



21 May 2025

## OFFICIAL NOTICE

### 2025/26 DATES CALENDAR

#### Introduction

On Monday 19 May Entain and TAB NZ advised that the 2025/26 Dates Calendar had been formally approved for release.

Attached is the Final Dates Calendar for 2025/26.

#### Additional Dates Subject to Funding

The calendar contains a net change of 15 additional dates:

- the increased dates are: ATC (4), Banks Peninsula (1), Invercargill (1), Methven (1), NZMTC (6), Oamaru (3) and WBOP (4)
- the reduced dates are: Forbury (1 relinquished), Kapiti Coast (2), Manawatu (1) and Rangiora (1).

The 15 additional meetings are subject to the final code funding agreement. Negotiations are continuing with TAB NZ and are expected to be confirmed before the end of June 2025. Clubs will be updated as soon as possible.

#### 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 wagering** from the current product: Friday Night Lights is succeeding in attracting new punters to Friday night.
- 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).
- 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 unreliable.

## Summary

The summary of the harness dates:

**Table 1: HRNZ licence count by weekday by season.**

Count of Dates	DOW							
Season	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Grand Total
2024/25	10	47	20	40	98	10	64	289
2025/26	8	13	28	71	102	3	79	304
Delta	-2	-34	8	31	4	-7	15	15

HRNZ's 2025/26 calendar totals 304 licences and 2,817 races, representing an increase of +15 licences and +146 races, when compared to the final 2024/25 calendar. Harness now has 28 Sundays with two meetings, double the current season. Only three Saturday meetings have been retained, Gore, Geraldine and NZMTC Easter.

## Specifics

Key changes from the draft calendar as circulated to clubs, and the submissions received.

### Auckland Trotting Club

- ATC wrote accepting the proposed dates, including four extra meetings.
- One additional is for a planned grass track meeting at Ruakaka on Easter Monday, 6 April.
- One additional due to calendar impact of 1 August being a Friday, and two new dates.

### Waikato Bay of Plenty

- Three additional Thursdays.
- The Auckland Anniversary Monday on a grass track meeting at Taupo. If this is successful HRNZ with Taupo Racing will develop additional meetings.

### Lower North Island

- In reviewing the effectiveness of the lower North Island January circuit, factors such as horse numbers, field sizes and wagering outcomes were considered, alongside the necessary adjustment of Hawera dates to accommodate the rescheduling of Wellington Cup Day at Trentham to 31 January. As a result, the circuit has been redesigned to create improved continuity, including additional racing opportunities through a new Manawatu meeting scheduled for Thursday, 8 January, and a WBOP meeting on the grass track at Taupo on 26 January.
- Kapiti Coast has lost the date Manawatu made available to it this season, and the early January mini meeting.
- Hawera club wrote saying they were happy to play their part in lower North Island racing with the changed dates. They requested an additional date which has not been possible this year.

### Manawatu

- Manawatu's submission argued for retaining 18 meetings. The calendar has 17 meetings. We have provided a Tuesday/Thursday racing scenario in most cases.
- The club asked for more Sunday / Tuesday sets with an earlier start. This has not been possible due to the increase in Trackside 1 Sunday commitments which generally allow only three equine meetings and one greyhound meeting
- Tuesday 18 November was transferred to WBOP (20 November) because there was no Manawatu Thursday meeting.
- A new meeting is scheduled for Thursday 8 January
- Tuesday 10 February WBOP meeting was transferred to Manawatu as requested.
- Thursday 9 April, a new meeting, to match 7 April with the club retaining Sunday 19 April.

**Wairarapa**

- a. The club asked for one of its dates at Manawatu restored to it. The club sponsor's a very successful Tuesday Manawatu meeting with members and sponsors travelling from Masterton. We have left the licence with Manawatu, with Wairarapa retaining a single licence for the iconic dual code January meeting.

**Nelson**

- a. Nelson requested an additional two-day meeting in June 2026 and the Timaru meeting scheduled the week prior to its January dates removed. We were unable to find suitable dates for this meeting. Considerations include preserving Friday Night Lights at Addington and Trackside servicing.
- b. The Timaru 7 January date provides racing opportunities for the significant number of horses in work in Canterbury that chose not to travel. The 2025 meeting was a turnover success.

**Methven**

- a. Methven wrote confirming that it was okay with all the dates.
- b. Methven's Friday meeting late October, prior to the Kaikoura two-day meeting, has been transferred to 18 December 2025
- c. Methven has an additional Sunday 22 March 2026.

**Amberley**

- a. The draft calendar had the club's only meeting on Thursday 5 February. HRNZ was successful in moving this meeting to Friday 6 February, Waitangi Day, as part of FNL. This is a one-off given that Waitangi Day moves across the weekly calendar, and the success of the Amberley meeting

**Akaroa**

- a. A club request to secure a Sunday succeeded with a move to Sunday 22 October from the draft calendar's Thursday 27 November.

**Banks Peninsula**

- a. The club sought additional dates, particularly in the two months from late September.
- b. A clash with Akaroa around 23 and 27 November has been resolved.
- c. The club sought an early to mid-January Sunday meeting – this is not possible with the Seddon's district circuit
- d. Wednesday 22 April – extra date.

**NZMTC**

- a. Six additional lower grade Wednesday meetings have been added to the Addington programme.
- b. The draft calendar proposed an eight-race NZMTC meeting on Friday 20 February 2026 opposite Wyndham at Cromwell as part of FNL. This was not proceeded with and replaced with a meeting on Thursday 19 February.
- c. The Friday prior to Cup Week will become a permanent NZMTC meeting. This was a Rangiora date.
- d. The two Premier meetings in late November and early December are replaced with a new Premier meeting on the Friday after Show Day. Cup Day increased to 13 races.

**Ashburton**

- a. Ashburton meeting has been transferred from 26 February to Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> February. This is opposite the second day of Wyndham at Cromwell. The thoroughbred racing club meeting formerly on Sunday 22 February is now on Friday 20 February.

**Timaru**

- a. HRNZ is working with the club to find a better option for its Cup meeting than Wednesday 3 December.
- b. The club is willing to service additional dates if they become available.

**Geraldine**

- a. Geraldine requested an additional date, proposing 19 October or 9 November. The former is an Ashburton Racing Club date while the latter is at the start of Cup Week and Entain staffing considerations means there are no Canterbury meetings on that date or Sunday 16 November.

**Waikouaiti**

- a. The club, with Central Otago, registered an interest in running the February Wyndham dates at Cromwell if the Wyndham club relinquished them. This is not happening.

**Oamaru**

- a. Took up Sunday 19 October from Sunday 12 October (now Akaroa).
- b. Wednesday 21 January 2026 taken up, a date relinquished by Forbury.
- c. The club is concerned with the lack of racing between March and September. A submission has been received proposing low grade winter racing, which HRNZ has under consideration.

**Forbury Park**

- a. The club sought a two-day date combination for a new Wingatui meeting, particularly for the wider Dunedin owner/trainer catchment. It has not been possible to find a suitable date arrangement.

**Central Otago**

- a. The club expressed concern about the lack of Otago meetings from mid-March until August (Kurow). Concern was also expressed about the programming of Canterbury meetings “in competition” with the summer circuits. The submission queried the ATC New Year’s Eve meeting taking horses away from the Central circuit.

**Northern Southland**

- a. A request was received to move Thursday 15 January to the next day. The new calendar gives the club two Thursdays and a Sunday (previously a Saturday). The club would prefer to return to Saturday. However, Saturdays are producing extremely poor returns for harness and our policy is to minimise them. Obtaining more Southern Harness Sundays is a priority.
- b. The Thursday 15 January was retained to run opposite Kapiti Coast that afternoon.

**Invercargill**

- a. Thursday 16 October, twilight, from 19 October which is now Oamaru.
- b. Friday 19 December, Cup Day increased to 11 races.

**Winton**

- a. The club submitted for additional Sundays in the summer/autumn and a new date for the Winton Cup and other features in April
- b. Regained Friday 31 October from the draft calendar date of Thursday 30 October. Thoroughbred meeting moved.
- c. Sunday 9 November, swapped with Wyndham to 16 November for World Drivers’ Championship.
- d. Sunday 12 April new date for Cup meeting, swap with Wairio.

**Wairio**

- a. Thursday 16 April, swap with Winton which goes to Sunday 12 April.

**Wyndham**

- a. Requested that NZMTC meeting on 20 February be moved – done.
- b. The club proposed swapping a dual code meeting at Wingatui (Forbury) from Sunday 15 March to Saturday 14 March. This is not possible for several reasons, particularly Entain Saturday racing priorities.
- c. 16 November swapped out 9 November with Winton for World Driver's Championship. The club's request to be considered for the WDC was noted.

**Southern Harness**

Southern Harness wrote with a list of submissions including those noted above by the individual clubs, together with meeting start time changes and alterations to the number of races.

**Feature Race Dates**

Several clubs wrote asking for changes to the dates for Feature races – those will be addressed next week as we construct the draft Group and Feature race dates.

**Final Note**

On behalf of Harness Racing New Zealand, I extend our heartfelt thanks to every club that took the time to make a submission as part of the Annual Dates Calendar Review process.

We are especially mindful that the majority of club committees are made up of volunteers who generously give their time, energy, and expertise to support and promote harness racing in their regions. Your dedicated service is the backbone of our industry, and we are truly grateful for the vital role you play.

The passion and thoughtfulness shown in your submissions speak volumes about your commitment to harness racing. It is encouraging to see such alignment across the country as we all work towards the shared goal of advancing and strengthening the sport in New Zealand.

Thank you again for your ongoing contributions. We value your voice, your dedication, and your partnership as we continue to shape a positive and sustainable future for harness racing.

With sincere appreciation



**Brad Steele**  
Chief Executive