

Media Release

Harness Racing New Zealand consults on draft pathway to a sustainable future.

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

HRNZ media release – embargoed until 16:30, 31 July 2026.

Harness Racing New Zealand (HRNZ) has released for consultation a draft of its 2027–2029 Statement of Intent, setting out proposed changes to its plans for the next three years.

HRNZ has been granted an extension until 11 September 2026 to submit its final Statement of Intent to the Minister for Racing. The extension will allow HRNZ to complete consultation and continue working constructively with New Zealand Thoroughbred Racing (NZTR) and TAB New Zealand on the funding structure that will underpin the final plan.

HRNZ continues to work collaboratively with NZTR through ongoing discussions with TAB New Zealand to achieve the best available and most sustainable funding structure for both codes. Any final inter-code funding arrangements will be agreed jointly by HRNZ and NZTR before being incorporated into the final Statement of Intent.

Over the past two years, HRNZ has invested in strengthening the sport through The Future Starts Now strategy, with increased stakes, additional racing opportunities and targeted industry initiatives. This investment has contributed to consecutive years of wagering growth and stronger participant engagement, providing the industry with a stronger platform for the future.

HRNZ Chair Grant Jarrold said the organisation was making difficult but necessary decisions to ensure the long-term sustainability of the sport.

"The transition from investment to sustainability was always envisaged as part of *The Future Starts Now*. The draft Statement of Intent reflects the funding information currently available and the need for HRNZ to plan prudently while the final funding structure continues to be worked through.

"We are working constructively with NZTR and TAB New Zealand to achieve the best sustainable funding outcomes available. Any final decisions will be made carefully and with the long-term interests of harness racing at the forefront".

"These proposals contained in the draft haven't been developed lightly. They reflect what's needed to bring our spending into line with the funding available while protecting grassroots racing and the pathways that matter most to our participants."

As part of the proposed reset, the draft Statement of Intent identifies potential savings across the national racing programme. The proposal includes targeted stakes adjustments, revisions to race programming, possible changes to funding provided to clubs and further efficiencies within HRNZ's own operations.

A key priority throughout the review process has been protecting grassroots racing wherever practicable. The \$8,000 minimum stakes policy has been maintained, with a greater proportion of funding reductions applied at the upper end of the racing programme.

"We have worked hard to preserve participation opportunities and maintain recognised pathways for horses, trainers, drivers and owners throughout the sport", Jarrold said.

"Continuing the current level of expenditure under the funding assumptions presently available would not be sustainable. We believe proposals represent the practical minimum required to align expenditure with available funding and place harness racing on a stronger and more sustainable footing for the future.

HRNZ will carefully consider the feedback received, together with the outcome of the continuing funding discussions, before finalising its position. Our overriding responsibility is to act in the best long-term interests of harness racing, its participants and the communities it supports".

The proposals outlined in the draft form part of HRNZ's broader programme of work to ensure the long-term sustainability of harness racing in New Zealand.

HRNZ will now consult with clubs and relevant industry stakeholders before finalising the Statement of Intent. That process will occur alongside continuing discussions with NZTR and TAB New Zealand regarding the final funding structure.

The final Statement of Intent will be submitted to the Minister for Racing by 11 September 2026. In completing that work, HRNZ will remain focused on acting in the best long-term interests of harness racing and securing a sustainable platform for its participants, clubs and communities.

ENDS

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Following a review of *The Future Starts Now* strategy and based on funding information and assumptions currently available for 2026/27, HRNZ is proposing transitioning from an investment phase to operating within available funding.

The proposals contained in the draft are intended to return HRNZ to a sustainable operating position while preserving the core of the racing programme and maintaining meaningful opportunities for participants across New Zealand.

Principles guiding the decisions.

Throughout the review process HRNZ has sought to:

- preserve grassroots racing wherever practicable.
- maintain meaningful racing opportunities across all regions.
- protect recognised pathways from grassroots through to elite competition.
- retain an aspirational Group and Feature racing structure.
- improve programme functionality and wagering outcomes.
- better align industry investment with demonstrated participation and commercial performance
- deliver sustainable expenditure reductions while minimising impacts on participants.

What is proposed in the draft?

The following proposals remain subject to consultation, the conclusion of funding discussions, HRNZ Board consideration and completion of the final Statement of Intent.

- The draft proposes a 2026/27 racing programme comprising 274 race meetings and approximately 2,565 races, compared with 288 race meetings and 2,700 races in 2025/26. These figures remain subject to final confirmation.
- Stakes will be adjusted across the national racing programme, with a greater proportion of the reductions applied at the higher end of the programme.
- The Group and Feature Race Calendar has been reviewed to align expenditure with available funding while maintaining the standing and integrity of the sport's premier races.
- Slot races will not form part of the 2026/27 racing programme.
- Race programming has been refined to improve field size, quality and wagering outcomes.
- HRNZ will reduce its own operating and administration costs as part of the wider programme of savings.

- Changes to club funding arrangements will be communicated directly to clubs.
- HRNZ will continue to review the racing calendar and programme to ensure it remains sustainable and fit for purpose.

What is being protected?

- The \$8,000 minimum stakes policy will be maintained.
- Base Race Funding at the lowest funding tiers has been prioritised to protect grassroots racing and participation.
- Recognised pathways for horses, owners, trainers and drivers will be retained.
- Meaningful racing opportunities will continue to be provided across all regions.
- The Group and Feature programme will continue to provide aspirational racing opportunities.

Approach to Group and Feature racing

In reviewing Group and Feature race investment, HRNZ has applied one consistent test:

To what level can investment be reduced while continuing to deliver substantially the same racing outcome?

This approach has enabled expenditure to be reduced while maintaining the standing, competitive quality and purpose of the industry's premier races.

Media contact:

David Di Somma

HRNZ News Desk and Content

Harness Racing NZ

+6421 316966