industry, including breeding, sport and leisure horses. Affiliates include The Irish Pony Club, Eventing Ireland, Para Equestrian Ireland and the Association of Irish Riding Clubs.

Demographics

Several key performance indicators demonstrate the exponential rise in the Irish horse population during the years of the 'Celtic Tiger':

- The number of TB foals registered by Weatherbys increased by 17.5% (from 10,214 to 12,004) between 2001 and 2006, and
- The number of TB horses returned in training increased by 22% (from 9,080 to 11,109) over the same period (HRI, 2006).

From a peak in 2007, coinciding with the onset of the economic downturn, there has been a decline in the numbers of TB's registered in the recorded categories in Ireland (Table 1).

Table 1. Statistics for registered TBs in the Republic of Ireland (from Horse Racing Ireland)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Stallions	356	390	420	405	414	416	312	271
Mares	16,467	16,938	18,867	18,817	19,251	20,700	20,038	18,851
Foals	10,214	10,574	10,992	11,748	12,004	12,633	12,419	10,167
Horses in training	9,080	9,360	9,618	10,416	11,109	12,188	12,119	11,638
Total	36,117	37,262	39,897	41,386	42,778	45,937	44,888	40,927

As illustrated in Figure 1, horse breeders and trainers registered with HRI (2008) are present in each county in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. These data provide further indirect information about the demographics of TB horses bred for racing on the island of Ireland.

Based on the Irish Sports Horse Questionnaire (ISHQ) and Central Statistics Office (CSO) figures, Hennessy and Quinn (2007) gave a conservative estimate for the national figure for the sports horse population, at 110,000. These authors further reported on the regional distribution of sports horses (Figure 2) (Quinn and Hennessy, 2008).

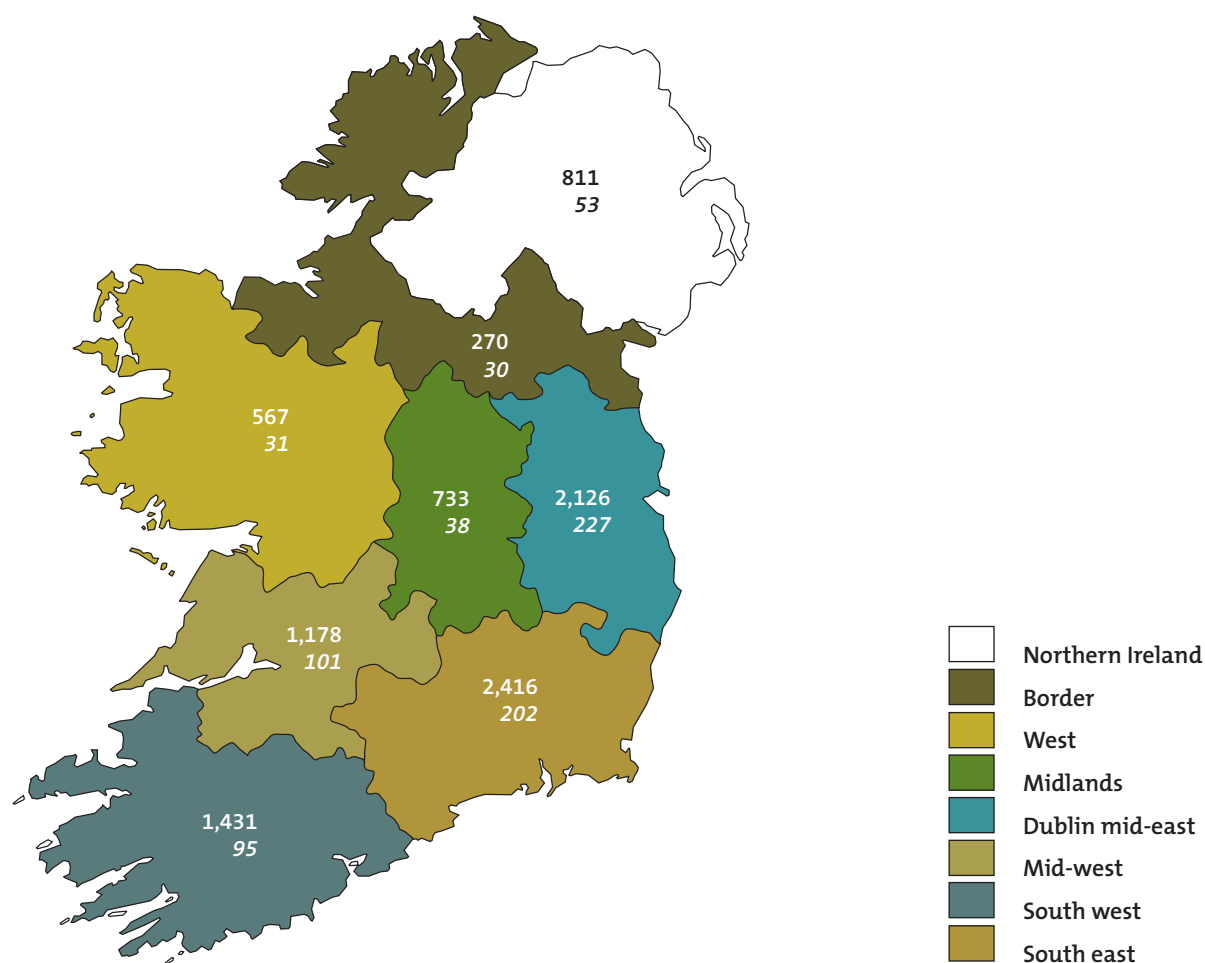


Figure 1. Number of registered Thoroughbred horse breeders and trainers (*italics*) in different regions of the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland, adapted from Horse Racing Ireland Factbook (2008).

Available data on horse demographics needs to be interpreted with care. For example, with regard to TB horses, no data are available about yearlings that remain in Ireland from the previous year's registered crop, nor of older TB horses that are not recorded as 'in training' or registered as breeding animals. These latter horses may, for example, be in 'pre-training', in point-to-point training/racing, in sports/leisure use, breeding to non-TB stallions, or retired. Furthermore, there is currently no legal requirement to register ownership of horses, transfer of ownership or premises used to keep horses. Consequently it is impossible to determine the actual number of horses in Ireland.

Value

The gross value of the TB industry to the economy in the Republic of Ireland is in excess of €1.1 billion per annum (Dukes, 2009). In addition, 80,000 visitors attended race meetings, sales and stud operations in 2008. Racing festivals, in particular, represent a significant source of income to local economies, estimated at approximately €260 million per year. Overall, the TB industry supports more than 22,000 full time employees.

In contrast, the economic value of the Sports/Leisure horse sector cannot be easily defined. There are, for example, an estimated 27.5 sports/leisure horses per thousand people, making Ireland the most-dense horse population in Europe. The annual expenditure within the Sports/Leisure Horse industry is estimated at €400 million (Hennessy and Quinn, 2007), highlighting the importance of equestrianism in Ireland.

Records from public auction indicate that the number of TB horses sold in Ireland grew in value by 31.5% between 2005 and 2006, from €145,626 to €191,463, respectively. In contrast, in 2007 as compared to 2006, although there was a further 9.7% increase in the numbers of horses returned in training (from 11,109 to 12,188), there was a 7% decrease (from a record €189.4 million in 2006) in the value of bloodstock sales at public auction (HRI, 2008) – an early indicator of trouble to come. A marked downturn was reported during 2009, with a reduction of 32% (to 67.5 million) in the value of bloodstock sales at public auction (HRI, 2009).

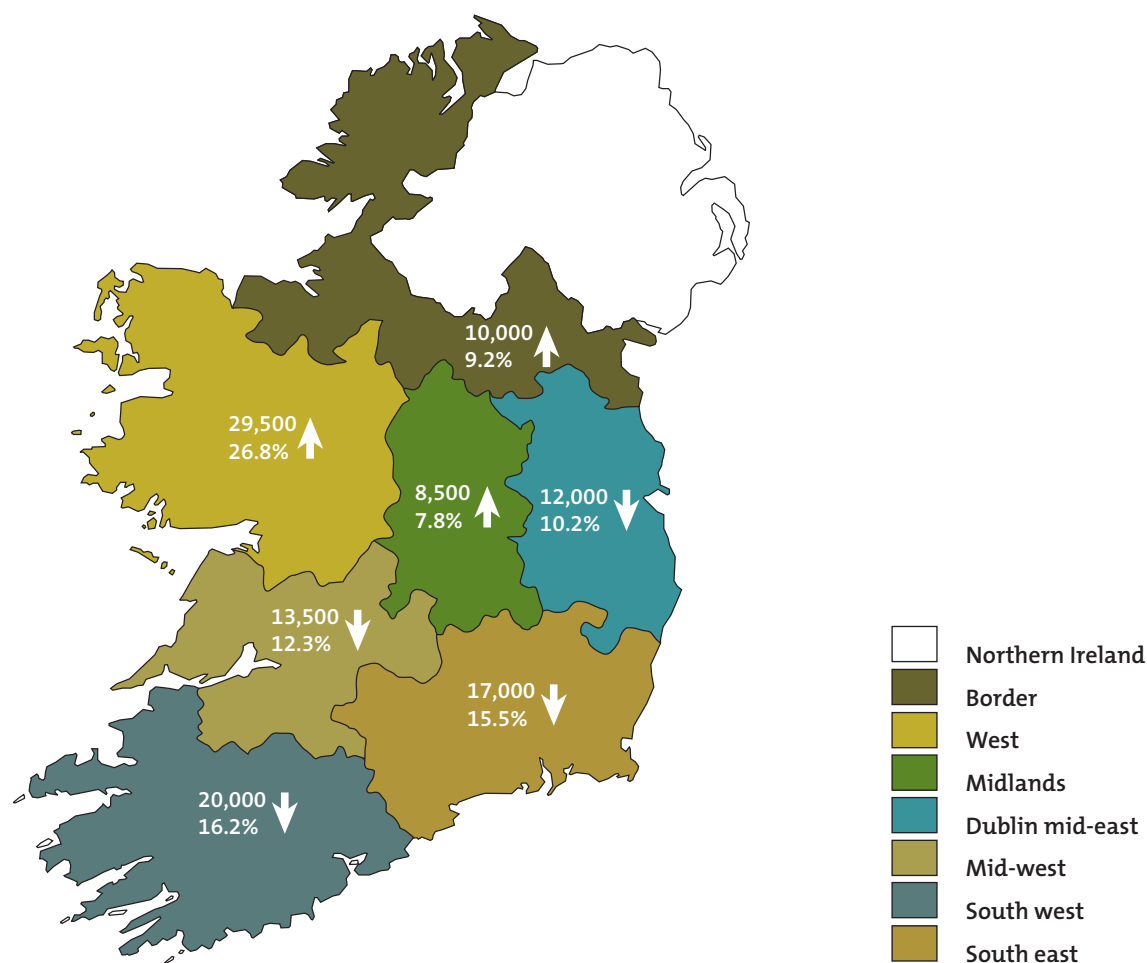


Figure 2. Estimated number and percentage of sports horses in different regions of the Republic of Ireland, adapted from Quinn and Hennessy (2008). The arrows indicate whether the region's share is increasing or decreasing.

EQUINE WELFARE

Overview

In Ireland, ultimate responsibility for the duty of care of equines rests with the owner or keeper. Governmental bodies such as the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council (FAWAC, 2005) and Teagasc (2007) have published guidelines to improve equine health and welfare. The equine industry has also recently published advice and guidance to individuals promoting the concept of 'responsible horse ownership' (HSI, 2009 and ITBA, 2009).

Animal welfare charities work to increase awareness of the importance of equine welfare, as well as working in a practical way to rescue, rehabilitate and re-home horses. Funding for charities remains a critical issue. As well as fund raising activities and donations from industry groups, animal welfare charities in the Republic of Ireland are partly funded by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF). In 2010, DAFF awarded €1,850,000 to 112 such organisations.

Legislation

Legislative responsibility for the entire equine industry has recently been given to DAFF to join with its long-held role in managing animal health and welfare issues generally. This new cohesion is to be welcomed as it is hoped that it will lead to a more integrated approach to the equine industries and equine issues as a totality. Table 2 provides a summary of the legislation relating to equine welfare in the Republic of Ireland.

Table 2. A summary of the main legislative structures regulating equine welfare in the Republic of Ireland

Protection of Animals Act, 1911	Section 1. If any person shall...,by wantonly or unreasonably doing or do any act, causing or procuring the commission or omission of any act, cause any unnecessary suffering, or being the owner, permit any unnecessary suffering to be so caused to any animal...such person will be guilty of an offence of cruelty within the meaning of this Act.
Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act, 1965	Section 16. For the purposes of any proceedings under the Protection of Animals Act, 1911 or this Act any animal found on any land shall be presumed to be owned by the occupier of such land unless the contrary be proved.
Control of Horses Act, 1996	Section 33. An authorised person or a member of the Garda Síochána who has reasonable cause to suspect that a horse is in such pain, distress or acute state of neglect or so severely injured or diseased as to be in need of veterinary attention, may require the owner or keeper of the horse, or if the owner or keeper is not readily available, a person apparently in charge or control of the horse, to immediately, or as soon as may be, obtain any necessary veterinary attention from a veterinary surgeon for the horse.
Statutory Instrument (SI) 14; European Communities (Welfare of Farmed Animals) Regulations, 2008	<p>Section 3. Paragraph 1: 'This Part does not apply to (a) ... (b) subject to paragraph 2, an animal used in competitions, shows, cultural or sporting events or activities while being so used.</p> <p>Paragraph 2: Notwithstanding paragraph (1)(b), these regulations apply to an animal of a kind or species that is normally bred or kept for the production of food, wool, skin, fur or feathers or for use in, or for the purpose of, the farming of land or of animal husbandry and, in particular, includes animals of the bovine, ovine, porcine and caprine species, equidae and poultry. ...</p> <p>Section 4: (1) A person shall take all necessary steps to ensure the welfare of an animal in his or her possession, in his or her control or under his or her care and to ensure that the animal is not caused unnecessary pain, suffering or injury.</p>

Education and Training

In the Republic of Ireland, a range of education and training programmes are available for members of the equine industry. The programmes are designed to fulfil different needs ranging from RACE (Racing Academy and Centre of Education), Festina Lente, Teagasc, third level education at University College Dublin and the University of Limerick, to the Cherry Orchard Equine Training and Education Centre. Such programmes are vital to supporting best practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The broad spectrum of interests represented in the equine industry creates special challenges. Currently the governance of the industry is fragmented and therefore there is no one organisation coordinating strategy or policy to promote equine health and welfare. *It is recommended that the responsibility for promoting appropriate standards of horse welfare is coordinated between the organisations within the equine industry, and with DAFF.*

One key issue is that of horse identification and the registration of responsibility for owning/keeping horses. It is currently not possible to track horses from birth to death except those whose owners/keepers voluntarily register their origin, change of ownership, movement and ultimate demise. This has implications for equine health, particularly in the face of an infectious disease outbreak, and equine welfare, being able to identify the owner in the event of problems such as the neglect or abandonment of horses. *It is recommended that a comprehensive system to register ownership (including transfer of ownership) and premises be introduced.*

METHODOLOGY AND FURTHER READING

A detailed review of the literature was conducted, including industry reports such as Horse Racing Ireland Factbook (2006, 2009), Profile of the Irish Sport Horse Industry (Quinn & Hennessy, 2008), horse sales records from public auction and legislation.

Collins, J., Hanlon, A., More, S. J. and Duggan, V. 2008. The structure and regulation of the Irish equine industries: links to considerations of equine welfare. Irish Veterinary Journal 61, 746-756.

Further information is available at www.ucd.ie/animalwelfare



Chapter 3

Engaging with Industry



CONTEXT

High standards in equine welfare are important to the ongoing success of the Irish equine industries, both in Ireland and internationally. As yet, however, objective information about equine welfare in Ireland is lacking; and therefore, it has not been possible to benchmark current practice, identifying areas of weakness and strength, and of opportunities for improvement.

There is substantial collective wisdom about equine welfare among the many people associated with the equine industries in Ireland – the stakeholder groups. The Delphi method is a qualitative survey technique developed to engage with experts and key individuals in such groups. In contrast, however, with previous applications of Delphi methodology in the animal welfare field, this study incorporated vignettes (narratives illustrating potential compromises to equine welfare), which may help secure respondent engagement with controversial issues, maximise return of meaningful responses and avoid respondent bias. These features were deemed essential to the success of this Delphi study of equine welfare and as groundwork for further detailed exploration of policy solutions with stakeholder groups in the Irish equine industries.

- *There is substantial collective wisdom about equine welfare among the many people associated with the equine industries in Ireland.*
- *This study seeks to influence positive change, through the development of inclusive, rather than imposed, policy solutions to address threats to equine welfare in Ireland. This can only be done with the involvement of all stakeholder groups, as outlined here.*

KEY FINDINGS

The Policy Delphi process

The Policy Delphi process was conducted over three rounds. Data was collected in both quantitative and qualitative form. At the onset of rounds 2 and 3, respondents were asked to review their input to the previous round in comparison with the group's pooled input (Figure 3):

- In *Round 1*, participants were asked to consider a number of different vignettes (or 'word pictures' of a potential equine welfare issue; see below), and to evaluate each according to acceptability ('how acceptable is this?') and frequency ('how frequently does it occur?').

- In *Round 2*, these issues were considered in more detail, focusing on:
 - o Situations (locations where welfare could be compromised),
 - o Drivers (factors motivating behaviour), and
 - o Mechanisms (possible means to address concerns).
- In *Round 3*, participants were asked to focus on the two welfare issues that were considered of greatest concern by the group (disposal of horses, unregulated gatherings), specifically addressing:
 - o Change (whether it was desirable and/or feasible),
 - o Drivers (factors that motivate behaviour), and
 - o Potential solutions.

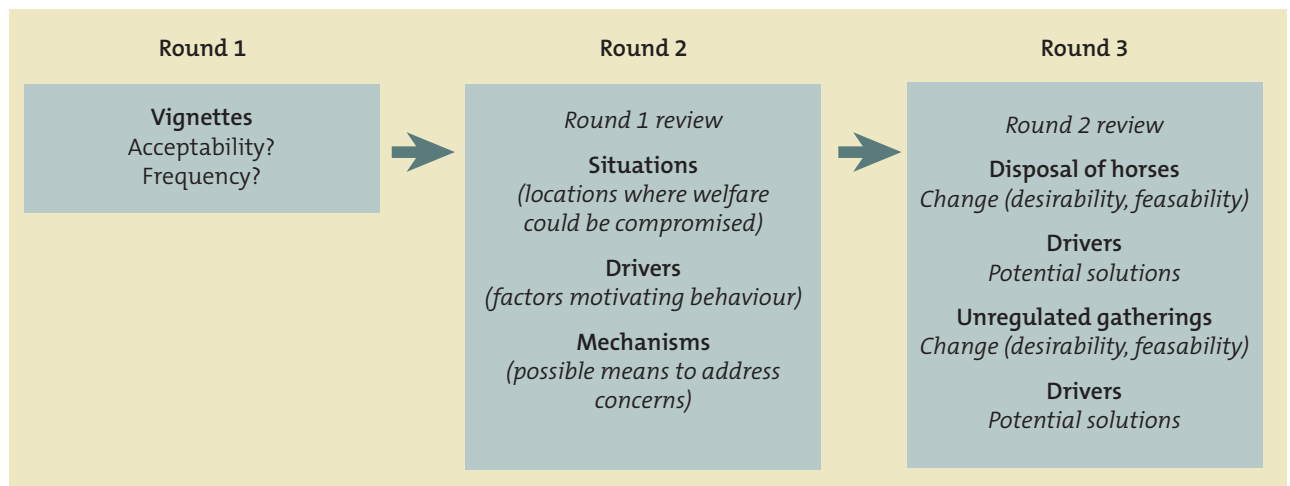


Figure 3: The three rounds of the Policy Delphi process

In total, 44 people participated in the study, from the following four groups:

- Those with a strong equine health and welfare focus
- Those with an active voluntary role in relevant committees, policy development or organisations
- Those where the equine industry was their main livelihood (but not in a hands-on capacity, with roles related to administration, finance, government)
- Those where the equine industry was their main livelihood (in a hands-on capacity, with roles related to riding, training, breeding, transporting, shoeing, vetting)

Vignettes

Vignettes were used throughout the Delphi process, providing participants with ‘word pictures’ of particular situations depicting potential welfare compromise. These are particularly useful in harnessing engagement in discussion of sensitive topics.

The following are examples of vignettes that were used during the study:

Jackie races his 10-months-old pony in harness on the roads. He boasts to his pals that he has clocked speeds of 50 kph (30 mph). He knows that the youngster’s joints won’t stand more than 6 months of such wear and tear, but carries on anyway ‘there are always plenty more where this one came from’.



Leah keeps her horses on sparse, rough grazing where ragwort flourishes, culling hay from part of it as their sole source of winter feed. Some fail to thrive and develop liver disease.



The results

Among the 44 Policy Delphi participants, there was a consensus that equine welfare was most likely to be compromised in the following situations (Figure 4):

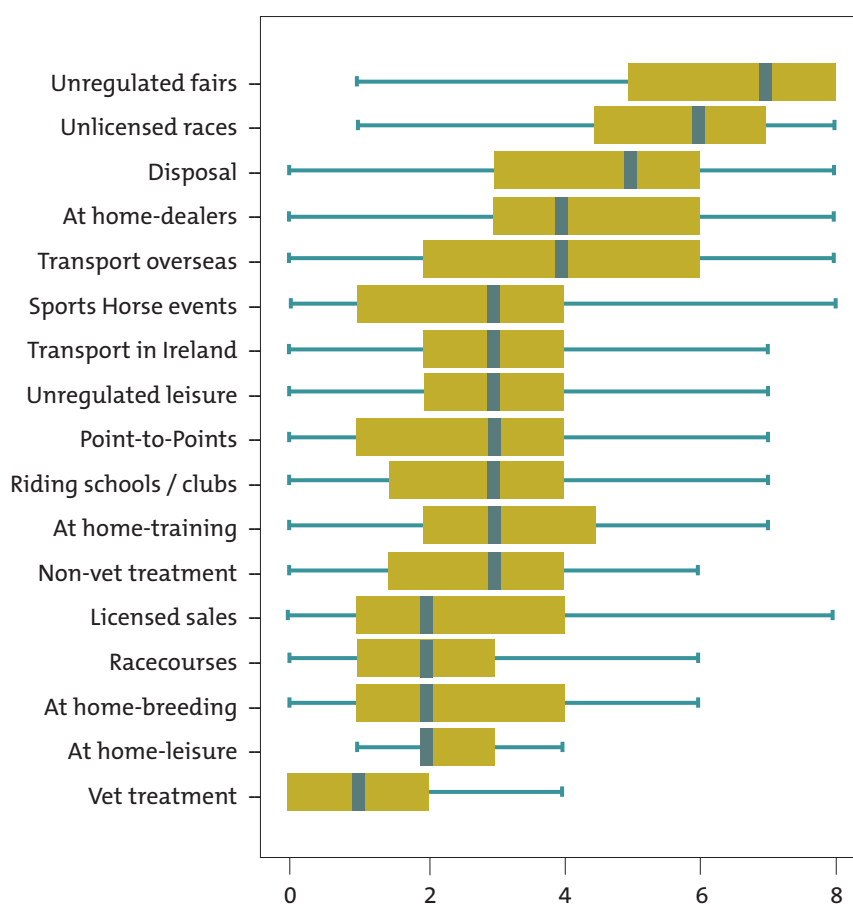


Figure 4. Responses of stakeholders indicating the situations or locations in which equine welfare is likely to be compromised (0=never; 8=frequently) (Policy Delphi [Round 2] responses).

The situations causing greatest concern were grouped as two composite issues for further exploration in Delphi Round 3; these are discussed in greater detail in Chapters 4 (disposal) and 5 (fairs and markets) of this report:

- The horse disposal process (including dealing and transport), and
- Unregulated fairs and markets.

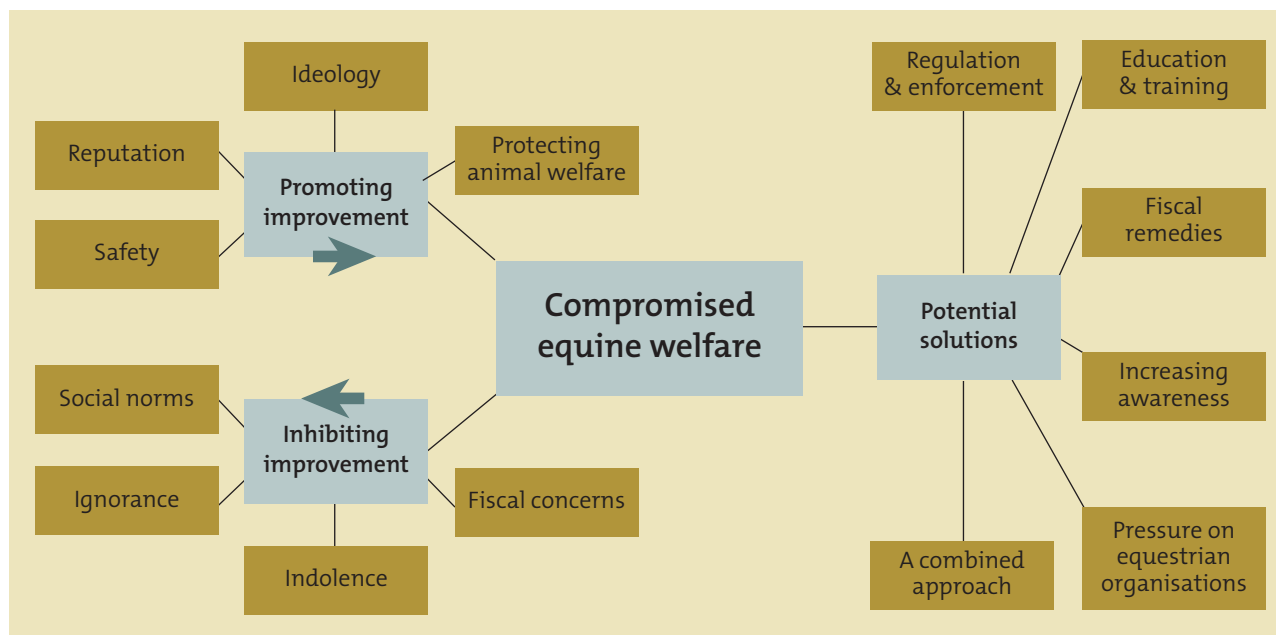


Figure 5. A global view of socio-economic factors that influence equine welfare, including factors that inhibit or promote improvement, and of potential solutions

Participants identified a range of factors inhibiting improved equine welfare, including:

- Social norms and acceptance of the status quo,
- Ignorance, indifference, occasionally malice,
- Indolence or laziness, and
- Fiscal or economic concerns.

There was also a range of factors promoting improved equine welfare, including:

- Safety for horse, man and the environment,
- Reputation and image of the equine industry,
- Ideology and a sense of correctness, and
- Protecting animal welfare.

The participants identified a range of potential solutions to compromised equine welfare, including:

- Regulation and its enforcement
- Targeted education, information and training,
- Financial remedies – levies, subsidies and penalties,
- Heightened awareness of the value of promoting welfare,
- Pressure on equestrian organisations to ‘own the issue’, and
- A combination of approaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Horses are of substantial importance to Irish society, and high standards in equine welfare are critical to the ongoing success of the Irish equine industries, both in Ireland and internationally. Industry leadership is central to efforts towards the development of inclusive, rather than imposed, policy solutions to address threats to equine welfare. *It is recommended that industry take the lead role in ongoing work towards improved equine welfare in Ireland.*

Objective information about equine welfare in Ireland is lacking; therefore it has not been possible to benchmark current practice, identifying areas of weakness and strength, and of opportunities for improvement. *It is recommended that there be ongoing benchmarking of equine welfare in Ireland, and in particular objective outcome-based measures of progress.*

Animal welfare is a complex area, with attitudes, perception and experiences of individuals being influenced by a broad range of factors. *It is recommended that researchers consider the use of mixed methods, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, in studies on this issue. The Policy Delphi methodology, used here, represents one potential approach.*

METHODOLOGY AND FURTHER READING

This work was conducted using a Policy Delphi, designed specifically for this purpose. The Delphi was conducted over three rounds with 44 participants. These participants were each closely involved in the equine industries in Ireland, in a number of diverse roles.

Collins, J., Hanlon, A., More, S. J. and Duggan, V., 2009. Policy Delphi with vignette methodology as a tool to evaluate the perception of equine welfare. *The Veterinary Journal* 181, 63-69.

Collins, J.A., Hanlon, A., More, S.J., Wall, P.G., Kennedy, J. and Duggan, V., 2010. Evaluation of current equine welfare issues in Ireland: causes, desirability, feasibility and means of raising standards. *Equine Veterinary Journal* 42, 105-113.

Further information is available at www.ucd.ie/animalwelfare



Chapter 4

Disposal of Horses



CONTEXT

Stakeholders identified the disposal of horses as one of the key issues compromising the welfare of horses in Ireland. It is particularly pertinent in the context of the numbers of horses being bred in Ireland, as described in Chapter 2, countered with the marked decline in horse sales. Since 2007, supply has outweighed demand.

There have been several outcomes to the diminished profitability of keeping and breeding horses, including increases in the abandonment of horses, relinquishment of horses to animal welfare charities, and horses being euthanized, exported or sent to abattoirs. From an industry perspective, whatever the outcome, the welfare of the horse should not be compromised.

Thus the welfare of the horse and the profit/loss to the owner are important considerations. To encourage best practice, low cost or cost-neutral humane solutions need to be provided. This chapter presents the current infrastructure available for the disposal of horses in Ireland between 2006 and 2009, based on insights from export, knackery and abattoir data.

- *As a consequence of diminished profitability of keeping and breeding horses, owners have looked towards low cost or cost-neutral solutions.*

KEY FINDINGS

Export

Larne port, Co. Antrim, is currently the only ferry port on the island of Ireland with facilities that allow horse transport vehicles to be viewed from above and horses to be unloaded for individual inspection. It is not current practice at ports to enter vehicles to examine horses to ascertain their welfare status, or to check identification documents against the animals being transported.

There are no accurate records of the total number of horses imported/exported from the island of Ireland. The Tripartite Agreement (based on Article 6 of the European Community Council Directive 90/426) between the Republic of Ireland (ROI), the United Kingdom and France, enables the free movement, without health certification, of horses between these countries, excepting where these horses are declared as intended for slaughter. Table 3 presents the number of horses imported and exported from three ferry ports on the island. No records exist for the numbers moving through the Co. Dublin ferry ports.

Table 3. The combined number of horses exported and imported annually via Larne, Belfast and Rosslare ports, during 2006-2009.

	2006	2007	2008	2009
Export	9,762	9,975	9,630	9,496
Import	7,288	6,956	5,763	4,683
Net export	2,474	3,019	3,867	4,813

Slaughter

The humane slaughter of horses for meat in Ireland has been limited by a number of factors. For example, until 2009, there was only one abattoir (B & F Meats; Table 4) licensed to slaughter horses in the Republic of Ireland (ROI). In 2009, to facilitate the humane slaughter of horses, two new abattoirs were licensed, in Co. Limerick and Co. Kildare, with a reported throughput of 1026 and 62 horses, respectively. A further plant is expected to begin operations in 2010. One licensed plant previously operated in Northern Ireland and, after a gap in operations in the mid 2000's, has recommenced the licensed slaughter of horses for human consumption in early 2010, at a rate of approximately 40 horses per week. However, not all horses can enter the human food chain. This option is only available, for public health reasons, for horses that can be accurately identified, examined as to their health status and certified as not having been administered certain specified medicines. Furthermore, it is only viable, for commercial reasons, for horses of an appropriate age, type and conformation.

Table 4. The total number of horses slaughtered in Ireland, for the human food chain, between 2002 and 2009 at B&F Meats, Co Kilkenny.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
No. of horses	1995	2060	824	614	822	1486	2002	3163

Knackery service

The disposal of horses through the knackery system is widely available, accounting for approximately 1993 horses in 2007. There are 39 knackeries (Category 2 Plants and approved contractors) in the ROI, with disposal numbers varying substantially by region (Figure 6). In contrast to the horse slaughter plants, the knackery operator typically visits the horse owner/keepers' premises and collects (in addition to possibly humanely destroying) the animal. Until January 2009, the disposal of horses through the knackery service was subsidised by the Fallen Animal Scheme, funded by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF) and the charge to the horse owner/keeper was likely to be of the order of €0 to €100. However, this cannot now be considered a cost neutral or low cost solution, with charges ranging from €0 in some few instances where the plant operator runs a hunt pack hunting over land owned by the supplier of the horse to in excess of €200 where no prior relationship exists between the parties. Most typically the cost is now of the order of €100 to €150.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Stakeholders acknowledged that the disposal of horses presented a significant challenge to the industry. Irrespective of the industry sector, it is vital that the welfare of the horse is not compromised. *It is recommended that lower cost disposal schemes via the knackery service be promoted to facilitate a humane endpoint for horses that cannot enter the human food chain.*

In terms of the welfare of horses going for slaughter, it is better that unwanted horses, fit for the human food chain, should be slaughtered as close to home as possible. *It is recommended that DAFF continues to support the licensing of abattoirs to facilitate the humane slaughter of horses locally.*

The all but unrestricted movement of horses facilitated by the Tripartite Agreement presents a number of challenges to the health and welfare of horses, including an increased biosecurity risk and an inability to properly account for the numbers of horses being exported, possibly for slaughter. *It is recommended that the terms of the Agreement need to be continually reviewed in the light of developing contingency plans for dealing with infectious disease threats and promoting the humane disposal of horses on this island in preference to travel for slaughter abroad.*

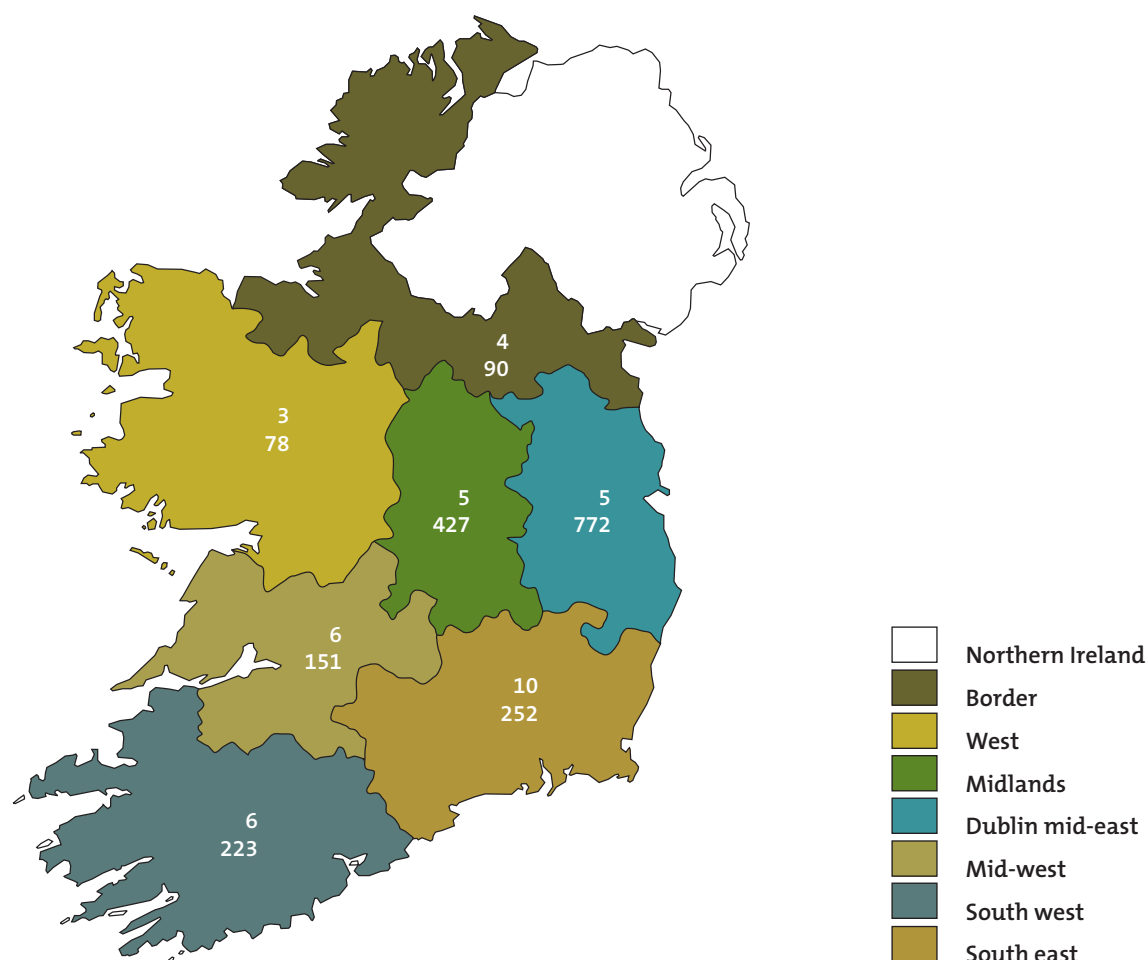


Figure 6. The estimated number of Category 2 Knackery Plants and Contractors, and number of horse carcasses disposed of annually, in the Republic of Ireland by region (top: number of knackeries; bottom: number of carcasses), as determined by a telephone survey conducted in September 2007.

METHODOLOGY AND FURTHER READING

An online Policy Delphi survey was sent to 44 individuals, representing stakeholder groups throughout the horse industry. The survey consisted of 3 rounds and was conducted between November 2007 and March 2008. This chapter is based on the second round of the survey, when stakeholders were asked to identify the main issues affecting horse welfare in Ireland. All respondents participated in each round of the survey.

In addition a telephone survey was conducted, in September 2007, of the 39 (category 2) licensed knackeries and contractors in the ROI, to collect data on the number of horses being disposed of through the knackeries service. A similar survey was conducted of the three horse abattoirs in Ireland, to ascertain the numbers of horses being slaughtered for human food production. Visits were conducted during 2008 and 2009 to ferry ports to view the facilities and to establish the numbers of horses being imported and exported via ferry.

Collins, J., Hanlon, A., More, S. J. and Duggan, V., 2008. The structure and regulation of the Irish equine industries: Links to considerations of equine welfare. *Irish Veterinary Journal* 61, 746-756.

Collins, J., Hanlon, A., More, S. J. and Duggan, V., 2009. Policy Delphi with vignette methodology as a tool to evaluate the perception of equine welfare. *The Veterinary Journal* 181, 63-69.

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Chapter 5

Fairs and Markets



CONTEXT

Unregulated horse gatherings, such as fairs and markets, are considered to be of high value culturally, socially and economically to Ireland. Ballinasloe Fair (pictured opposite), held over a ten day period each October, is estimated to be worth €8 million to the local economy (Mullins 2008). In some cases these events can be traced to the issue of royal charters, for example Banagher Fair by Charles I in 1628 (Mullins 2008).

These events, however, do not operate under legislative control; nor is there currently an agreed industry Code of Practice. Industry stakeholders identified the behaviour of owners and dealers at these events as a major issue impeding the welfare of horses in Ireland. The crowding and lack of control over adverse interactions between horses, and between horses and attendants, led to significant exposure to illness, injury, fear and aversive behaviour.

Change in equine welfare standards of any significant degree at unregulated fairs and markets may be difficult to achieve. There is a significant risk that enforced non-consensual change at established events might simply exacerbate any problems of poor horse welfare by encouraging the setting up of break-away events with even less oversight than currently exists.

- *Industry stakeholders identified the behaviour of owners and dealers at these events as a major issue impeding the welfare of horses in Ireland.*

KEY FINDINGS

Unregulated fairs and markets were identified by stakeholders during the Delphi process, as a situation likely to compromise equine welfare. Visits were made to 14 fairs and markets (Figure 7) on 30 occasions in Ireland over 3 years, to assess horse welfare. The key findings are summarised below.

Access of horses to sufficient and appropriate water, feed and shelter appeared unduly compromised. Where watering facilities were provided, they were often used for other purposes such as the washing of utensils, so as to make them unsuitable for horses drinking. While a number of thin horses were observed, the majority of these events were held during the summer, which meant that most horses had adequate flesh coverage. Indeed, obese ponies with evidence of clinical laminitis were also observed. The uncared for state of the hooves of horses being presented for sale was notable. Horses were routinely exposed to stressful situations, for example, by grouping with unfamiliar cohorts, by mixing colts with fillies, and by the practice of weaning foals abruptly at autumn fairs.

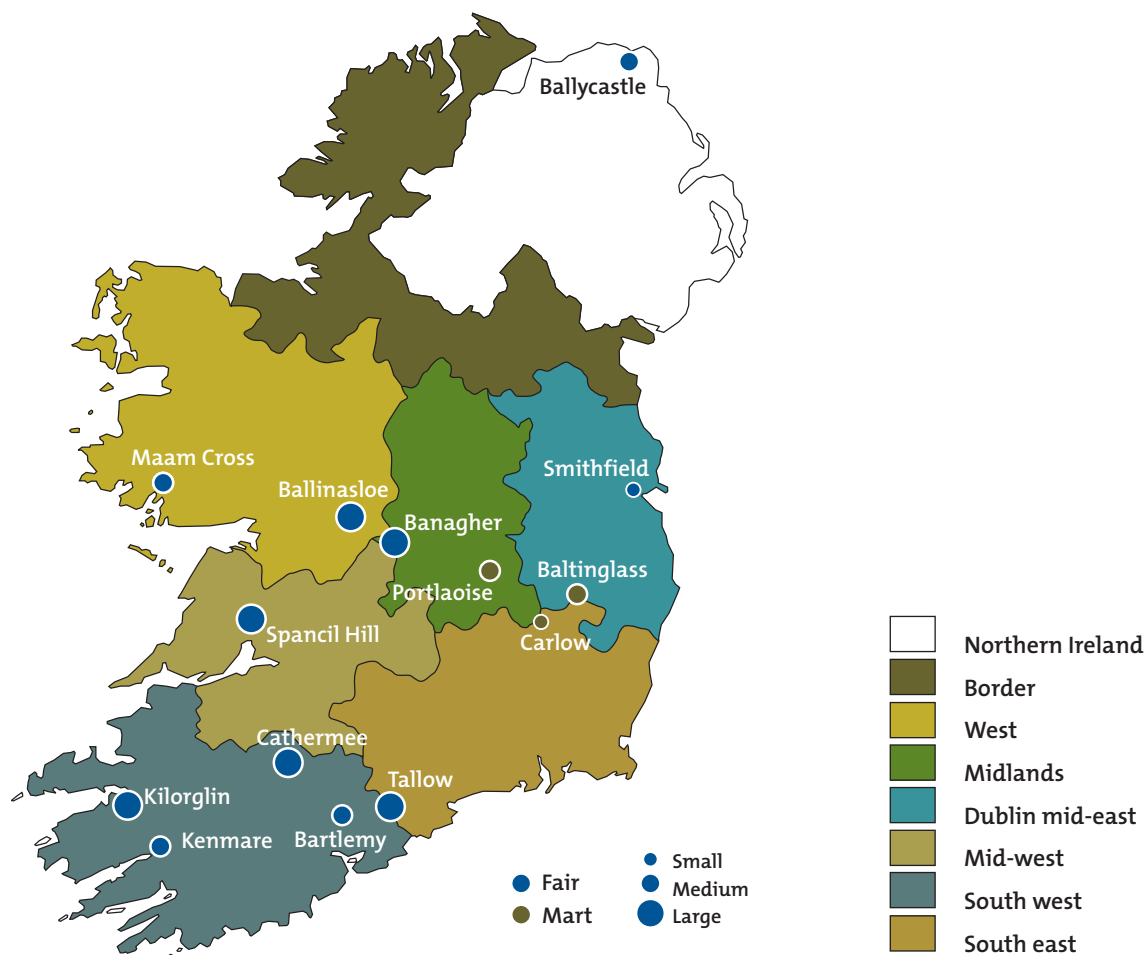


Figure 7. Distribution of horse fairs and markets visited during the study. The size and colour of the circle denotes the type (fair or market) and size (small, medium or large) of event, respectively.

The potential for the transmission of contagious disease at these events was identified as a risk to horse health and welfare. This risk was exacerbated by the lack of consistent enforcement of identification legislation, which would assist in the tracing of disease outbreaks. In 2008, officials from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF) commenced a high profile campaign to raise the awareness of the need for horse passports – it is, for example, an offence to transport horses or buy/sell them without an accompanying matching identification document. This programme was not pursued in 2009, ostensibly for reasons related to funding. The identification of horses issue may be particularly relevant in the event of an incursion of an exotic disease of a highly transmissible nature.

Direct physical abuse of horses was occasionally observed, but was considered to be as a result of traditional accepted practices among certain groups (such as the Traveller community) rather than active malice. It is notable amongst men from these groups that they habitually carry sticks (which are on sale at the fairs) which they use to hit and prod passing horses on a seemingly random basis. Male children appear to adopt this practice as ‘normal’; there is little censure of this practice currently within the Traveller community; and a strong disregard for the views of the ‘settled community’.

‘Flashing’, or racing young horses up and down the roads, with no regard for their joints, was commonplace at these events.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The variable standards recorded at unregulated fairs and markets have the potential to compromise both the health and welfare of horses. *It is recommended that a Code of Practice for horse welfare at fairs and markets be developed and implemented at all events across the island of Ireland.*

Recent events have highlighted the biosecurity risks to the horse population in Ireland. *It is recommended that the regulations on identification be consistently implemented at horse gatherings.*

Outreach education and service programmes could be provided to targeted industry sectors, for example, passport and microchipping clinics with groups currently not being reached by the equestrian organisations. These must be provided at a reasonable cost (to the target audience), and on a without-prejudice basis. *It is recommended that groups such as Teagasc continue to offer advice and training to improve the quality of preparation (e.g. hoof care) for horses likely to be presented for sale. In addition, it is recommended that education and training programmes are initiated to work with key individuals in leadership roles in groups such as the Traveller community, to promote better treatment of animals at fairs and markets.*

METHODOLOGY AND FURTHER READING

A Policy Delphi was conducted over three rounds with 44 participants. These participants were each closely involved in the equine industries in Ireland, in a number of diverse roles. In addition, an equine welfare assessment protocol was developed, based on the Five Freedoms, which incorporate elements of what animals want (e.g. seek to express normal behaviour), and what they require for health (e.g. avoidance of injury) (FAWC, 1979). The protocol was applied at 14 separate fairs and markets (Figure 7) venues on 30 occasions in Ireland at visits conducted over 3 years.

Collins, J.A., Hanlon, A., More, S.J., Wall, P.G., Kennedy, J. and Duggan, V., 2010. Evaluation of current equine welfare issues in Ireland: causes, desirability, feasibility and means of raising standards. *Equine Veterinary Journal* 42, 105-113.

Collins, J., Johnson, J., Hanlon, A., More, S.J. and Duggan, V., in preparation. The development and application of a tool to assess the welfare of equidae at fairs and markets in Ireland.

Further information is available at www.ucd.ie/animalwelfare



Chapter 6

Case Study of On-Farm Equine Welfare



CONTEXT

The diminished profitability of keeping and breeding horses, in association with the current economic crisis, has at times led to significant welfare problems, for example the abandonment of horses. In addition to the two main issues highlighted by stakeholders during the Delphi process, concern was expressed about the welfare of horses kept by horse dealers.

In 2009, a case emerged in the Republic of Ireland (ROI), which illustrated the concerns expressed by some stakeholders. The case is of significance because it demonstrates difficulties with the current regulatory framework governing the welfare of horses.

Research on animal welfare science advocates the use of welfare inputs (the knowledge and skill of the owner/keeper, the appropriateness of the management and environment in relation to the type of animal) and welfare outcomes (animal-based measures of welfare state). Case severity, the number of animals affected and the duration of the problem can also be used as benchmarks of a potential welfare problem. Using this two-fold approach, a case study of an Irish horse farm was conducted during 2007, 2008 and 2009 and is presented below.

- *The case is of significance because it demonstrates difficulties with the current regulatory framework governing the welfare of horses.*

KEY FINDINGS

Background

The number of horses on the home farm varied over time, ranging from 50 to in excess of 100 breeding fillies and mares, and foals, weanlings, yearlings, young colts and geldings. Five breeding stallions and two teaser pony stallions were also present. The health and welfare of the horses was significantly compromised on the farm, for example by the inadequate provision of water and feed. This was manifested by low body condition scores, often 1 to 1.5 on a 6-point scale from 0=emaciated to 5=obese (Carroll and Huntington, 1988). In addition, toxic ragwort was present throughout the farm on land that was grazed bare by starving horses.

Indicators of poor clinical health were recorded on repeated visits including:

- Inflammatory lesions and traumatic wounds in varying stages of healing,
- Parasitic infestations and purulent discharges, and
- Lameness with overgrown, cracked and misshapen hooves.

The presence of abandoned carcasses in varying states of decay (sometimes contaminating water courses on land; sometimes with ready access by farm dogs) indicated that the problem had been ongoing for months.

Regulatory framework

Traditionally horses are categorised as a sport/leisure, and not a farm animal. Until the emergence of this case, the main regulatory instrument applied to horse welfare was the Protection of Animals Act 1911 (Table 2). However, the 1911 Act lacks the key provisions of the regulation used to safeguard the welfare of farmed animals (S.I. No. 14 of 2008). Equidae used for the purpose of the farming of land fall within the scope of SI No. 14 of 2008, but this Statutory Instrument had not been employed to date in relation to horses. For example, the 1911 Act requires that animals must have suffered before action can be taken. In contrast, S.I. No. 14 of 2008 contains provisions to instruct the owner/keeper on measures that need to be implemented to prevent animal suffering.

As required by the 1911 Act, An Garda Síochána (the Irish police), which are assigned as authorised officers, accompanied by a private veterinary practitioner (PVP) visited the farm on 15 occasions between February 2007 and December 2009. The PVP provided the owners with animal husbandry and veterinary advice during each visit. The gardaí issued notices of impending seizure of individually identified horses, and warned of the likelihood of prosecution if horse welfare standards were not improved.

Resolution

Overall, the welfare standards for horses on-farm continued to deteriorate during 2008, and horses were moved to unknown and unsupervised premises at the owner/keepers' direction. At a meeting held in February 2009 jointly with An Garda Síochána, the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ISPCA) and Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF) officials, no resolution was achieved to address the practical difficulty of managing the care of more than 100 horses of negligible resale or disposal value, spread between several properties in different counties. Horses were subsequently seized and a prosecution was instigated under Garda direction under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 and the Control of Dogs Act 1986. However, the welfare standards for the remaining horses did not improve during 2009. In December 2009, DAFF invoked section 34 of S.I. No.14 of 2008 for the first time ever, to seize horses. This section provides that where an authorised officer who is a veterinary practitioner is of the opinion that an animal (to whom the legislation applies) is suffering, or is seriously at risk of suffering, that measures should be taken to relieve same by seizure, sale, destruction or disposal. Welfare charities selected some horses for rescue, the remainder were humanely destroyed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The resource implications of dealing with large scale on-farm equine welfare problems were discussed, with stakeholder groups, in comparison with other farmed species and in the context of the deteriorating state of government and animal welfare charity finances. *It is recommended that DAFF adopt a primary role in safeguarding the welfare of horses and should be provided with appropriate resources to ensure that this role is not compromised.*

The expressed threat that horses might be moved from the ROI to the United Kingdom (UK), in response to increasing pressure by the authorities, was not one that could be addressed in this case. The Tripartite Agreement allows for the uncontrolled movement of equidae (excepting if declared as intended for slaughter) from the ROI to either the UK or France. There was thus the concern that horses suffering poor welfare conditions might simply be moved, without inspection, to another jurisdiction. Although the Agreement stipulates that horses must be accompanied by passports, the portal inspection services are not configured or staffed to inspect individual horses in regard to their identity or welfare state. There is no monitoring of the movement of horses across the border between the ROI and Northern Ireland. *It is recommended that all ferry ports should be provided with the facilities and human resources to monitor and record horse movements into and out of the island of Ireland.*

Prevention and early intervention should be further promoted. In 2004, the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council (FAWAC) established the Early Warning Scheme (EWS) involving groups such as DAFF, the ISPCA and the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) to provide support for farmers experiencing difficulty with the care of their animals. *It is recommended that the scheme should be extended to horses, with the additional involvement of stakeholder bodies such as Horse Sport Ireland (HSI), Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) and the Irish Thoroughbred Breeders' Association (ITBA).*

S.I. No. 14 of 2008 could be employed much more extensively by authorised officers (DAFF's veterinary inspectors) to encourage the keepers of horses on farms to manage their horses to the standard required for other farmed animals. This would involve the issuing of welfare notices and, in extreme cases, the seizure of horses. This recommendation is predicated on additional funding being made available from government and/or industry sources to underwrite the cost of enforcement, seizure, disposal and prosecution. *It is recommended that S.I. No. 14 of 2008 should be one of the key legal instruments used to safeguard the welfare of horses.*

An Animal Health and Welfare Bill is currently in preparation. It is expected that this will introduce the concept of a 'duty of care' for the owners/keepers of animals; that many antiquated legislative provisions such as the 1911 Act will be replaced; and that the new Act will provide comprehensive powers to enforcement agencies to deal with serious infringements to the welfare of animals in Ireland. *It is recommended that the new Animal Health and Welfare Bill should contain comprehensive provisions to safeguard horse welfare.*

METHODOLOGY AND FURTHER READING

Visits to the farm were undertaken and information, in the form of written notes and digital recording of observations and examinations, was gathered in consultation with officials from the Gardaí, DAFF and the ISPCA. Further independent veterinary corroboration of clinical findings and laboratory support occurred post seizure of horses.

Collins, J.C., Hanlon, A., More, S.J. and Duggan, V., 2010. A case study of equine welfare on an Irish farm 2007-2009. The Veterinary Record, in press.

Further information is available at www.ucd.ie/animalwelfare



Chapter 7

Solutions at Work in Ireland



CONTEXT

Diverse groups administer schemes and perform works aimed at improving welfare standards for horses in Ireland. Social horse projects, which engage with local horse keeping communities and foster a responsible approach to the owning and keeping of horses, already exist and are models of good practice. Local authorities are charged with the implementation of the Control of Horses Act 1996 but adopt widely differing approaches. Some place an emphasis on problem prevention rather than reaction when a crisis incident occurs, for example involving horses straying on the road.

Horse rescue centres are run by animal welfare charities: they do sterling work with limited funds but do not have the capacity or the resources to cope with the increasing number of horses requiring care. The Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council (FAWAC) is a non-statutory advisory committee, which advises the Irish Government on the welfare of all farmed animals. Action is needed to affirm the position of FAWAC as a co-ordinating body with the power to convert advice into positive actions.

- *There are islands of excellence in Ireland but their capacity is not sufficient and their efforts not co-ordinated to make a significant impression on the current problem.*
- *Legislative support is needed to convert the advice of FAWAC into actions.*

KEY FINDINGS

Case Study 1. Animal Welfare Charities

Horse rescue centres are run by several animal welfare charities:

- Crosskennan Lane Animal Sanctuary, Co. Antrim
- The Donkey Sanctuary, Co. Cork
- The Dublin Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (DSPCA), Co Dublin
- The Irish Horse Welfare Trust (IHWT), Co. Wicklow
- The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ISPCA), Co. Cork and Co. Longford

Funding is a critical issue for animal welfare charities in Ireland. Each of the equine rescue centres in the Republic of Ireland is supported by DAFF, which announced funding totalling €1,850,000 to 112 animal welfare organisations for 2010. Each charity also relies on the generosity of equine industry organisations, and on the general public. Such charitable income, in Ireland, has always been at a comparatively modest level. However, as general economic conditions have deteriorated in Ireland from 2007 onwards, and the need for animal rescue and care has increased, donations to animal welfare charities have actually fallen. The ISPCA cite a decrease in funding by >50% and a reciprocal increase in workload of >50% during the past three years. Animal rights and animal welfare are different philosophies: any confusion between these in the minds of the public is unhelpful to the funding of mainstream animal welfare charities (B. Bent, ISPCA Chairperson, personal communication).

The emphasis at centres run by animal welfare charities is on the rescue, rehabilitation and re-homing (where possible) of horses (and donkeys at the Donkey Sanctuary) that were deemed to be in need of care – by virtue of neglect or abuse. The IHWT additionally runs a dedicated retraining-of-racehorses scheme for which it receives funding from the horse racing industry.

Animals rescued by charities are sometimes humanely destroyed on veterinary advice or because they are not deemed suitable for re-homing. Some horses are held for longer periods than the charity running each centre might ideally wish, because they are the subject of ongoing prosecutions for cruelty to animals. However, some such as the Donkey Sanctuary and Crosskennan Lane are likely to choose to keep individual animals on a long term sanctuary basis. Most of the centres visited had developed links with each other and with similar centres in the UK, thus facilitating the movement of horses/donkeys between charitable organisations.

Case Study 2. Cherry Orchard Equine Education and Training Centre (COEETC)

COEETC is based in Ballyfermot, a built-up area of West Dublin. This project commenced approximately ten years ago as a local community initiative in response to the commencement of The Control of Horses Act 1996 which the Local Authority was beginning to use to manage a perceived problem with the local horse keeping culture. Funding was secured both centrally (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food [DAFF]; Department of Education and Children; Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment) and more locally (Dublin City Council). Initially it seems there was a perception (by local groups) that the Cherry Orchard initiative would provide an equestrian facility for locals to house their own horses and use at will and under their own terms.

The facility has evolved otherwise: the horses are owned and managed by centre staff to provide (subsidised) training and education to local youth. Teaching sessions are conducted in equine skills – both riding and general horse husbandry – for locals, either individually or on referral from Dublin City Council, the Gardaí, Youth or Disability Groups. Currently approximately 600 persons benefit from training sessions weekly at COEETC. These sessions have been employed to engage with local youth in spin-off schemes, aimed in general at providing an alternative to a street culture, and more particularly at raising education standards through Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) modules. Such training might lead to further college education or entry to a professional equestrian career, for example through RACE (the Racing Academy and Centre of Education) in Kildare.

Case study 3. Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council

In 2008, FAWAC established a sub-committee – the Equine Welfare Working Group - to address the specific issues associated with horses. Representatives from industry and charity stakeholder groups were invited to contribute. The working group and invited speakers reported to FAWAC. Council members have subsequently expressed concern about a perceived worsening of welfare conditions for horses on farms and at gatherings such as horse fairs, and a perceived need to improve existing routes for the humane disposal of unwanted horses. The existing Early Warning Scheme (EWS) related to farmed animals, a Code of Practice for fairs, and subsidised humane destruction schemes have received attention. Members further proposed that the correct identification of equidae receive appropriate legislative attention as being fundamental to achieving improvements in equine health and welfare. Advisory documents have been issued to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Case Study 4. Louth County Council

Though not designed primarily to protect horse health and welfare, the Control of Horses Act, 1996 provides wide-reaching powers to Local Authorities to manage the local horse-keeping culture. They may define (by means of bye-laws) 'Exclusion Areas' where the presence of horses is not permitted (for example, an area of foreshore during certain hours of the day and/or days of the year) and also 'Control Areas' where the physical resources required by horse owners/keepers can be defined before a license will be granted. Funding is provided centrally (by DAFF).

Louth County Council has defined 'problem' areas as Control Areas (for example, a region of commonage where horses might compete with other grazing species), and instigated a rigorous set of requirements for the licensing, exercising and keeping of horses in those areas.

Louth County Council has developed a template involving a locally staffed and managed collection system and impounding facility for stray horses. Authorised officers (local authority veterinarian and inspectors) patrol the 'Control Area' in a marked 4X4 vehicle towing a horse box, creating a highly visible presence and interaction with the horse-keeping community. Staff offer a service (the identification of horses) to owners/keepers who show a willingness to comply with local bye-laws, and otherwise impound horses where necessary – either in the public interest and/or to show that the legislation has teeth. Local Authority staff expressed the view that this interaction has led to an improvement in compliance with the law, and to a reduction in the incidence of serious problems with irresponsible horse keeping.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Animal welfare charities provide a tremendous service to the horse industry, picking up the pieces when horses have been neglected, abandoned or where responsible owners can no longer afford to keep their horses. The role of charities is often collaborative, working alongside other stakeholders, to facilitate the rescue and re homing of horses. *It is recommended that government and the equine industry continue to support the services provided by such animal welfare charities. In view of the expertise and facilities of the main equine welfare charities, it is recommended that Welfare Inspectors from selected charities be appointed and trained under the terms of the Animal Health and Welfare Bill currently being drafted.*

Social horse projects are a good example of the initiative taken by communities in response to legislative controls on horse keeping. Communities are in the best position to establish benchmarks for responsible horse ownership. *It is recommended that such initiatives continue to be funded and that similar initiatives are supported throughout the island of Ireland.*

The development of the EWS by FAWAC is a welcome initiative, to improve the welfare of farmed animals. *It is recommended that FAWAC (and its stakeholder organisations) introduce an EWS for horses on farms and seek funding for the humane disposal of selected horses that are no longer 'fit for purpose'.*

This research identified inconsistencies in the manner in which Local Authorities implement the Control of Horses Act 1996. Louth County Council has established a benchmark by developing a practical and sustainable infrastructure and operating procedure. *It is recommended that Local Authorities adopt a consistent and pro-active approach in the implementation of the Control of Horses Act 1996.*

METHODOLOGY AND FURTHER READING

Visits were conducted to three horse pounds and related local authorities to observe and document their procedures. In addition, five horse rescue centres were visited and four social horse projects were reviewed, and staff and clients interviewed. A review was also conducted of the contribution of FAWAC to addressing the equine welfare issue.

Collins, J., Hanlon, A., More, S.J., Wall, P.G., Duggan, V., in preparation. The keeping and disposal of horses: a national perspective.

Further information is available at www.ucd.ie/animalwelfare



Chapter 8

Identified Solutions and Future Directions



CONTEXT

As part of the current research project, a broad number of people have been engaged with a process designed to identify practical ways to promote improved welfare standards for horses in Ireland. These include key individuals in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland, from the disparate sectors of the Irish equine industry, from local and central government, and from the animal welfare organisations. They participated in semi-structured interviews, focus groups and a facilitated workshop, to suggest, and explore, possible solutions to the two most significant equine welfare issues identified during the Delphi process, including welfare at unregulated gatherings and during the disposal process.

- *Agreement on the priority problems and feasible solutions is key to the stakeholders acknowledging, and taking ownership, of horse health and welfare issues.*
- *Horse owners are not a homogenous group and welfare issues exist among a subset of all sectors.*

KEY FINDINGS

A number of key findings, relating to identified and future solutions, have been explored during this research project.

- There is a lack of coherence between industry and government. In addition, responsibility for both promoting and enforcing appropriate standards of horse welfare is spread across many agencies and bodies.
- Industry sectors may shy away from taking ownership of equine welfare problems, perceiving that these are, or can be labelled as, issues for other sectors but not theirs.
- Horse production has outstripped demand in all sectors. This, coupled with the recent economic downturn, is one factor contributing to the escalating equine welfare problem.
- The indiscriminate breeding of moderate quality horses has compounded the problem of unwanted horses. Continued emphasis, by industry bodies on targeted responsible horse breeding (and ownership) is vital.
- A solution to the current increase in unwanted horses is required. Animal welfare charities are either close to or have exceeded capacity and thus are unlikely to offer a sustainable solution to the problem. In this context, a scheme facilitating the humane disposal of horses is vital to maintaining a vibrant industry. A financially incentivised disposal scheme should be considered with funding arising from a government grant or some form of cross sectoral levy.

- The conditions at unregulated fairs and markets failed to support basic requirements of equine welfare such as the provision of feed and a supply of clean water.
- The Traveller Community has a highly significant horse culture. There was an initial perception among other industry sectors that a high proportion of horse welfare problems were associated with this sector. While for example unregulated fairs may be synonymous with Traveller culture, adverse welfare is not confined to any one sector.
- Traveller men acknowledged that the practices of some of their members were in conflict with accepted equestrian norms. However, they pointed out that horses are an integral part of their tradition, a vital means of earning status and respect from their peers, and a valued means of interaction with the 'settled' community. They pointed out that many of those who own 'coloured' horses are not Travellers, yet when welfare problems are identified in these types of animals, the finger is quickly pointed at their community.
- Local Authorities have legislative powers conferred by the Control of Horse Act 1996. A more co-ordinated and proactive approach to managing the keeping of horses, and thus to equine welfare, would be better than the current approach, which is commonly fragmented and reactionary once problems arise.
- Local Authorities have powers to designate 'Control areas' and thus to regulate currently unregulated horse gatherings, such as unlicensed horse fairs and races.
- Prevention is better than crisis management. Using a cost-benefit approach, it is better to support the development of new measures to prevent welfare issues from arising, instead of suffering the costs associated with welfare problems including adverse publicity and the damaging impact this has on the entire equine industry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following were specific proposals by respondents in industry, government and the welfare charities:

- Industry should take the lead in addressing problems and funding solutions, government should facilitate, and responsible welfare charities should guide.
- A comprehensive identification system for horses should be introduced and maintained, including registration of ownership and the transfer of ownership. Better enforcement of horse identification is needed at critical control points such as horse fairs and at points of export/import.
- Indiscriminate and untargeted horse production should be controlled. The introduction of a horse licensing scheme should be considered, either for horses generally or for stallions in particular. Better education of breeders is needed to ensure that mares and stallions are specifically selected for breeding so that the offspring are produced for a particular purpose and haphazard breeding is discouraged.
- 'Champions' of horse welfare, and of responsible horse ownership, should be involved in all sectors as high profile messengers. The messenger is as important as the message itself.
- A licensing system and associated 'Welfare Code of Practice' should be developed, for implementation at horse gatherings such as fairs and markets. If implemented, it should be enforced. Work with events, such as Spancill Hill fair, that have already commenced this process voluntarily, and expand to other events. These gatherings are major tourist attractions; some of the funds raised could be used to provide better facilities for horse care and better stewarding to manage horses at the event.
- Education is crucial if Irish horses are to be protected from poor standards and the Irish horse industry from adverse publicity. Across all sectors there should be a focus on the importance of taking responsibility for horse welfare and promoting responsible horse ownership. Outreach education and service programmes should be developed, tailored for specific subsets of sectors not currently reached by equestrian organisations (for example, horse identification and husbandry clinics for groups such as Travellers). Improved communication and understanding between Traveller and 'settled' communities is essential to achieving progress in developing best welfare practice.
- A single comprehensive conduit should be developed for science-based information, education and training on horse health and welfare for the equine industries, using a trusted neutral source.
- Humane disposal should be considered the most appropriate way to deal with unwanted, no-longer-valued, surplus horses. Such animals are best humanely destroyed, not neglected, abandoned or required to do jobs for which they are unsuitable. A disposal scheme should be considered to reduce the numbers of horses likely to suffer from adverse welfare. However, a sensitive and co-ordinated approach is required to explain (to media and the public) the necessity of this approach. Financial returns from horse production, registration and activities should be secured, specifically to fund the humane disposal of horses.

METHODOLOGY AND FURTHER READING

Three elements of the research project were utilised to identify solutions and to guide future directions. These included:

- Recorded semi-structured interviews, with 11 key opinion formers across all equine sectors,
- Two focus groups, with members of the Traveller Community, and
- A professionally facilitated workshop, with 31 representatives of the key stakeholder groups.

Collins, J., Hanlon, A., More, S. J. & Duggan, V., 2009. Policy Delphi with vignette methodology as a tool to evaluate the perception of equine welfare. *The Veterinary Journal* 181, 63-69.

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Further information is available at www.ucd.ie/animalwelfare

PROPOSAL AND FURTHER AIMS

A proposal has been made to government and industry sectors to implement some of the above-mentioned recommendations. The aim of this proposal is to perform further work with, and for, industry and government on issues related to the breeding, keeping, transport, competition and disposal of horses in Ireland, to the benefit of all parties. This group might, for example, develop outreach clinics from the UCD Veterinary Sciences Centre to targeted groups. It might work to develop a Code of Practice to be implemented at currently unregulated horse gatherings. It might develop a science-based service providing excellence and expertise on equine health and welfare to stakeholder groups across the industry sectors.

Our industry will inevitably change, and it is vital that those who best understand horses and their importance to Ireland remain at the core of the decision-making process. The authors of this report urge all stakeholder groups to remain engaged with this issue, and to work together to develop policies that are industry inclusive rather than imposed from without.

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http://www.teagasc.ie/publications/2009/Teagasc_HorseOwnership.pdf

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This research was funded by World Horse Welfare. World Horse Welfare is a leading international horse charity dedicated to giving horses a second chance in life.

- The charity has four recovery and rehabilitation centres in the UK, to help to bring vulnerable horses back to full health and rehome animals through a Horse Loan Scheme.
- International training teams help working horses and their owners across the developing world. By providing specialist training and education in poor communities, the charity helps horse owners acquire the skills they need to get the best from their animals.
- World Horse Welfare campaigns for improved legislation. Safe guarding the welfare of horses transported within Europe for slaughter has been one of its key aims since the charity was founded in 1927.

Stakeholder engagement has been vital to understanding the most significant equine welfare issues in Ireland. Without the support, involvement and advice of key individuals drawn from all aspects of the equine industries in Ireland and abroad, this research would not have been possible or fruitful. We are greatly appreciative to all who contributed to the work reported here. In particular we would like to thank (alphabetical order):

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 George Lane - DAFF
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 T J Whelan - farrier
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Photograph credits

Page 2 *Robin Des Pres* - Anngrove Stud
 Page 6 *Mare and foal* - Irish National Stud
 Page 7 *Connemara pony* - Ruth Rogers
 Page 12 *Racing at Limerick* - HRI
 Page 13 *Showjumping at RDS* - HSI
 Page 18 *Horse in transit* - World Horse Welfare
 Page 26 *Horse in field* - B. Bent, ISPCA
 Pages 27 & 31 *Rescued horses* - IHWT
 Page 34 *Irish Draughts at RDS* - HSI
 Page 35 *Racing at Bellewstown* - HRI

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