

Advancing Equine Scientific Excellence

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EQUINE END OF LIFE COLLABORATIVE PROJECT



THE DONKEY
SANCTUARY



WorldHorseWelfare



promoting excellence in
industry relevant equine research



September 2017

Advancing Equine Scientific Excellence is a committee of the British Equestrian Federation's Equine Development Portfolio

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2011 the UK's Equine Sector Council for Health and Welfare have undertaken an annual review of the 2007 Equine Health and Welfare Strategy¹. Risks identified have been assessed under one of four categories: general risks; welfare risks; health risks; and knowledge/skills risks. Within the welfare risks category, a "delay in euthanasia" giving rise to welfare concerns, was rated as the second highest risk after the breeding of low value equines.

The EEoL (Equine End of Life) project, coordinated by Advancing Equine Scientific Excellence (AESE), and supported by The Donkey Sanctuary and World Horse Welfare aims to provide an in-depth awareness of attitudes to equine euthanasia and end of life decisions. The purpose of the research is to develop the knowledge-base in relation to why people do or do not feel able to make the decision to put an equine to sleep; the thought process worked through to arrive at these decisions; and what additional information and support could be made available to help people to put the equine to sleep when the time is right and/or such a decision is needed.

Data were gathered by 28 students from 13 institutions recruited in the late summer of 2014. through an AESE-designed methodology. The methodology included a depth interview (DI) script, alongside focus groups (FG), using a purposive homogenous sampling strategy which targeted specific groups: donkey owners and carers; recreation/amateur horse or pony owners; and competition/professional horse or pony owners. An online survey (OS) was also utilised, based on the DI script, again to gather information from specific target groups. The OS was publicised through social media and email, with a paper version available. Participants for the OS were self-selecting and subsequently categorised into the appropriate target group during data analysis.

Key findings from the research include:

- The importance of an equine owner/carer having a plan in place for the euthanasia of their animal and the disposal of the body. The loss of an equine can occur at any age, and having a plan in place can help to alleviate the stress involved. Owners/carers are open to planning and this should be explored to ensure it is done in the most sensitive and impactful way possible;
- The discrepancy between the understanding of a quality of life assessment and its implementation, indicating an area for further education of equine owners/carers; and
- The importance of role of the veterinary profession in supporting owners/carers in making the decision to euthanise their equine at the most appropriate time;
- The way in which information is provided, ideally through a trusted veterinarian as well as reputable websites; and
- The level of support equine owners and carers need, when assessing quality of life and then to make the decision to euthanise their animal, is significant and should not be underestimated.

¹ British Equine Veterinary Association, British Horse Industry Confederation, National Equine Welfare Confederation, Defra, Scottish Executive and Welsh Assembly Government. *Equine health and welfare strategy for Great Britain*. [British Equine Veterinary Association: Cambridgeshire, 2006].

Consideration of these five points – the utilisation of a plan; the education of owners/carers in assessing the quality of life of their animal; the significant role of a trusted veterinarian; the importance of making information available in the most accessible and appropriate way; and the significant role of support in assessing quality of life and making the decision to euthanise an equine – are key in ensuring the outcomes of this project are maximised and assist in improving the welfare of our equine population.

Project Team

Advancing Equine Scientific Excellence: Prof Pat Harris, Chair; Dr Georgina Crossman, Study Coordinator; Dr Tim Parkin, Committee Member; Jan Rogers, Committee Member

Supporting data analysis: Clinical Assistant Professor in Equine Internal Medicine, Marco Duz, University of Nottingham

The Donkey Sanctuary: Dr Faith Burden; Dr Karen Rickards

World Horse Welfare: Sam Chubbock; Tony Tyler

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