



NATIONAL FORUM EXECUTIVE

PO Box 31-209

Christchurch

National Forum – Summary Report

Meeting: National Forum (Teams)

Date: 26 March 2026

Time: 7:00pm – 9.35pm

1. Attendance

Present: John Hartnell (Chair), Nigel Armstrong, Penny Baynes, Doug Gale, Jamie MacKinnon, Katrina Price, Rob Lawson, Hamish Scott, Graham Sinnamon, Ben Smith.

Secretary: Catherine McLeavy

Apologies: Murray Little.

HRNZ Representatives: 7.45pm-9.20pm: Grant Jarrold, Brad Steele, Matt Peden.

2. Purpose

To discuss key industry matters and engage directly with Harness Racing New Zealand (HRNZ) on current priorities and emerging issues.

3. Agenda Items

a. Handicapping Review

Discussion:

Forum members discussed the operation of the handicapping system, particularly at lower rating levels, noting challenges in achieving competitive race outcomes.

HRNZ Response:

HRNZ confirmed the system is under review, with sufficient data now available to assess performance. Refinements are being considered, with timing likely aligned to the winter period.

Outcome:

It was noted that alignment between handicapping and programming is critical to achieving intended outcomes.

b. Look North Strategy Review

Discussion:

The forum sought an update on the midpoint review of the Look North / Future Starts Now strategy.

HRNZ Response:



HRNZ advised that a data-driven review has been completed and is currently being discussed with affected clubs prior to wider communication.

Outcome:

It was noted that outcomes will be communicated following club engagement.

c. Project Stamina

Discussion:

Clarification was sought regarding process, timing and decision-making.

HRNZ Response:

HRNZ confirmed the project remains in the analysis phase, with draft findings expected in May–June 2026. Final decisions will sit with code boards.

Outcome:

The process was noted as ongoing.

d. Ministerial Review

Discussion & Response:

Due to confidentiality, no substantive update was provided.

Outcome:

The item was noted.

e. Entain – Growth & Future Focus

Discussion:

The forum discussed wagering trends and the extent to which growth is benefiting racing.

HRNZ Response:

HRNZ confirmed that recent growth has been primarily driven by sports betting, with limited uplift from racing to date.

Outcome:

It was noted that improving racing engagement remains an important focus.

f. HRNZ Board Vacancy

Discussion & Response:

HRNZ advised that the recruitment process has been paused and will be progressed alongside the AGM cycle.

Outcome:

The item was noted.

g. Breeding Incentives

Discussion:

The forum discussed opportunities to support breeding activity, including potential timing of incentives.

HRNZ Response:

HRNZ confirmed that a review is underway, including consideration of earlier release of incentives and improved communication.

Outcome:

The item was noted as active.

h. Governance Training

Discussion & Response:

Governance training was discussed as a potential initiative. HRNZ noted that funding would be required and may be considered in future budgets.

Outcome:

The item was noted.

i. Communication & Reporting

Discussion:

The forum discussed the accessibility and clarity of current reporting.

HRNZ Response:

HRNZ acknowledged that while reporting exists, there is an opportunity to improve consolidation and accessibility.

Outcome:

It was noted that enhanced national-level reporting would be beneficial and should be considered a priority.

j. Greyhound Position

Discussion:

The forum sought clarity on the implications of the greyhound racing exit.

HRNZ Response:

HRNZ advised that transition and rehoming costs will be prioritised, with timing of any redistribution of funding remaining uncertain.

Outcome:

The item was noted.

k. Auckland & Cambridge

Discussion:

Northern performance and race scheduling were discussed.

HRNZ Response:

HRNZ noted that earlier start times in Auckland have shown positive results, and that broader northern performance is being assessed through the Look North review.

Outcome:

The item was noted.

l. Export Fee

Discussion:

The forum discussed the recent change to export fees and associated settings.

HRNZ Response:

HRNZ advised the revised fee reflects current costs and aligns with comparable jurisdictions. A flat fee was adopted for simplicity.

Outcome:

The item was noted.

4. General Discussion

The forum discussed broader industry themes, including:

- Horse utilisation and participation
- Allocation of funding across the industry
- Long-term sustainability and transparency
- TripleSData information availability, and use for wagering

These matters reinforced the importance of:

- Effective programming
- Clear reporting
- Ongoing engagement between clubs and HRNZ

5. Meeting Close

The Chair thanked attendees and closed the meeting.