

NEW ZEALAND THOROUGHBRED RACING WELFARE STRATEGY

Together for the Thoroughbred

2026-2030



NEW ZEALAND
THOROUGHBRED **RACING**

PUREI HŌIHO NĀTI O AOTEAROA



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Introduction

NZTR's Thoroughbred Welfare Strategy establishes a whole-of-industry approach to achieving the highest standards of Thoroughbred welfare in New Zealand. It calls for a genuine transformation to a horse-centred system, where welfare is not secondary to performance but inseparable from it.

Modern animal welfare focuses not only on preventing harm, but also on promoting positive experiences and emotional wellbeing. The New Zealand-developed Five Domains Model (illustrated on page 6) forms the basis of NZTR's Thoroughbred Welfare Guidelines, providing a science-based framework that considers nutrition, physical health, environment, behaviour, and the horse's resulting mental state. Its adoption across the Thoroughbred industry supports consistent, informed decision-making and reinforces a shared commitment to improving horses' overall quality of life.

The strategy provides clear guidance to ensure every horse enjoys a good life, that racing and training environments meet rigorous safety standards, and that the industry maintains public confidence through transparent and responsible practices. Welfare is a shared responsibility, and this strategy ensures all participants are equipped and empowered to do the right thing.

For the purposes of this strategy, Thoroughbred racing and breeding are recognised as intrinsically connected and collectively considered racing-related activities. Decisions made in breeding directly influence welfare outcomes throughout a horse's racing life and beyond, reinforcing the need for a consistent, end-to-end approach to welfare across both sectors.

This strategy is a living document and builds on the progress made through the previous 2022 strategic plan. It will continue to evolve throughout its lifetime and beyond, with regular review and updates as new insights and industry needs emerge. This ensures the approach remains current and responsive to continually strengthen the systems that support our equine athletes.

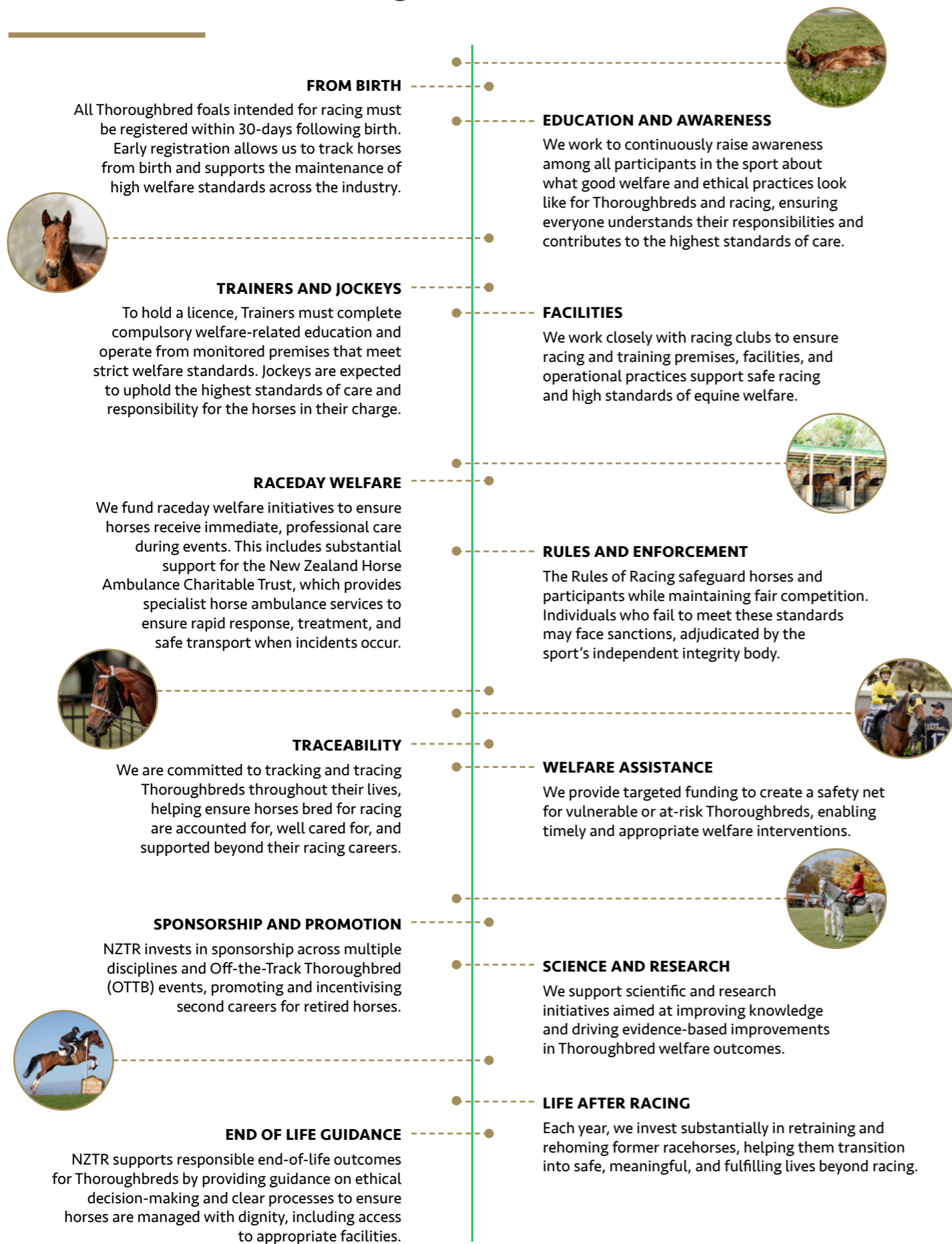
At the heart of the strategy is the principle that performance must never come at the cost of welfare. Every decision, from breeding and training through to racing, transition, and retirement, should be made with the horse's wellbeing as a central consideration. As with our previous strategies, the 2026-2030 edition has been informed by research evidence as well as leading welfare practices from international equine sport authorities, carefully selecting the most effective approaches to ensure New Zealand aligns with global best practice while remaining tailored to local contexts.

The strategy also establishes a clear commitment to traceability across the Thoroughbred lifecycle. This includes mandatory foal notification within 30 days of birth as the first step in lifelong traceability, continued tracking throughout racing-related activities, and best efforts to maintain visibility of a horse's whereabouts and welfare following retirement from racing.

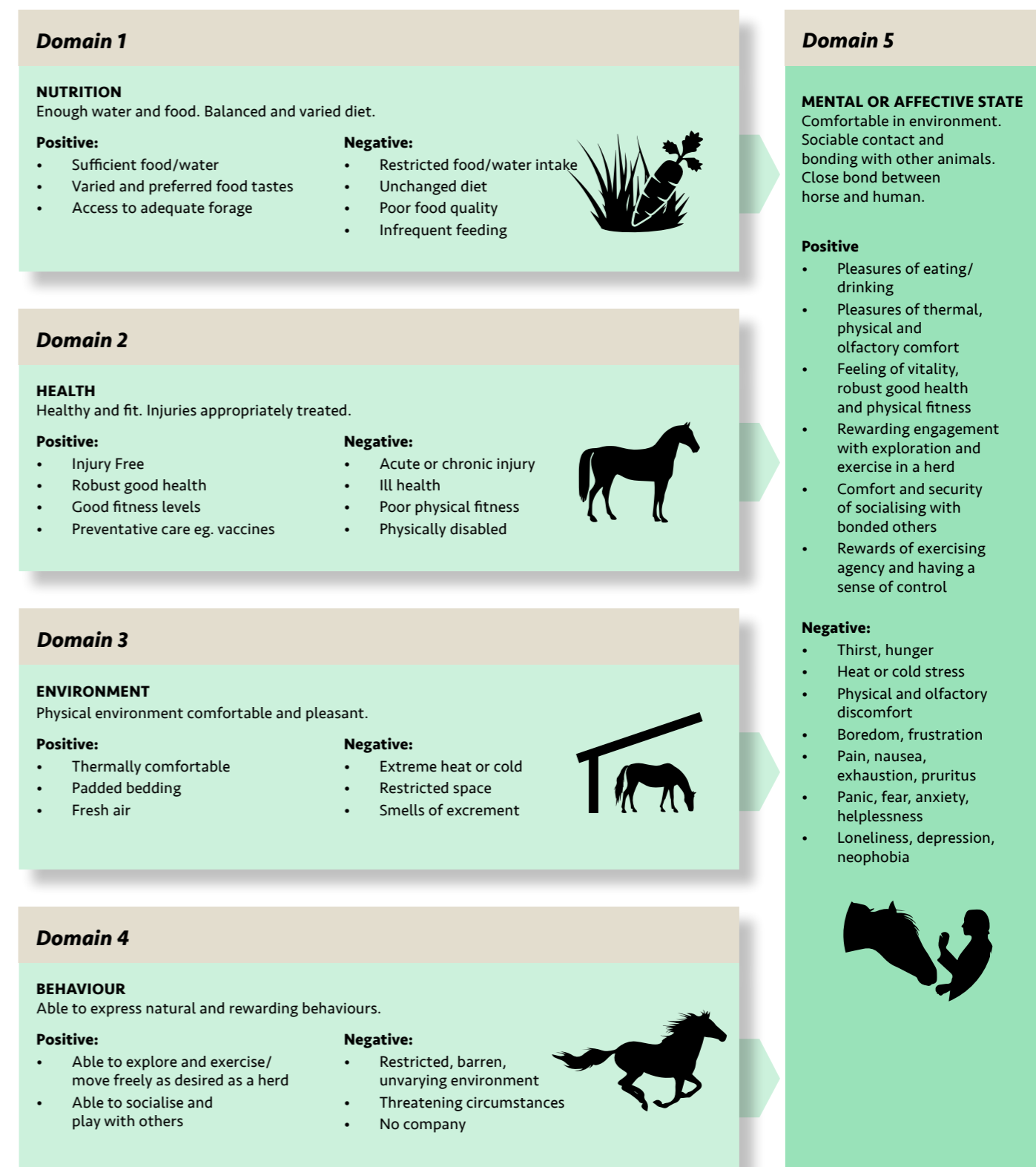
New Zealand's racing industry has both the capability and opportunity to deliver world-leading welfare for Thoroughbreds, supported by a skilled workforce, favourable environment, and high-quality bloodlines. As public and international expectations continue to change, improving consistency and accountability remains important. By embedding shared responsibility and applying evidence-based practices, this strategy provides a clear framework to ensure every Thoroughbred is well-cared for and valued throughout their life, better positioning New Zealand at the forefront of global Thoroughbred welfare leadership.

1. <https://nztr.co.nz/sites/nztrindustry/files/2023-03/Thoroughbred-Welfare-Strategy-Update-2022.pdf>

NZTR's Role in Thoroughbred Welfare



5 Domains Model of Animal Welfare¹



1. The 5 Domains Model for Thoroughbred Welfare was adapted by NZTR under the guidance of Professor Emeritus David J Mellor ONZM.

Our Vision, Purpose, Pledge

OUR VISION

Excellent Welfare, Every Thoroughbred, Every Day.

OUR PURPOSE

To maintain internationally recognised best-practice standards for Thoroughbred welfare in New Zealand, ensuring every horse is valued and responsibly cared for throughout its life.

OUR PLEDGE

We pledge to uphold and continuously advance the welfare, safety, and respect of Thoroughbreds by placing these considerations at the centre of our decision-making from birth through retirement and beyond.



Our Welfare Aspirations

The goals of this strategy give effect to a genuinely horse-centred approach to Thoroughbred racing and breeding in New Zealand. They provide practical expression to a system where welfare and performance are intrinsically linked, and where every decision is guided by what is best for the horse across its entire lifetime.

These goals are intentionally aspirational. They challenge the industry to lift standards beyond minimum compliance, to pursue safer systems and better outcomes, and to ensure shared responsibility for lifetime care. They also reinforce the importance of transparency and accountability in maintaining public confidence and aligning with evolving national and international expectations.

To ensure this strategy delivers meaningful and measurable outcomes, each strategic initiative has been directly aligned to one or more of the four targeted goals. This deliberate mapping ensures that all projects, investments, and policy decisions are clearly linked to the welfare outcomes we are seeking to achieve. By providing a connection between initiatives and goals, we can prioritise resources effectively, track progress, and demonstrate the real-world impact of our work for horses, participants, and the wider community.

OUR FOUR TARGETED GOALS:

- THRIVING THOROUGHBREDS**
Every Thoroughbred is supported to live a healthy and good life.
- EXCELLENCE IN SAFETY**
Relentlessly pursuing safer practices, facilities, and outcomes.
- PUBLIC CONFIDENCE**
Build and maintain trust through transparency, integrity, and evidence-based welfare standards.
- RESPONSIBLE CARE**
A shared commitment to lifetime welfare, with everyone understanding the significance of the part they play.



Our Strategic Initiatives

01. WELFARE AND SUPPORT

CONTEXT:

While most Thoroughbreds receive a high standard of care, welfare practices vary across training, racing, and retirement environments. Gaps remain in addressing behavioural and social needs alongside physical health, and awareness of welfare in all its forms is uneven across participants. Earlier identification of vulnerable horses and clearer support pathways are required.

OBJECTIVE:

Promote consistently high welfare standards to support the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of Thoroughbreds throughout all stages of life, while improving understanding of welfare responsibilities across the industry.

SUCCESS MEASURE:

Higher engagement with welfare education, improved audit outcomes, earlier identification of welfare concerns, and fewer repeat welfare issues.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

- Improvement in industry understanding of welfare best-practice based on the 5-domains model (survey-based)
- Year-on-year reduction in welfare-related charges, driven by improved rule compliance
- Measurable uplift in body scores for welfare supported horses



NEW INITIATIVES	SUMMARY	IMPACT PRIORITY	DELIVERY			GOALS TARGETED
			Y1	Y2	Y3+	
Euthanasia Guidelines	Publish clear, humane guidelines to support compassionate decision-making and ensure consistent end-of-life care for horses.	Critical	✓			3
Industry Transportation Guidelines	Develop and publish clear industry transportation guidelines that support safe and comfortable transport of horses.	Critical	✓			3
New Zealand Thoroughbred Welfare and Ethics Advisory Group	Establish an independent group of experts to provide advice on complex welfare and ethical issues and support sound decision-making.	Critical	✓			3
End-of-Life Pathways	Establish national processes, partnerships, and funding to ensure Thoroughbreds are managed with dignity at end of life, including access to appropriate facilities and humane disposal options across both islands.	Critical/High	✓	✓		3
Vulnerable Thoroughbred Safety-Net	A suite of support programmes to assist vulnerable Thoroughbreds, providing a safety net that includes emergency aid, disaster response, humane euthanasia support, short-term recovery assistance, lifelong emergency contact(s), and welfare check visits of retired thoroughbreds.	High	✓	✓		2
ONGOING INITIATIVES						
Welfare Assessment Guidelines	Review and update welfare guidelines so they reflect current best practice, set clear expectations for care, and support consistent welfare outcomes.	For review				3
Future Whip Use	Review whip use to ensure rules and penalties reflect current international practice, recent evidence and community expectations.	For review				2
Raceday Gear and Training Aids	Review the use of raceday gear and training aids to understand how equipment affects horse welfare, and update rules where needed.	For review				2
Stable Inspections	Work with the integrity body to support stable inspection processes that promote positive welfare outcomes and encourage compliance with welfare standards.	For review				3
International Welfare Standards	Continue to inform and adopt international best practice and evolving public expectations, to support lifelong welfare advancements for Thoroughbreds.	In progress				3
Biosecurity Efforts	Continue to work with government and industry partners to strengthen disease prevention and strengthen response and notification measures.	In progress				2

02. THOROUGHBRED TRACEABILITY

CONTEXT:

While most Thoroughbreds are registered, consistent tracking of location, ownership, and welfare status throughout their lifetime, particularly post-racing, remains incomplete. Frequent movement between environments and limited system integration reduce population visibility and oversight.

OBJECTIVE:

Strengthen lifetime traceability by ensuring Thoroughbreds are tracked from birth through racing and into retirement, while progressively improving visibility of retired horses.

SUCCESS MEASURE:

Improved accuracy and timeliness of lifetime horse tracking data, fewer unknown statuses, and stronger compliance with traceability requirements.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

- Increased traceability of Thoroughbreds, supported by accurate, complete, and status records
- 100% of retirement notifications lodged within required timeframes
- 100% of foals registered within 30 days



NEW INITIATIVES	SUMMARY	IMPACT PRIORITY	DELIVERY			GOALS TARGETED
			Y1	Y2	Y3+	
Traceability Systems and Processes	Improve systems and data quality to support accurate, efficient tracking of Thoroughbreds.	Critical / In progress	✓			2
Thoroughbred Traceability Amnesty Month	Provide a dedicated period for participants to update horse status information without penalty, improving the accuracy and completeness of traceability data.	Critical	✓			2
IDmyTB	Support widespread use of IDmyTB across the industry to improve traceability, information sharing, and real-time oversight of Thoroughbreds.	Critical	✓	✓		2
Sale Standards	Establish consistent sale standards for Thoroughbreds sold for racing or breeding to improve welfare outcomes, minimise risk at key transition points, and reinforce lifelong responsibility.	Critical	✓	✓	✓	4
Freeze Branding Practice	Review current freeze branding practices to assess welfare impacts, ongoing necessity, and potential alternatives that enhance identification and traceability outcomes.	Medium	✓	✓		2
Nationwide Thoroughbred Survey	Build a clear national picture of retired Thoroughbreds and their lives after racing, supporting targeted aftercare and strengthening public confidence through greater visibility of retired Thoroughbreds.	Medium	✓	✓		2
ONGOING INITIATIVES						
Rule Review	Review traceability rules and policies to improve clarity and consistency, helping participants better understand and meet registration requirements.	For review				2
Lifelong Traceability Collaboration	Continue to work with equestrian organisations and national registers to support ongoing traceability of Thoroughbreds beyond racing, helping maintain long-term welfare oversight.	In progress				2

03. SAFER RACING & TRAINING

CONTEXT:

As with all competitive sports, racing carries inherent risk, and safeguarding Thoroughbreds requires consistent standards, strong collaboration across participants, and the adoption of evidence-based practices to support continuous improvement.

While fatality data is well established, there is an opportunity to strengthen the collection and analysis of non-fatal injury data to be able to identify high risk conditions.

OBJECTIVE:

Reduce the risk of injury to Thoroughbreds through the consistent application of safe racing practices and protocols.

SUCCESS MEASURE:

Improved injury and incident data quality, enhanced injury surveillance, and increased adoption of agreed safety practices across training and racing.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

- Work to reduce fatalities and ensure rates remain among the lowest in the world
- Year-on-year increased number of accredited racing and training facilities
- Increased number of high-risk horses identified and assessed as suitable to race



NEW INITIATIVES	SUMMARY	IMPACT PRIORITY	DELIVERY			GOALS TARGETED
			Y1	Y2	Y3+	
Racecourse and Training Facility and Surface Standards	Establish best-practice welfare and surface standards for racecourses and training facilities, supported by accreditation and incentive frameworks that encourage safe and horse-centred environments.	High	✓	✓		3
Thoroughbred Health Reporting	Strengthen systems for collection and reporting of treatments, injuries, and incidents, helping identify risks early and support proactive safety measures.	High	✓	✓		3
Research Policy	Develop guidelines to support ethical, welfare-focused research and use the findings to improve outcomes for racing and breeding Thoroughbreds. Fund research that builds evidence and leads to practical improvements.	High	✓	✓		4
Predictive models of High-Risk Horses	Advance policy-supported, data-driven approaches to identifying horses at elevated welfare risk, enabling earlier, preventative decision-making across racing and training environments.	High	✓	✓	✓	3
Pre-race AI Gait Analysis	Explore the effective use of technology to assess how horses move before racing, helping detect early signs of injury and prevent harm.	High	✓	✓	✓	2
Wearable Technologies	Support the use of wearable tools in training and racing to monitor horses' wellbeing, helping carers identify risks early and keep horses safe.	Medium	✓	✓	✓	2
ONGOING INITIATIVES						
Equine Mortality Review Panel Findings	Use mortality data to understand common risks, share clear learnings, and take action to help prevent future harm.	For review				3
Suitability to Race	Review the current suitability to race rules to identify gaps for high-risk horses and adjust rules to reflect evidence-based welfare standards.	For review				3
Notifiable Treatments and Incidents	Review and strengthen how notifiable treatments, injuries, conditions, and incidents are reported, improving transparency, data quality, and early identification of welfare risks.	For review				3
New Zealand Horse Ambulance Service	Continue to provide operational and financial support to the NZ Horse Ambulance Trust, ensuring rapid, professional care for horses in need.	In progress				4
Innovation and Technology Safety Solutions	Continue to explore and adopt new innovations and technologies that improve safety in racing and training.	In progress				3

04. RETRAINING AND REHOMING

CONTEXT:

Many Thoroughbreds transition successfully out of racing; however, outcomes are inconsistent. Gaps in structured pathways, owner planning, and industry-wide coordination can leave some horses vulnerable at retirement.

OBJECTIVE:

Support successful transitions out of racing by strengthening structured pathways for retraining, rehoming, and retirement, while encouraging early owner planning and promoting the value of Thoroughbreds beyond the track.

SUCCESS MEASURE:

More consistent transitions out of racing, increased uptake of recognised retraining and rehoming pathways and earlier owner planning.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

- Increased % of retired Thoroughbreds transitioned through recognised pathways
- Increase in number of acknowledged retrainers participating in audited programmes
- Percentage of rehomed Thoroughbreds remaining in the same home after 12 months, as an indicator of successful long-term transition and wellbeing



NEW INITIATIVES	SUMMARY	IMPACT PRIORITY	DELIVERY			GOALS TARGETED
			Y1	Y2	Y3+	
Thoroughbred Transition Model	Deliver a refreshed, evidence-based transition model that establishes clear assessment and classification of Thoroughbred suitability for rehoming and second careers.	Critical	✓			
Off-the-Track Thoroughbred (OTTB) Community Support	Build a support network for off-the-track Thoroughbred owners, retrainers, and riders, providing advice, resources, and peer support.	High	✓	✓		
OTTB Opportunities Beyond Competition	Support partnerships and incentives that expand opportunities for off-the-track Thoroughbreds in leisure, lifestyle, therapy, and working roles beyond competition.	Medium	✓	✓		
ONGOING INITIATIVES						
Rehoming Model and Funding	Review and strengthen the retraining and rehoming model and funding approach to ensure it is sustainable, transparent, and delivers positive long-term outcomes for horses.	For review				
Sponsorship Model	Review and enhance the sponsorship model aimed at encouraging ownership of retired Thoroughbreds in second careers, growing participation, and supporting demand across equestrian sport.	For review				
Acknowledged Retainer Support	Expand education, mentoring, and professional development to support acknowledged retrainers and strengthen their skills and capability.	For review				
Education and Support for OTTB Owners and Riders	Continue and enhance education and support for OTTB owners and riders (clinics & coaching) to improve horse and rider outcomes.	In progress				

05. RESPONSIBLE BREEDING & OWNERSHIP

CONTEXT:

Responsible breeding and ownership underpin the long-term health and sustainability of the Thoroughbred industry. A skilled workforce, strong horsemanship, and favourable breeding environment support positive early-life welfare. However, greater consideration and accountability for the horse's full lifecycle is needed. Early experiences influence both racetrack performance and long-term welfare outcomes, placing responsibility on breeders and owners to proactively plan for the horse's care and maintain high welfare standards throughout its life.

OBJECTIVE:

Strengthen engagement with owners and breeders to support responsible practices and proactive lifecycle planning for Thoroughbred welfare and performance.

SUCCESS MEASURE:

Implementation of breeding welfare principles, supported by targeted engagement with breeders and owners and the introduction of accountability measures that promote responsible practices and long-term welfare outcomes.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

- Authorised syndicator framework updated to incorporate clear welfare and ownership responsibilities, with full adoption across all authorised syndicators.
- 100% of foals registered with a designated "Accountable Person" identified
- Higher percentage of Thoroughbreds bred for racing that achieve a race start



NEW INITIATIVES		SUMMARY	IMPACT PRIORITY	DELIVERY Y1 Y2 Y3+	GOALS TARGETED
Breeder Welfare and Traceability	Work with breeders to review breeder-specific rules and assurance frameworks to improve welfare outcomes, support accurate breeder declarations, and enhance traceability, promoting greater transparency and shared responsibility across the breeding community.	Critical	✓ ✓	3 goals targeted	
Life-Cycle Planning	Develop and implement lifecycle planning guidance for Thoroughbred breeders and owners, supporting proactive decision-making and responsible care throughout the horse's life.	High	✓ ✓	3 goals targeted	
Responsible Syndication	Review authorised syndicator criteria to ensure they reflect Thoroughbred welfare responsibilities and responsible ownership practices and explore the potential for an accreditation scheme.	High	✓ ✓	3 goals targeted	
Thoroughbred Population Analysis	Use population insights to guide education and racing incentives that support responsible, high-quality breeding decisions.	Medium	✓ ✓	3 goals targeted	
ONGOING INITIATIVES					
Thoroughbred Breeding Welfare Guidelines	Collaborate with relevant associations to review and update breeding welfare guidelines, ensuring they reflect current knowledge, align with international best practice, and promote responsible breeding, early education and lifelong care.	For Review		3 goals targeted	
Breeder Engagement	Strengthen engagement, education, and advocacy to embed a welfare-focused breeding culture.	In Progress		3 goals targeted	

06. EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

CONTEXT:

Public trust in the New Zealand Thoroughbred industry depends on transparency, accountability, and collective responsibility for horse welfare. While strong expertise exists, consistent understanding and application of welfare standards must be supported and clearly demonstrated.

OBJECTIVE:

Enhance transparency and accountability while equipping participants with education, guidance, and a culture that supports high-quality care and best-practice welfare.

SUCCESS MEASURE:

Increased engagement with welfare communications, improved understanding of welfare obligations, and regular transparent reporting of welfare outcomes.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

- Year-on-year growth in engagement with welfare resources
- Improvement in industry welfare knowledge and attitudes (survey-based)
- Grow stakeholder and public trust and confidence measures (survey-based)



NEW INITIATIVES	SUMMARY	IMPACT PRIORITY	DELIVERY			GOALS TARGETED
			Y1	Y2	Y3+	
Public Trust and Perception Study	Establish a baseline of public perceptions and attitudes toward horse welfare across equestrian sport, then track changes over time through an annual pulse survey to inform industry action and measure shifts in public sentiment.	Critical	✓			2
Industry Welfare Survey	Establish an industry-wide benchmark of understanding and attitudes toward horse welfare, supported by an annual survey to track change over time, inform education initiatives, drive cultural change, and guide future priorities.	Critical	✓			3
Dedicated Welfare Webpage	Launch a central, trusted site for welfare guidance, policies, research, and support resources.	Critical	✓			3
Annual Reporting	Publish a clear, comprehensive annual report on welfare performance, initiatives, and outcomes.	High	✓			1
Welfare Communications Strategy	Develop and implement a transparent, proactive and targeted communications strategy to engage industry participants on horse welfare and build understanding of key expectations and changes.	High	✓	✓		2
Owner Engagement	Targeted engagement with owners to improve understanding of costs, lifelong responsibility, and planning for horses' lives after racing.	High	✓	✓		2
Welfare Educational Resources	Develop a range of accessible welfare learning resources to support consistent standards and flexible, anytime learning across the industry.	High	✓	✓	✓	2
ONGOING INITIATIVES						
Enhanced Reporting	Provide clear reporting on the Thoroughbred welfare fund to show how funds are allocated and spent, building trust and transparency.	In Progress				2
Whole-Horse Welfare: Mental and Physical Wellbeing	Promote a holistic approach to Thoroughbred welfare by supporting greater understanding of mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing.	In Progress				3
Industry Ambassadors	Engage respected industry figures to champion best practice, welfare, and traceability, and support positive cultural change.	In Progress				3
Welfare Competency	Strengthen welfare competency expectations through licensing and education pathways, reinforcing shared responsibility for welfare outcomes.	In Progress				3
Public Connection with Thoroughbreds	Continue to grow public events and enhance storytelling that celebrate Thoroughbreds and promote awareness of their welfare and care. E.g., National Thoroughbred Week	In Progress				2
Thoroughbreds' Successful Post-Racing Transition	Work with the industry to promote early education, handling, and exposure that support smoother and more successful transitions after racing.	In Progress				2



Enablers and Acknowledgment



Our Critical Enablers

Achieving the goals of this strategy requires more than good intentions. It depends on strong foundations that enable consistent and effective action across the Thoroughbred racing and breeding sectors.

These critical enablers describe the systems, structures and behaviours that must be in place for the strategy to succeed. Together, they support a genuinely horse-centred approach by ensuring decisions are informed by evidence, delivered by capable people, governed with clarity, and backed by appropriate resources.

They also recognise that welfare outcomes are shaped not only by rules and policies, but by leadership, culture, technology, and collaboration across the industry. By strengthening these foundations, the industry is better equipped to manage risk, drive continuous improvement, and meet both public and international expectations for lifetime care of Thoroughbreds.

The following enablers set out what must be established and maintained to turn this strategy into meaningful, measurable welfare outcomes for Thoroughbred to live a good life.

Delivering this strategy depends on a number of key foundations being in place:

- **Funding and Resources**
Sustainable and targeted investment that prioritises initiatives delivering the greatest long-term benefit to Thoroughbred welfare.
- **Leadership and Accountability**
Clear governance structures, defined roles, and visible leadership that set expectations and ensure consistent welfare outcomes across the industry.
- **Skilled People and Culture**
A skilled, well-supported and connected workforce that puts welfare first and encourages learning and improvement.
- **Information and Data**
Robust data collection, analysis and reporting systems that guide decision-making, enable early risk identification, and measure welfare outcomes over time.
- **Standards and Guidelines**
Up-to-date welfare standards will provide clarity and consistency at every stage of a Thoroughbred's life.
- **Technology and Infrastructure**
Fit-for-purpose systems will support monitoring, traceability, reporting, and information sharing to strengthen welfare oversight.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Partnerships**
Proactive, transparent engagement supported by a comprehensive welfare strategy that delivers our objectives and shared responsibility for Thoroughbred welfare.
- **Continuous Improvement and Innovation**
Ongoing review, innovation and adoption of best practice to respond to emerging risks, new evidence and changing expectations.
- **Legislative Alignment**
Alignment of all initiatives with New Zealand animal welfare legislation and relevant Codes of Welfare to ensure compliance and collaboration and reinforce public confidence.



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