



19 February 2025

## CIRCULAR 2501

### FIRST DRAFT 2025/26 DATES CALENDAR

#### Introduction

On Friday 14 February HRNZ received the first draft 2025/26 Dates Calendar. The release was delayed from pre-Christmas due to ongoing discussions between Entain and NZTR.

Please note that the proposed additional dates **are not funded at this time**. They are subject to the outcome of the code funding negotiations and the availability of additional funding.

Responses are due from harness clubs and kindred bodies **by close of business Tuesday 4 March 2025** and should be **emailed to Matthew Peden** (HRNZ Head of Racing & Wagering) at [matthew.peden@hrnz.co.nz](mailto:matthew.peden@hrnz.co.nz). HRNZ has been asked to respond to the Dates Committee by 7 March 2025.

We will be conducting an internal review in the week of 3<sup>rd</sup> March. Club comments will be considered then.

#### Strategy

A reminder of our overall strategic approach under The Future Starts Now:

- a. The **focus is on sustaining and growing harness racing as a national** industry. The alternative would impose significant limitations on future growth.
- b. **Building a harness racing infrastructure of horses and bettors in the upper North Island** remains central to our future, particularly as Auckland is the nation's economic centre.
- c. **Increasing horse retention and utilisation by creating opportunities** for horses to race more frequently.
- d. **Generating new punters and increased punting** from the current product: Friday Night Lights is succeeding in attracting new punters to Friday night, increasing the number betting on both meetings and increasing the average bet size. Harness punters are up 15% in total (110,000) and 11% on a regular weekly basis (six months to 31 January 2025).
- e. **Increasing the hype and buzz** around our feature races and carnivals. While the principle that stake distribution is a strategic investment is valid, its impact should be measured over the medium to longer term, (not just three or four months). For example, **our Cup Week investments and NZTR's Karaka Millions and other \$1M races are not expected to pay for themselves purely through wagering** - their purpose is to showcase the industry, increase relevance, and drive long-term participation.

- f. Focussing on **factors that are within our control and influence**, particularly turnover. Margin and GBR are generally beyond our control. GBR is inherently volatile, particularly given the increasing share of fixed odds turnover. This makes short-term comparisons like the ones often presented by social media commentators unreliable.

## Summary

### Total meetings

Region	Meetings	Percentage	Increase
North Island	111	35.7	2
Upper South Island	128	43.7	9
Southern	61	20.7	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>11</b>

The proposed meeting changes by club:

- a. Auckland - 3 new
- b. Cambridge - 3 new
- c. Kapiti Coast - 2 less
- d. Manawatu - 2 less
- e. Ashburton - 1 new
- f. NZMTC - 8 new
- g. Methven - 1 new
- h. Rangiora - 1 less
- i. Forbury - 1 less
- j. Invercargill - 1 new

Within the draft calendar there have been some meeting date movements for various reasons including seeking greater Sunday racing, Trackside servicing and public holidays.

Some of these movements were not at HRNZ's request. In our response we will address issues raised by clubs affected by calendar changes.

## Specifics

### World Drivers Championship (WDC)

HRNZ is hosting the WDC in early November. Our tentative programme is:

Date: November 2025	Racetrack	Number of Races
<i>Saturday 1<sup>st</sup>: Welcome and briefing in Christchurch, New Zealand, travel to Kaikoura</i>		
Sunday 2 <sup>nd</sup> and Monday 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Kaikoura Raceway, Kaikoura TC	Five (5)
Wednesday 5 <sup>th</sup>	Ashburton Raceway, Ashburton TC	Five (5)
Friday 7 <sup>th</sup>	Addington Raceway, Christchurch NZMTC	Five (5)
Sunday 9 <sup>th</sup>	Central Southland Raceway, Winton TC	Four (4)
Tuesday 11 <sup>th</sup>	Addington Raceway, Christchurch, NZMTC	One (1)

WDC heats require 10 horses and two emergencies.

The Rangiora meeting on the Friday before Cup Week will become a permanent NZMTC meeting as part of the overall "Cup Week" reshaping. The Ashburton meeting may be a one-off meeting to facilitate the WDC.

### Auckland Trotting Club

- a. The season will start on 23 January with another meeting on 30 January.
- b. The third new meeting is simply a function of the season starting on 1 August.

### **Waikato Bay of Plenty**

- a. The spring season runs deeper into November with a new date and a Manawatu Sunday transferred to Cambridge. Similarly, there are new dates in February.
- b. Two late-January Fridays are transferred to ATC so that Friday Night Lights commences earlier.
- c. The Auckland Anniversary Day meeting will be a grass track meeting at Taupo. HRNZ is investigating further grass track options in the north.

### **Manawatu and Lower North Island**

- a. HRNZ is reviewing the January lower North Island programme. We are meeting with the clubs on Tuesday 25 February in Palmerston North. Horse participation and turnovers have been disappointing.
- b. The thoroughbred's Wellington Cup meeting has moved to the last weekend of January. Due to Trackside servicing requirements Hawera cannot continue on its traditional weekend. The Hawera two days have been moved to Sunday 18 January and Tuesday 20 January.
- c. Kapiti Coast's two days plus a four-race mini meeting have been reduced to one day, subject to the review.
- d. Manawatu is reduced by two days, subject to the review.

### **NZMTC (Addington)**

- a. Eight additional lower grade Wednesday meetings have been added to the Addington programme.
- b. We will be seeking an eight race NZMTC meeting on Friday 20 February 2026 opposite Wyndham at Cromwell.
- c. The Friday prior to Cup Week will become a permanent NZMTC meeting.
- d. The two premier meetings in late November and early December are replaced with a new premier meeting on the Friday after Show Day. The programme on that day will include:
  - i. The Christian Cullen 4YO Pace
  - ii. The NZ Oaks and Derby (pacing)
  - iii. The NZ Oaks and Derby (trotting)
  - iv. A feature mares trot
  - v. A feature trot
- e. The four Group 1 2YO Aces programmed on the first Friday of December have been deleted. The \$400,000 of funding will be re-allocated, some to improving the lead-in races to the Cup Week juvenile races. Major 2YO racing in the South Island will end during Cup week. This change will support northern horses remaining in Christchurch an extra week.

### **Southern Harness**

- a. Southern Harness Sunday meetings increase to 33 from 20 this season.
- b. Forbury Park TC has given up an Oamaru date and is seeking at least one additional four-meeting date at Wingatui.



**Brad Steele**  
Chief Executive