

UTILISATION REFERENCE GROUP

REPORT # 2: Racing Guidelines & Other Matters

10 August 2024

This is the second report of the Utilisation Reference Group (URG). The URG reviewed the submissions received on Report #1, has had several Zoom sessions, and a follow-up meeting of HRNZ staff and racing managers in late May. This draft has been shared with the Executive of the NZ Harness Trainers and Drivers Assn which provided feedback that was incorporated.

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Comments Welcome

The URG's First Report is available at <https://www.hrnz.co.nz/assets/Utilisation-Reference-Group-Report-1-190224-v3-1.pdf> .

This draft for consultation.

Comments are welcome to john.mooney@hrnz.co.nz by close of business Monday 26 August 2024.

1. National Racing Bureau

National Racing Bureau -see Section 7 of our February Report: briefly its functions, described in detail in Annex A, will include:

- a. Ensuring that race programs reflect the programming principles outlined in Section 3 below, i.e. maximising turnover, providing opportunities for horses to race at their level of ability while protecting animal welfare.
- b. Responsibility for programming of races for the season, in consultation with clubs and regional programming bodies;
- c. Publishing programs and dates for feature races and race series so that owners and trainers can better plan the race program for their horses.
- d. Extending the use of conditioned programming to achieve consistency of fields and fairness in racing opportunities.

- e. Publishing tentative race programs at least two months in advance and confirmed programs three weeks in advance.
- f. Providing services relating to nominations, withdrawals, composition of fields, driver nominations, scratchings and any other administrative functions relating to the conduct of races. See Sections 5 to 8 below.
- g. Monitoring the effectiveness of the Handicapping and Programming Policy against its objectives and recommending and making changes.

The National Racing Bureau will receive local and regional contributions into its programming decisions.

Bureau staffing, operating practice and IT considerations, are being developed.

2. Qualifying Times

The URG re-visited the question of qualifying times and standards. We must have as a national objective increasing the utilisation of our available horses safely and maintaining animal welfare standards.

There are a significant number of horses that maintain their gait in a qualifying trial and for a myriad of reasons they do not go under the qualifying time. So what? The horses end up coming back to the trials in a fortnight at additional cost to the owner!

If a horse can maintain its gait from a mobile and a stand, in a field, it should receive a qualifying certificate.

The Harness Racing Victorian Rule for qualifying is as below. We recommend similar for here to be implemented as soon as practicable after this final period of consultation.

Harness Racing Victoria Rule 11

“11.1 – To be eligible for a mobile start race a horse must qualify in a mobile start Qualifying Trial and/or to be eligible for a standing start race a horse must qualify in a standing start Qualifying Trial.

11.2 – To qualify to race, a horse must, to the satisfaction of the Stewards:

11.2.1 – In a mobile start – score up without interference to other horses and be in its correct barrier position and be within one metre of the mobile barrier gate from the candy pole to the starting point, then complete the trial in a competitive manner without losing gait or rhythm.

11.2.2 – In a standing start – not delay the start through intractability and leave the barrier at the correct gait then complete the trial in a competitive manner without losing gait or rhythm.

11.2.3 – For such qualifications to be valid, a minimum of three horses must contest a mobile start trial or a stand start trial, unless otherwise determined and approved by Stewards. *[There are situations where it is not practical to conduct a tree horse trial. Stewards can authorise a horse to qualify by joining a workout, or with one other horse, or on its own if Stewards as satisfied that the criteria above is achieved.]*

11.3 – To change the gait of a horse, the owner or trainer must lodge a written request with HRV. The horse must re-qualify and a further change of gait cannot be approved until the expiration of three months from the date of the previous request.

11.4 – A horse must be qualified to race prior to acceptance time for a given meeting.

11.5 – A horse that qualifies without having had a valid Stable Return lodged may have that qualification rescinded.”

When the number of horses are below the above minima a trial can be conducted, with the permission of stewards, against the performance criteria and a time standard by one horse or two horses.

Qualifying trials could / should be run in association with race meetings.

3. Programs

Programming Principles

The principle programming considerations will be:

1. maximizing wagering turnover; will be the principal consideration; through
2. providing opportunities for horses to race “like for like” fairly to the greatest extent possible; while
3. maintaining animal welfare standards.

Other programming factors include:

- a. Number of acceptors for the race.
- b. Number of acceptors for other races.
- c. Quality of acceptors.
- d. Alternate racing opportunities.
- e. Available stake distribution.
- f. Impacts on other races or subsequent meetings.
- g. Number of available races to be conducted at the race meeting.

Utilisation & Retention

This group was established to enhance the utilisation of the horses we breed. There are four main areas of focus:

1. Horses that do not enter the racing system because they do not meet the current qualifying time standard or are sold from a workout.
2. Horses that meet the standard and then never race because trainers and owners believe that there are no opportunities for the horse to race fairly and be competitive. For example, nationally 1498 horses qualified from 1 January 2023 until the 4th June 2024. Forty five were exported. Three hundred and seventy seven (377) have not been seen at a race track since qualifying, i.e. 25 percent.
3. Horses that cease their career because trainers and owners believe that there are no opportunities for the horse to race fairly or competitively.
4. Horses racing more frequently.

We should regularly programme races for these horses. HRNZ could adopt a policy at all non-ATC and NZMTC meetings that a low stake race for maidens and a conditioned race for R35 and R39 horses with less than \$3,000 in their last 5 starts be programmed at every meeting. One week pace/trot then reversed the next week trot/pace. Members of the URG believe it should be piloted in Southland and Canterbury.

We must bring as many horses as possible into the racing system and keep them there. We are hearing from owners every week that they want to see their horses race.

We note that the new programming for the ATC and Cambridge is seeking to establish two distinct pools of horses in each gait. ATC should offer racing at R40 and above. Cambridge will offer regular opportunities by gait, narrower rating bands and selecting fields bottom up for R35 and above horses. Cambridge horses will earn points to regularly have opportunities to race at Auckland in 'Cambridge Rewards' races for higher stakes.

The policy has these significant advantages:

- a. Maximising wagering with consistent fields of horses of a similar ability.
- b. Keeping horses racing and more often.
- c. Keeping owners interested in the sport.
- d. Adding to field sizes, turnover and margin.
- e. Adding to the national pool of horses racing.
- f. Identifying South Island horses that are suited to the low stakes grade and whose owners may consider transferring them to the Waikato for regular racing.

A small increase in the number of horses we retain racing, and an increase in their average annual number of race day starts has a significant impact on turnover and margin.

4. Handicapping

This proposed policy will seek to use the handicapping system and conditioned race programming, hand in glove.

The success of this system rises or falls on setting and enforcing programming policies.

In February the Reference Group reached the consensus that the current rating handicap System is not an appropriate framework for the best use of our horses or efficient programming as it has evolved from 2017. These are our view of current weaknesses:

1. There is no logical reason to link rating points to stakes.
2. The entry point into the rating system at MR50 is equivalent to the 62nd percentile of the rating system. It is too high for maiden winners in most cases. [*Note: the median rating of all current horses racing is 47.*]
3. A horse should be able to return to its competitive rating level expeditiously.
4. Under the current system the number of unplaced starts and hence costs required to return to a competitive rating are too great and not conducive to encouraging retention.
5. The horses bunched at the lower ratings are often programmed in races without appropriate conditioning.

6. Horses going up in the ratings are meeting experienced horses coming down the rating when conditioning should be used to separate them.
7. We do not use the rating system or conditioning effectively to provide opportunities to race “like with like.”

The objective of the Handicapping and Programming Policy should be to:

- i. provide a handicapping framework that puts horses in a competitive position as often as possible; and then
- ii. uses evidence-based conditioned programming to seek to race together horses with like ability and experience.

We propose a simple but flexible system designed to penalise winners with a rating re-handicap, acknowledge placegetters (2nd, 3rd or 4th) as being competitive at their present rating levels with no rating adjustment and give a rating relief to any unplaced runner (5th or further back).

The ratio between the winning penalty and the unplaced relief will be set at approximately 5:1 unless otherwise approved by the board of HRNZ.

All penalty-free races will be just that with no penalty given (points or stakes) for a win and no points deducted for an unplaced effort. These principles are intended, as much as possible, to retain integrity over the rating population structure.

Proposed Structure:

- A. One entry point for all horses.
- B. A qualified horse takes a maiden status, with no rating, and take its place in a field based on conditions, e.g. age, sex or just a qualified non-winner.
- C. Ratings to range from R35 to R120.
- D. Horses enter system at R40 after their maiden win, i.e. at the 20th percentile.
- E. All winning horses will receive a five-point penalty, except as specified in paragraphs I and J below. *[Note: Ratings will no longer be linked to stakes. Trainers and owners can choose if they race for \$6,000, \$8,000 or \$15,000 when the points for a win are the same. Using stakes in the last five starts, wins in the prior six months, lifetime wins when conditioning races will keep them out of where they should not be. Condition races for the pool of R35 – R39 horses will take care. Current programming practice will change to ensure that like races like.]*
- F. Horses placed second to fourth will have no rating change.
- G. Horses placed fifth to last will lose one rating point. (Note: Rating points awarded in a race will broadly match points lost based on 10 horse average fields. The Reference Group was not blind to the danger of the integrity issue around the 5th and 6th place boundary if a differential was maintained
- H. Penalty free races are penalty free, i.e. no points to the winner and no points deducted and no stakes counted.

- I. 4YO & older race-winning horses winning a race driven by a Junior Driver in races with an advertised stake of \$8,000 or less will receive a Rating Penalty reduction from the standard five-point penalty. The reduced penalties are as follows: for Junior Drivers that have zero to 25 career wins (at the start of that race day) a two-point reduction in rating penalty will apply. For Junior Drivers that have 26 or more career wins (at the start of that race day) a one-point reduction in rating penalty will apply - unless the win results in a Rating Penalty Free win, which takes precedence.
- J. It is not intended to re-rate all horses when this system is introduced. There will be a need to re-rate one-win horses currently above R40 back to R40.
- K. There will be no rating concessions for fillies and mares races with a stake of \$8,000 or less. *[Note: HRNZ has set a target of 16 percent for all F&M races. It will be programming additional F&M races and using provisions of conditioned racing and preferential draws. The Silk Road F&M series will include a 'no escape clause' meaning that eligible F&Ms must race in the F&M race on that day and not enter other races unless the field size is exceeded.]*
- L. Two-year olds – in earlier consultation it was suggested that 2YOs returned in the new season with rating concessions. This has been dropped.

Conditioned Races and Policy

- I. The rating system provides the principal framework for programming races: conditioning seeks to make races fair.
- II. By using ratings simple conditions such as the earnings in last five starts, wins in last five starts, wins in last six months or a year can be used to optimise racing opportunities.
- III. It is envisioned that the judicious use of conditioned programming with this rating structure will produce even and competitive fields and has the potential to create consistent opportunities for all classes of horses. *[A focus will be age group racing. There is a strong view that we need to be more active in programming races by age.]*
- IV. We must avoid extraneous ad hoc programme conditions that do unintended harm to a particular set of horses.
- V. Where nominations are sufficient for fields of 13+ horses, consideration will be given to splitting them into an extra race with tighter bands and similar ability. *[Note: For wagering purposes the margin gain drops off at 12+ horses. For example, at some of our summer venues four 12-horses fields across tighter rating bands are preferable to three -16-horse fields. We should be aiming to achieve an annual and increasing minimum average of 10 to 11 starters.]*

Concerns have been expressed that the proposed changes to the handicapping system will result in a downward slide of the median rating and an accumulation of horses in the R35 - R40 band as well as restricting the movement of horses up the 'grades'.

With respect, this system has been designed, under a horse utilisation and retention focus, to allow horses to regularly find racing opportunities where they can be competitive and thus

extend their racing life, not to move horses through 'grades', a concept that does not exist under a fall-back rating system.

In addition, it has been constructed under one of its guiding principles to maintain structural integrity in the sense that the expectation would be that as many points would be given for a win as are removed for unplaced efforts in a race with our average field size of 10, rendering the concern over rating slippage unfounded.

One of the flaws recognised in the present system with respect to the retention of racing stock is that it takes too long after a win that moves a horse outside of its competitive rating band to return it back to this competitive level. The suggestion that we increase the winning penalty to push horses up the ratings quicker would be counter-productive to retaining them as part of our racing population.

The handicapping system proposed is a simple structure to be used in conjunction with appropriate programming conditions to create opportunity to move horses out of the lower rating levels. Change is needed in our programming. Giving lower rated horses, say R35 - R40, two or three opportunities in programmed races with wide rating bands, which we currently do, cannot continue. We must programme competitive races for the lesser ability horse. There needs to be a dedicated race for these horses that goes ahead even with small nominations.

5. Nominations and Acceptances

1. The HRNZ National Racing Bureau will establish and maintain a racing system that operates online to the greatest extent possible.
2. A horse must be nominated for a race or an official trial online.
3. Nomination and Acceptance times for race meeting are as per the below table, however these may vary for public holidays or special circumstances:

4.

Race Day	Nominations Close	Acceptance Close
Tuesday	Friday prior, 12.00pm	Friday prior, 2.00pm
Wednesday	Friday prior, 12.00pm	Friday prior, 2.00pm
Thursday	Monday, 12:00pm	Monday, 2.00pm
Friday	Monday, 12:00pm	Monday, 2.00pm
Saturday	Monday, 12.00pm	Tuesday, 9,00am
Sunday	Monday, 12.00pm	Tuesday, 9,00am
Monday	Tuesday, 12.00pm	Tuesday, 2.00pm

Exceptions will be made for acceptances at two-day meetings and within the summer circuits.

A question has been asked about when Wednesday racing meeting nominations/acceptances should close. Should they be Sunday or Monday of the race week to allow for weekend racing form changes?

5. All nominations close with HRNZ's National Racing Bureau.
6. Trainers will be required to nominate horses in order of preference. Preferences for horses nominated for multiple races online will be determined by the ranking given by the trainer to each horse for the races available.
7. Trainers must nominate a driver at the time of nomination. A confirmed driver engagement must be confirmed to the HRNZ Racing Bureau no later than 24 hours after acceptances close. In the event that a driver is named to drive two or more horses in a race it is the responsibility of the respective trainers to confirm the drivers for their horses. Driver changes required after confirmation may be made under special circumstances as approved by the stewards.
8. Trainers will be able to view nominations made prior to nominations closing.
9. Upon nomination close at 12.00pm a viewing window of two hours will be permitted for trainers to view all nominations.
10. Once the viewing window has been made available no new nominations will be accepted unless nominations have been extended.
11. Once the viewing window has been made available trainers are NOT permitted to change their preferences however may scratch the horse from one of their preferences at another meeting.
12. Trainers, if upon viewing their nominations, discover an apparent error with their nomination are encouraged to contact the HRNZ Racing Bureau as soon as possible. Should the apparent error be at the fault of the trainer the HRNZ Racing Bureau is under no obligation to correct their error after the 2.00pm deadline.
13. No trainer will be permitted to enter a horse for a race, or any driver be declared for any engagement, unless the relevant person has his/her respective licence at the time of the declaration.
14. Trainers who nominate online are reminded that they should always check any nominations lodged. This will confirm that nominations have been correctly lodged and provide a chance to rectify any problems or errors.
15. Trainers who nominate are also reminded to use the "Comments" field to indicate any requests e.g. two starters or none, can race both days, early race etc. [Preferences see the next section.]
16. A horse must be qualified to race prior to the close of nominations for the race they have nominated for.
17. If nominations for a race(s) at a meeting are extended beyond the 2.00pm close of acceptance deadline, in addition to online notification all registered trainers will receive an SMS detailing which races are extended and the new closing time. Please be sure your

mobile phone details in the system are current. Preference in field selection will be given to original nominations.

18. If the trainer of a horse is required to produce a veterinary certificate prior to racing, the trainer must either ensure the certificate is received prior to raceday or arrange for a vet to inspect the horse on course, failure to do so will result in horse being declared ineligible to start.
19. If a horse is stood down to trial and is also engaged to race at an upcoming meeting, such horse will be scratched from its upcoming engagements. There will be no opportunity to trial the horse between engagements to clear it to race.
20. When nominations have been extended for a particular race, any horse that has been scratched prior to acceptance time, may only be re-nominated on the same handicap mark in a standing start race or under the same assessment mark in a mobile start race and shall be treated as a late nomination.
21. If a horse nominates for two or more races at a meeting, the trainer must notify the HRNZ Racing Bureau of a preference for one race over another.
22. Horses are always considered in the first instance for the race entered as their first preference. However, the National Racing Bureau will have the right to use discretion to place horses in a race other than their first preference in special circumstances, after consulting the trainer. *[A race not proceeding or a horse being place on the ballot or a horse is up to and including two points outside published race conditions.]*
23. A horse will be considered for subsequent preferences should they receive a ballot from their preferred event.
24. Should acceptances for more than one race meeting close on the same day and trainers wish to start their horse at both meetings, if circumstances allow, the trainer must indicate their intentions to the HRNZ Racing Bureau otherwise the nominated horse/s will be considered for one start only. If no contact is made the Bureau will use their discretion whether to include in the second start. The Bureau's decision will be final and binding.
25. Trainers are encouraged to communicate any requests to the HRNZ Racing Bureau prior to the 12.00pm deadline when nominations close to avoid any disappointment. Requests can only be made in the "Nomination Comment" section online.

Examples of requests include:

- i. Two starters or none
 - ii. No more than two starters per race
 - iii. I want to race at both meetings
 - iv. Early race please
 - v. I have nominated six horses but can only transport four, so four starters maximum please.
27. All communication with the HRNZ Racing Bureau regarding the race meeting being drawn that day will cease at 12.00pm unless trainers have been notified that nominations have been extended. Trainers are requested NOT to call and ask whether their horse is likely to gain a start. If enough preferences or nomination comments are left there should be no

need to call, this practice only disrupts and delays the completion of race fields and other day to day responsibilities.

6. Field Selection

An earlier discussion draft of this paper included a points-based field selection policy as used in several Australian states.

The URG felt that HRNZ should develop its own policy. A simpler system may be to use money earned in the last five starts.

The standard could be fields selected in descending order of prize money earned (highest earner selected first or highest earner last five starts).

Bottom-up field selection should be used, and notified in programs, to enhance the utilisation of lesser rated horses in the R35 to R45 category.

Bonus payments should not be included in money won.

7. Barrier Draws

Barrier draws will be programmed at the discretion of HRNZ Racing Bureau, for example, but not limited to:

– Random Barrier Draw (RBD).

– Preferential Barrier Draw based on:

- Rating (PBD/R),
- Sex (PBD/SEX),
- Stakemoney earned at last 'X' starts (PBD/\$LX),
- Lifetime stakemoney (PBD/\$L),
- Lifetime wins (PBD/LTW),
- Field Selection Points (PBD/FSP),
- Win Only Earnings (PBD/WOE).
- Combinations of the above criteria may be applied to races e.g. (PBD/R/\$L4).

Note: PBD criteria is applied at acceptance time and not altered by subsequent performances.

8. Scratchings

1. Horses scratched either before or after Acceptance Time will be automatically stood down from racing for a period of six days from Acceptance Time. *(Vet certificates will not be required and if obtained gains no reduction of this period, except as stated below.)*
2. If a horse is scratched either before or after Acceptance Time, and it holds a nomination to race at the same venue or circuit within three days of the meeting it was scratched from, Stewards may waive the above provision on being assured by the trainer, supported by a signed certificate from a veterinarian, that the horse is fit to race.

3. A horse engaged as an emergency can be scratched penalty free prior to 7.30am on the morning of the meeting. In the Southern Harness Region this will be 5.00pm the night before.
4. Other than in the Southern Harness Region final scratchings are taken at 7.30am on the morning of each race meeting. In the Southern Harness Region this will be 5.00pm the night before. Emergencies will be withdrawn at this time if there have been no scratchings in the race.
5. Horses scratched after 7.30am on race day (or 5.00pm in the Southern Harness Region) will be automatically stood down from racing for a period of six days from the date of the meeting
6. A horse that is a late scratching due to a float breakdown will be automatically stood down from racing for a period of six days from the date of the meeting, except that in cases where a mechanical certificate of repair is lodged and accepted by the Stewards within 48 hour of the meeting, the ban may be reduced entirely. Paperwork not lodged within 48 hours for the above penalties may be considered at the discretion of the Stewards for approval or otherwise.
7. On days when multiple Acceptance Times are scheduled, if a horse gains a start in a race, it is the responsibility of the trainer to withdraw such horse from subsequent nominations before Acceptance Time if he/she does not want such horse to gain another start.
8. If, following the release of fields, a horse is scratched due to a change of ownership, such horse, upon lodgement of the transfer of ownership papers, may have the scratching penalty lifted. A horse that is scratched due to a change of trainer will remain liable to the appropriate scratching penalties, unless such horse has been transferred to an interstate trainer, in which case the scratching penalty may be lifted upon approval from the Stewards.
9. On a race day where the forecast maximum temperature for the race meeting venue is determined by the NZ MetService to exceed thirty-eight degrees Celsius (38°C), the trainer of a horse engaged at that meeting may scratch the horse free of penalty prior to 8.30am on the day of the meeting. Scratchings effected after 8.30am on race day will attract the normal scratching penalty. Such applications may only be made on the day of the race, and notified to the Racing Office.
10. A horse which is a starter in a standing start race and is re-handicapped following a performance in another race may either stay in the race it has accepted for or scratch without penalty by contacting the HRNZ Racing Bureau prior to 7.30am on race morning (5.00pm in the Southern Harness Region.)
11. A horse drawn as an emergency for a race and subsequently drawn as a starter in a race at another meeting may be scratched by connections without penalty from the first race provided there has been a scratching from that race and application is made to the HRNZ Racing Bureau.

9. Claimers

There was a strong request to re-introduce some form of claiming opportunity.

HRNZ will in the next month review the current Rules and Regulations on claimers to modernise them.

A specific request is for the reintroduction of maiden claimers as operated in Southland.

There is a place for claiming races to improve horse utilisation.

Annex A: Harness Racing Bureau

Race Programming

- a. In conjunction with Racing Manager, develop race programming strategy.
- b. Lead the development of the annual schedule of dates with the TAB NZ and clubs.
- c. Oversee delivery of race programmes for all clubs in a timely manner
- d. Allocate funding levels to each meeting and race in accordance with HRNZ Board policies and taking into account any race club contributions
- e. Responsible for loading harness race programmes into racing system four months in advance and ensuring the details of the race programmes information for all meetings and races are complete and accurate and in alignment with the Business Plan
- f. Programme and load official trial conditions into InfoHorse.
- g. Liaise with club management in relation to changes to race programmes
- h. Load amendments to race programmes into Infohorse as required
- i. Liaise with club secretaries as necessary when changes to published race meeting programmes occur and to apply their requests with race names when such changes arise
- j. Assist the Racing Manager with the preparation of annual race group and feature fixtures and race series for particular sets of horses.

Handicapping and Racing

- k. Select starters for race and official trial fields for harness racing meetings conducted in accordance with the Rules of Harness Racing and Handicapping and Programming Policy considering at all times the objectives of that Policy
- l. Lead the selection of horses for feature races such, providing objective selection of the best performed horses for each feature race.
- m. Respond directly to queries from customers regarding race programmes, racing policies and related rules
- n. Correctly classify horses which have been imported for racing in accordance with the new business model rules.

Policy Development

- o. Conduct regular reviews of policy for harness racing handicapping and programming to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
- p. Keep abreast of developments throughout Australia with a view to improving NZ race programming.

Racing Administration & Operations

- q. Provide assistance and input to enable the harness code racing operations throughout the country to operate efficiently and effectively for the benefit of all stakeholders.
- r. Understand the operations of InfoHorse racing system, as related to racing administration functionality and assist with co-ordination and usage by stakeholders including awareness and communications with licence-holders and other stakeholders.