



WorldHorseWelfare

# Manifesto for Equine Welfare

Welsh Senedd: 2021-2026



# World Horse Welfare manifesto

Over the last five years, Wales has made significant advances to promote and protect equine welfare, including the Welsh voluntary code of practice for animal welfare establishments and the introduction of The Equine Identification (Wales) Regulations 2019.

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

The Welsh Senedd should:

- Consider licensing of equine welfare establishments.
- Improve welfare during transport.
- Work towards full digital traceability of equines.
- Improve enforcement of equine legislation.
- Facilitate quicker rehoming of equines involved in prosecution cases.
- Improve welfare on the commons and mountains.
- Update licensing of 'hiring of horses' establishments.

# 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. The 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.

We welcomed the Welsh voluntary code of practice for animal welfare establishments, which is a step in the right direction. Moving forward, **support must be given to raising awareness of this code of practice** and encouraging sanctuaries and rescue centres to adopt its recommendations. Furthermore, **we would urge newly elected Members of the Senedd to ensure that a review of these establishments is carried out**, with a view to legislating for the licensing of these premises if there continue to be welfare challenges despite the publication of the code of practice.



# Improving welfare during transport

World Horse Welfare welcomed the Welsh Government's consultation on welfare during transport. We ask the new Welsh 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 for equines. Moreover, there is clear evidence to show that the current legislation is 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) (Wales) 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 Welsh 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.



## Enforcing equine welfare legislation

For over ten years, we have had a significant equine welfare problem across England and Wales. Equine welfare charities estimate that there are more than **7,000 equines at risk** across these two countries, with no signs of this problem diminishing. **Lack of enforcement** of equine legislation, including the Animal Welfare Act 2006, has been identified as a key barrier to improving this welfare situation.

Enforcement is a complex area, with some local authorities taking a more active role than others. Unfortunately, even those local authorities that traditionally have been more engaged on equine welfare are now taking a less significant role. We have good reason to believe that this is due to **lack of resources and effective training**, alongside equine welfare not being prioritised by senior officials. We would therefore **urge the new Welsh Parliament to support a review into current enforcement of equine legislation** with a view to identifying tangible and realistic solutions to help ensure we can improve equine welfare throughout Wales.



## Rehoming equines involved in prosecution cases

Equines that are involved in prosecution cases and are not signed over can often end up staying in rescue centres for **up to two years before they can be rehomed**. This is due to a prosecution process that is often lengthy, particularly if the decision is appealed. This can have a **significant impact on the welfare** of the equines involved, with stallions often unable to be castrated and kept separate from other horses. It also has **significant cost implications for rescue centres** and means that space is taken up that could be used for other equine welfare cases.

Consideration needs to be given as to how to allow equines involved in prosecutions to be rehomed more quickly, reducing costs associated with prosecutions for rescue centres (and some local authorities who pay for boarding of equines involved in prosecution cases) and freeing up space for other equines in need. We anticipate that these cases are only going to take longer, with delays expected in cases being heard due to Covid-19, therefore this does need to be addressed urgently.

### We would urge the Welsh Parliament to consider the following:

- **Training of law clerks and magistrates**, with clear **guidance issued, so that there is a consistent approach to using section 20 under the Animal Welfare Act 2006**, which allows equines to be given into possession of another party and rehomed before a decision is made on the prosecution case.
- **Encouraging magistrates and district judges to prioritise equine welfare cases**, as far as possible, particularly when they involve large numbers of horses.

# Improving equine welfare on the Welsh commons and mountains

While some equine herds on the commons, moors and mountains are well managed and cared for, unfortunately others are not. Indiscriminate breeding, lack of identification and owner accountability are significant barriers to ensuring good welfare of the equine herds kept in these environments.

We recognise that a well-managed common needs to take into account all the species kept on the land, alongside biodiversity, tourism and sustainability. We would therefore **propose that the Welsh Parliament supports government-backed projects**, which will ensure **better management of the commons**, including the resident equines.

We recommend that the following should be considered:

- **Commons Act 2006** carried over in full into Welsh legislation to **allow for Commons Councils** to be formed.
- Working with local stakeholders and enforcement agencies to ensure **full identification of all equines** on the commons and mountains. In derogated areas the required list and management plans must be regularly maintained, at least on an annual basis, and made readily available. To encourage compliance, consideration could be given to allowing all equines on the commons and mountains to be microchipped with photo digital identification initially, with a full paper passport issued once they are moved off the area.
- **Development of land management schemes for individual commons**, including potential for government grants.





# Licensing of 'hiring out horses' establishments

Riding establishments in Wales 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 encouraging 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 horses, ponies and donkeys who are hired out for economic gain.





World Horse Welfare  
Anne Colvin House  
Snetterton  
Norfolk NR16 2LR  
t: +44 (0)1953 498 682



**WorldHorseWelfare**

[publicaffairs@worldhorsewelfare.org](mailto:publicaffairs@worldhorsewelfare.org)  
[www.worldhorsewelfare.org](http://www.worldhorsewelfare.org)

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