

THOUGHT LEADERS DINNER¹

Robin Hood Hotel, Adelaide, Friday 11 February 2011

In the past, experienced horsemen would say “Do this, it works”--these days, we have so much more knowledge, gained from research, to be able to say: “Do this, it works *because...*” (Dr Robyn Stokes)

Recently Horse SA invited approximately 20 horse organisations to send a representative to a dinner which had the aim of commencing dialogue between organisations on the topic of horse welfare.

Dinner Guests: Professor Paul McGreevy [University of Sydney] Dennis Edmonds [HorseSA] Helen Whittle [HorseSA] Jane Evans [PRE] Dr Kirrilly Thompson [Uni SA/Pegasus Pony Cub] Di Birmingham [PCA SA Vice Chair/Gawler River Pony Club] Kay Milton [RDA State Manager] Leanne Maynard [PCA SA, President Lower North Zone] Dr Samantha Franklin [University of Adelaide, Vet Faculty Roseworthy] Mark Boon [RDA] Julie Fiedler [Horse SA/Facilitator] Dr Robyn Stokes [Note taker]

Professor McGreevy opened the dinner discussion with a brief history of animal welfare. Horse Welfare was officially recognized first in England in 1824, with concern about carriage horses amongst other animals. (*Editors side note;* The first Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Australia was formed in Victoria on 4 July 1871, following public concern about bad treatment of horses.)

There has been so much improvement in the treatment of many other species, but still, tired horses are having the whip used on them as an accelerator, when a new study shows that it just does not work.² There are examples across other horse pastimes too, for example, where nosebands are exceedingly tight on dressage horses.

We need to be able to celebrate good horsemanship, good breeding & good training.

Julie outlined the dinner program. Using the analogy of the earth’s hemispheres joining to be an organisation; with one sphere members and other sphere committees & rule books- tectonic plates do agitate, differences naturally occur in a living planet or organisation.

Paul & others such as Dr Andrew McLean have done a lot of work which individual riders and trainers are applying, but it’s not so easy to make organisational cultural changes to apply learnings. During the dinner Julie encouraged everyone to have a

¹ The term thought leader can be applied to an organisation that integrates professional ethics with highly-effective leadership development

² <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0015622>

'helicopter' view of the organisation they are involved with [i.e. look at the big picture.

A second line of thought to carry through the evening was "What would society think about your organisation's horse activity? And how would we tell the people about the good things that are going on?"

Professor McGreevy introduced each question block. The questions in italics were in addition to the questions in bold that were provided to organisations prior to attending the dinner. The questions were spread over the evening main course, dessert and coffee.

Questions:

How do you talk about horse welfare in your organisation? *Is it a "dirty word" How is good welfare recognised? How is good welfare celebrated? How is good welfare rewarded?*

How is new research, new ideas or new improvements introduced formally or informally into your organisation policy, practices, rules & culture? *Who gives your organisation the "heads up" Do you rely on international organisations, such as the FEI? (Did you know the FEI has recently disbanded its Horse Welfare sub-committee whilst still maintaining that the "Horse's welfare is paramount"?)*

How can riders and the industry benefit from welfare increments? *If riders don't benefit, can we expect things to improve?*

Leadership in welfare, what does this mean? *Can South Australia be a leader in Australian horse welfare initiatives? How are you going to lead discussion of welfare in your organisation? If you are not going to, who is?*

Many conversations took place around the table which were not specifically recorded, however some clear themes emerged;

- Existing practices & procedures that we could consider for carrying messages e.g. coaches' committees, organisation policy hand books, websites
- How can policies be kept up to date?
- Consumerism influencing decision making, feed sales as an example
- Changing society expectations, free range eggs as an example
- "Moving the Money" how to financially or otherwise reward best practice

- Animal's life time (horse longer than a chook, life time line to implement change in an owners choices linked to this longer life)
- Can we make good welfare tangible? Or measurable or valuable?
- Help is needed to carry the message to "Dave next door" or to support change (even if based on science) in horse organisations
- Children as agents of change, used to influence adult behaviours
- Codes of Practice
- Horse organisations collaborating to share ideas and give out same messages
- Unique Identification of horses in the UK has dramatically provided for good welfare outcomes, as for the first time each horse has a legal owner who needs to provide a legal duty of care towards the animal. Individual horse passports record horse health
- Example of benchmarking, unique horse ID, courses for breeders PRE model discussed

The evening closed with some discussions about current and future welfare research, which included;

Nosebands: Many current rulebooks are unclear on the tightness of nosebands or how to measure this. Rules often say '2 fingers', but whose fingers & where are these placed for the purposes of measuring? Professor McGreevy's group has commenced work on the average circumference of 2 finger joints – using the US Equestrian Federation diagram as a guide - on both male & female examples, and developed a prototype gauge. There is a difference if the noseband pressure is measured over the bridge of the nose or on the mandible, or between the mandibles. Further work is being done to clarify a recommendation.

Stress Levels: The eye temperature of horses correlates with salivary cortisol concentrations, making for easier measurement of stress levels. This can be now measured using an infra-red type camera (rather than having to process saliva samples). In the future, Stewards may present evidence based on thermographic images taken of the horse in warm up or competition where stress has been identified. A camera is a quicker and completely non-invasive way compared to taking saliva samples.

Junior Rider "**Best & Fairest**" website and kit: Funding has been received from the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy to prepare a junior rider program to promote best and fairest in a club based on horse welfare. To be judged by peers. It may be that Gawler River Pony Club can help pilot the project.

At the end of the evening, feedback from each participant was sought. Summarised as:

The Discussion:

- Fantastic! I don't think this sort of meeting with different horse organisation representatives talking about welfare has been run anywhere in Australia before
- I felt comfortable/ it was easy to talk/ non-threatening/friendly
- Would have liked more organisations to attend, help broaden out discussion

Other format options:

- A panel format at the front to lead discussion?
- Break out into small groups, report back
- Would like to hear all conversations!
- More time
- Hypothetical - Geoffrey Robertson style
- Biographies on attendees prior to coming to the meeting

Facilitators Feedback:

- The dinner program concept was selected to help create a non-threatening environment and engage every participant in direct meaningful discussion
- It is enlightening to hear that everyone wants to further talk about progressing welfare in horse organisations and, through the format ideas, is seeking out different ways to do this
- We are now able to say that this topic can be discussed in a considered and meaningful way across organisations in a non-threatening environment

Thought Leaders Group:

- Shared insights into how organisations currently talk about welfare with their members e.g. language such as wellness or well-being vs. "welfare case" or cruelty
- Shared thoughts on ways organisations introduce welfare continuous improvement models with reference to barriers or opportunities

- Shared learnings about actions or initiatives by organisations that have successfully triggered behaviour change in ordinary members, on or off field, or operation of policy/management level with measurable outcomes
- Shared informed relationships between research/researchers and those that have influence over how welfare is managed within their field
- Sharing of thoughts on priorities of further research needs or resources to help organisations providing structured horse sports or recreation in the area of welfare or “wellness” of horses
- Shared support as Thought Leaders continue the discussion within their own organisation with support from others in this network

For further information contact

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Qualifications

*BVSc, PhD, MRCVS, MACVS (Animal Welfare), Cert CABP, Grad Cert Higher Ed.
RCVS Recognised Specialist in Veterinary Behavioural Medicine*

Research Interests

- Equitation science.
- Ethopathies in companion and exotic species.
- Learning theory as applied to animal training and behaviour modification.
- Urban animal management.
- Use of IT in teaching and epidemiological research.

Contribution to the Profession and the Community

- Member of RSPCA (Australia) Scientific Advisory Panel.
- Member of Scientific Advisory Panel for World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA)
- Co-founder and Junior Vice-President: International Equitation Science Society (ISES)
- Member of Scientific Advisory Panel: International Fund for Animal Welfare.

Books

2010 [Equitation science](#) - **McGreevy, P.D.** & McLean, A.N. Wiley-Blackwell, Oxon.
ISBN: 9781405189057

2009 [A Modern Dog's Life](#) - **McGreevy, P.D.** UNSW Press, Sydney. ISBN:
9781742231051

2007 [Carrots and Sticks: principles of animal training](#) - **McGreevy, P.D.** & Boakes, R.A. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. [Also available in Japanese]. ISBN-13 :

9780521686914.

2004 [Equine Behavior: a guide for veterinarians and equine scientists](#) - **McGreevy, P.D.** W.B. Saunders, London. [Also available in Russian]. ISBN 0-7020-2634-4