



**WorldHorseWelfare**



# **Manifesto for Equine Welfare**



**Scottish Parliament: 2021-2026**

# World Horse Welfare manifesto

Over the last five years, Scotland has made significant advances in ensuring the welfare of its equines is protected and promoted. Of particular note was the enactment of Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Act 2020, which we warmly welcomed.

Looking ahead, we would encourage the new Parliament to build on these successes and position Scotland as a leader in equine welfare.

The Scottish Parliament should:

- Ensure the success of licensing of equine welfare establishments.
- Improve welfare during transport.
- Work towards full digital traceability of equines.
- Update licensing of 'hiring of horses' establishments.
- Give serious consideration to the regulation of commercial equine establishments and breeders.

# World Horse Welfare vision

World Horse Welfare's vision is a world where every horse is treated with respect, compassion and understanding.

# World Horse Welfare mission

Our mission is to work with horses, horse owners, communities, organisations and governments to improve welfare standards and stamp out suffering in the UK and worldwide.

# Licensing equine welfare establishments

While most rescue centres and sanctuaries have been set up by people who have the expertise and resources needed to properly care for and rehabilitate horses and ponies, no-one is checking that this is the case. Those equines that are taken in by these organisations often are at their most vulnerable. To ensure they are given the protection they deserve, these establishments must be licensed and inspected.

Currently, in the UK, rescue centres and sanctuaries can become members of The National Equine Welfare Council (NEWC). NEWC conducts site visits to approve membership and offer education and support to help ensure organisations meet minimum welfare requirements. However, membership is voluntary and not all rescue centres and sanctuaries have signed up.

The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Scotland) Regulations 2021 will introduce mandatory licensing of these establishments. However, **we urge the new Scottish Parliament to commit to ensuring the success of this legislation**, including by ensuring **appropriate training** and **resourcing of enforcement bodies** and effective **species-specific guidance** to underpin the legislation.



# Improving welfare during transport

World Horse Welfare welcomed the Scottish Government's consultation on welfare during transport. We ask the **new Scottish Parliament to continue to support improvements** that will better protect equine welfare, whilst ensuring an aligned approach is taken – as far as possible – across Great Britain.

Transportation can be both stressful and exhausting for many horses and long journeys can increase the welfare risk. There is clear evidence to show that the current legislation is also difficult to enforce, as it is too complex and open to interpretation. We would therefore like to see the following introduced:

- **12-hour maximum journey times** for all equines, before a mandatory rest of 9 hours off the vehicle.
- **12-hour finite journey times** for equines going to slaughter unless they are located in a remote area.
- **Certificates of competence** for everyone involved in transporting equines.
- Improved design standards for equine transport vehicles and the introduction of annual inspections to ensure these vehicles are fit to be on the road from an equine safety perspective.
- **Removal** of the category of '**registered**' equines in this piece of legislation – scientific research shows breeds used for sports are as susceptible, if not more, to respiratory illness caused by transport.
- **Better enforcement** of the legislation, including through enhanced collaboration between enforcement agencies.





## Full digital traceability of equines

An effective identification system, which requires all equines to be microchipped and their details held on a central database, is not only key to **encouraging responsible ownership** but will help give a much clearer picture of the equine population. This is vital in the event of a disease outbreak.

The enactment of The Equine Animal (Identification) (Scotland) Regulations 2019 introduced the requirement for an up-to-date and accessible central equine database and for all equines, irrespective of age, to be microchipped. This is **the first step towards full traceability of all equines, and it is now important that the Scottish government builds on this** by:

- **Revising the current regulations** to ensure they support a frictionless and **digitised** end-to-end user experience, simplifying the process and encouraging greater compliance.
- Supporting the equine sector in ensuring equine owners and keepers are aware of and comply with the Equine ID requirements, using **enforcement measures** where effective and appropriate.
- Introducing a **centralised database of all premises where equines are kept**, including recording the type of activity taking place on the premises (for example, breeder, dealer etc.)
- Requiring **notification of key movements** on/off premises, ideally digitalised.
- Ensuring all systems and databases relating to equine traceability are integrated, including with the rest of the UK and key trading partners.
- Serious consideration must be given to **separating equine identification requirements from equine zootechnical requirements**. The former should be serviced centrally by government and the latter serviced by studbooks.

Altogether, this package would enable equines to be identified and their movements linked to registration of premises. This has numerous benefits including effective disease control, meaningful checks on food chain status, the ability to identify lost, straying and stolen horses and reunite them with their keepers and identifying those people responsible for the welfare of neglected or dumped equines and holding them to account. It would also allow for animal health requirements around export/import to be truly enforceable, ensuring equines are compliant with the isolation and residency requirements.

# Licensing of ‘hiring out horses’ establishments

Riding establishments in Scotland continue to be licensed and inspected under the Riding Establishments Acts of 1964 and 1970. Our understanding of animal welfare has advanced significantly since then, particularly with the introduction of the Five Domains. These domains incorporate the idea that animals should be provided with positive experiences, not just protected from negative experiences or conditions. We also have better knowledge – supported by scientific research – of what constitutes good equine husbandry, including around stabling, pasture management and general mental well-being.

**This 50-year-old piece of legislation is well past its due date for being updated** to ensure it is **fit-for-purpose** and able to achieve its intended aim of protecting all horses, ponies and donkeys who are hired out for economic gain.





## Regulate commercial equine establishments and breeders

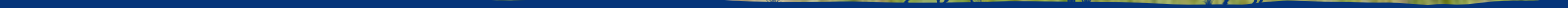
While Scotland fortunately does not suffer from a significant ‘horse problem’ as seen in the other UK administrations, we do still take equines into our Scottish centre that are:

- **From commercial premises** - including breeders, dealers and livery yards – and **suffering from poor welfare.**
- A result of **indiscriminate and/or irresponsible breeding.**

We believe there is a strong case for serious consideration of regulation of commercial equine establishments. Those responsible for these premises should be held to higher standards than the average horse owner, as they are profiting commercially and holding themselves out to be equine experts. Unfortunately, the professional standards expected of these people and premises are not always met, resulting in sometimes hundreds of horses and ponies being put at risk.

Overbreeding in particular is a complex issue, with little research undertaken into the root causes. There are undoubtedly a number of different groups - some of which are commercial while others are not - contributing to the overbreeding of horses, both in Scotland and across Great Britain. Unfortunately, this makes it all too easy for each group to blame the others and take no responsibility, and therefore no action, themselves.

We would urge the **newly elected Scottish Parliament to support further research in this area**, to help better understand what policies best tackle overbreeding and poor welfare on commercial equine premises. We suggest this could include consideration of **licensing of stallions and of commercial equine premises.**



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