

# Handicapping Changes Approved by HRNZ Board for 2017/18 season

## Summary of Changes

From 1 August 2017 following is a summary of changes that will be made to the Handicapping Points System

- 8 points for wins up to and including \$10,000 (was \$9,000)
- 10 points for wins over \$10,000 (was \$9,000)
- Trotters awarded same points as pacers
- Horses placing second and third will increase one point but can't go past last winning or revised rating
- Non-win horses brought in line with winners – points for placings second and third only
- Reduced Age Group Caps: 2YO Trotters – R65, 3YO Trotters R85, 2YO Pacers R75, 3YO pacers R95
- Non-tote races up to \$5,000 will be penalty free for non-win horses (applied retrospectively also)
- Unplaced horses in claiming races will drop points for placing fifth to last
- Horses above the age group caps and horses close to the caps will be re-rated at season's end

## Introduction

The HRNZ Handicapping Sub-Committee met in June to review the application of the Handicapping Points System that was introduced nationally on 13 March 2017. Included in this review was consideration of submissions from a number of industry groups and individuals on aspects of the system. In summary, the Sub-Committee is encouraged by the results to date with field sizes up, more even racing as highlighted by higher average favourite starting prices and less races with dominating favourites that inhibit turnover. Additional races have been run over that scheduled highlighting the industry has quickly come to terms with the new system. Attached are statistics provided by the NZRB highlighting the encouraging results since mid-March.

The Sub-Committee is comprised of Rob Lawson (Chairman), Ken Barron, Jason Broad, Allan Brown, John Green, Peter Larkin and Brian Rabbitt. HRNZ's Handicappers, Andrew Morris and Kevin Smith, attend and report to Sub-Committee meetings.

At its meeting, the Sub-Committee agreed to a number of refinements to the current system. These recommendations were subsequently confirmed by the HRNZ Board at its meeting on 12 July. The purpose of this paper is to outline the changes agreed to.

## Modified Points Scale

For races with an advertised stake up to and including \$10,000 the standard points for winning will be eight. For races with an advertised stake of \$10,001 or more the standard points for winning will be 10.

Discretion downwards from those standard point levels will be available to the Handicappers. No horses will increase more than 10 points for any win. Fillies and mares concessions will still apply.

**Reason for change:** With the impending stakes increases in 2017/18, the increase of the lower stakes bracket from \$9,000 to \$10,000 was logical. The decision that was made to have horses gain no more than 10 points, regardless of the stakes of the win, was to stop horses being pushed too high in ratings too soon. Note: Handicappers will continue to have discretion downwards in applying fewer points to winning horses.

## Trotters Points in Line with Pacers

Trotters will be treated the same as pacers for the purposes of gaining points. That is 8 points for races up to and including \$10,000 and 10 points for races over \$10,000.

**Reason for change:** Representatives of the Handicapping Committee surveyed trotting participants who were not opposed to this change. At the lower end of the horse population, where most horses sit, there is a need to elevate winners sufficiently high enough to move them away from the horses they have just defeated.

## Points for Placings

Horses that place second or third in a race will increase one rating point, provided that the increase does not take them past their last winning points assessment. No horse will receive more than one point for placing second or third. There will be no increase in points, regardless of the stakes of the race for any fourth or fifth placings.

**Reason for change:** This has been one of the more controversial aspects of the system. The above clause has been in place for horses running in races at the lower stakes level but will now operate across the board. This change will give owners and trainers more surety and clarity as to how their horses will be treated from a week-to-week basis. This change will provide for less discretion being exercised by Handicappers in rating placed horses.

## Points for Placings in Non-Win (MR) Races

The points for placings policy for non-win (MR) horses has been brought into line with the wider system. Non-win horses will only gain a point for running second or third in a race, with there being no increase for horses placing fourth which will now receive 0 points.

**Reason for change:** Brings greater consistency and simplicity into the system.

## Age Group Caps

The following caps for the various age groups were resolved by the committee.

2YO Trotters	-	R65	(previous cap R85)
3YO Trotters	-	R85	(previous cap R110)
2YO Pacers	-	R75	(previous cap R85)
3YO Pacers	-	R95	(previous cap R110)

Horses in the above sections currently rated higher than the incoming caps will be re-rated as at 1 August to the new levels. This will also necessitate re-rating of horses that are sitting just below the incoming caps so as to ensure greater fairness through the change. In considering this, it must be kept in mind that 2YOs receive a maximum of five points for wins under \$15,000 and 3YOs receive half points for every second win under \$15,000.

**Reason for the change:** The above caps were determined because the existing caps were seen as too tough on 2YO and 3YO horses, although it was acknowledged that they were a starting point for the initial ratings system.

## Treatment of Non-Tote Races

From 1 August the only races permitted to be run as non-tote \$2,000 races will be 2YO Trots. These races will be made "penalty free" for non-winners, meaning any horse that wins one or more of such races will remain a non-winner (MR) for handicapping purposes. For any race-winner winning a \$2,000 non-tote race Handicapper's discretion will apply.

Any non-tote race with a stake up to and including \$5,000 (encompassing Australasian Breeders Crown heats which cease after the 2017/18 season) will also be penalty free for non-winners, with Handicapper's discretion used in the case of race winners winning said non-tote race.

**Reason for change:** As it stands horses winning legitimate non-tote races in very small fields or walkovers are being overtly penalised for their moderate success or from simply "turning up".

## Treatment of Unplaced Claimers

It was approved that unplaced (5<sup>th</sup> to last) horses in Claiming races will be treated the same as horses in standard races. That being they will drop at least one point at the discretion of the Handicapper. Formerly horses in claiming races did not drop points for unplaced performances automatically.

**Reason for change:** From reviewing the results of claiming only races since the introduction of the new Handicapping Points System, there appeared to be no reason to not have horses in such races dropping points for unplaced performances. Horses placing first, second or third in claiming only races will not be subjected to ratings increases, consistent with the previous system.

## **Other Matters**

### **Re-Rating of Horses at Season's End**

Owing to the reduction in the ratings caps for age-group horses, some horses will be re-rated at season's end, along with horses that are closer now to the ratings caps than they were originally intended to be.

### **Use of Discretion**

It was decided that the use of discretion, given the recommendations that were approved, was still required and was important to ensure balance and fairness within the system. The increased clarity around points for placings however will reduce the discretion that was previously exercised in the system. The ongoing use of discretion within the system will be monitored and further reviewed in the new season as the Sub-Committee is conscious of the industry's unease with the use of Handicapper's discretion.

### **Handicapping Summary**

The above changes are designed to create better structure within the system and give participants more clarity as to what's happening with their horses, without eroding the integrity of the system. It must be noted that the new system has achieved many of the objectives set out in the mandate for change. As participants and punters learn more about the system and the refinements outlined above take effect, further improvements should be made to the industry's overall position.