



## National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee

31 May 2018

Hon. Meka Whaitiri  
PO Box 18 888  
Parliament Buildings,  
Wellington 6160

Dear Minister Whaitiri,

In March 2018 you requested that the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) provide you with advice on rodeos. You specifically asked for advice around the use of flank straps (also known as flank ropes) and electric prodders and asked the committee to provide you with advice around tail twisting and rope burning at rodeos. You also asked for advice around the welfare of the animals in rodeos as a whole, and the use of calves (bovines under the age of 12 months) in rodeo events. NAWAC has considered your request, and considers that standards for the use of flank straps & electric prodders, and the actions of tail twisting & rope burning, currently exist and so these aspects are already covered by the existing regulatory system (as outlined below).

With respect to the issue of the welfare of animals at rodeos as a whole, and the issue of calves, the committee is recommending a suite of non-regulatory actions that are aimed at encouraging self-regulation in the industry which will address those aspects not currently covered by legislation.

The committee also recommends that a clear time period be established for these actions to be implemented, and should the industry fail to meet these non-regulatory actions within the agreed time period, that additional regulatory options should be taken. Regulatory options could include the review of part, or all of the code of welfare for rodeos and/or the development of new regulations around rodeos.

### **Aspects of rodeo currently covered under the current regulatory system**

The committee considers that the use of flank straps, electric prodders, tail twisting, and flank straps are items that can be managed within the existing regulatory system, either by the Animal Welfare Act 1999 (the Act), minimum standards in the code of welfare, and/or the new animal welfare regulations in the Animal Welfare Care and Procedures Regulations (2018) package, which are due to come into force in October 2018:

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	<b>Rodeo Code of Welfare</b>	<b>Regulations</b>	<b>Animal Welfare Act 1999</b>
<b>Flank straps</b>	<p>Minimum standards requiring that flank straps are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) quick release,</li> <li>ii) covered with soft material,</li> <li>iii) not weighted with noise-making equipment,</li> <li>iv) not so tight as to restrict the movement of the animal,</li> <li>v) removed from a horse as soon as it is practicable to do so.</li> </ul>	<p>Regulation that equipment used on horses (which includes flank straps) are not to cause a cut or skin abrasion that bleeds or discharges.</p>	<p>The incorrect use of flank straps could be considered as wilfully / recklessly ill-treating an animal and therefore could be an Act prosecution offence.</p>
<b>Electric prodders</b>	<p>Minimum standard requiring that electric prodders are not to be used on calves.</p>	<p>Regulation that electric prodders are not to be used on cattle under 150kg, must only be used on the animal's hindquarters or forequarters, and the animal must have sufficient room to move away.</p>	<p>The incorrect use of electric prodders could be considered as wilfully / recklessly ill-treating an animal and therefore could be an Act prosecution offence.</p>
<b>Tail twisting</b>	<p>Minimum standard stating that manipulation of the tail during the steer wrestling event must not be performed.</p>		<p>Tail breaking could be considered as wilfully / recklessly ill-treating an animal and therefore could be an Act prosecution offence.</p>
<b>Rope burning</b>			<p>Rope burning could be considered as wilfully / recklessly ill-treating an animal and therefore could be an Act prosecution offence.</p>

**Welfare of the animals in rodeo as a whole (including the use of calves):**

The committee utilised an expert panel and a structured assessment process to evaluate the animal welfare impacts of the seven rodeo events as listed in the Code of Welfare: Rodeos, including those events using calves (calf riding, and rope and tie). The NAWAC report entitled ‘Rodeo events – How do they impact the sentient animal?’ is attached that documents this assessment process and the surrounding discussions. The assessment resulted in the panel proposing a number of non-regulatory recommendations.

The committee considers that there are animal welfare concerns with some aspects of rodeos and that the industry may not be aiming to achieve the recommended best practices as stated in the rodeos code of welfare, in particular, those outlined in Part 9 of the code, which describe the need for development of a welfare assurance system for rodeos.

*Recommendation*

NAWAC considers that several non-regulatory options aimed at increasing the welfare of animals in rodeos could be pursued. Should you wish to adopt this recommended approach, the committee will discuss with the New Zealand Rodeo Cowboys Association (NZRCA), and other rodeo industry bodies, supported by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), to agree upon an appropriate timeframe in which the following non-regulatory options can be proposed, and then implemented by industry:

<b>Event</b>	<b>Non-regulatory options</b>
<b>Rodeo wide</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Propose the formation of a forum in which rodeo event organisers, rodeo veterinarians and rodeo appointed animal welfare officers can meet periodically with, MPI and SPCA Animal Welfare Inspectors to provide professional development and improve practices and consistency. This recommendation follows the development of a similar group with the introduction of the Racing Integrity Unit.</li><li>• Recommend the monitoring and record keeping of all animals used during training activities for rodeo events.</li><li>• Recommend more intensive monitoring and record keeping of all animals used in rodeo events, including after retirement from rodeo.</li><li>• Recommend research to assess the physical impact of an event on animals, including assessment of physiological markers of injury, at an interval of 48 to 72 hours following completion of the event.</li><li>• Propose that the industry considers either reducing or replacing the higher impact events (e.g. cessation of some events, or replacement of events with alternatives that have less impact on the animals).</li></ul>

<b>Rope &amp; tie (calves)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommend the implementation of methods and instruments that may have less of a negative impact upon the calves e.g. bungee ropes / breakaway ropes.</li> <li>• Commission further research into investigating the type and severity of damage to the necks of the calves arising from this event. For example, the following approaches could be discussed for assessing damage post-event: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Examining the bruising on the necks of light coloured calves (after shaving).</li> <li>○ Inflammation profile studies.</li> <li>○ Invasive post mortem studies.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Depending on the results of the above research, develop modifications for, or, the replacement of the rope and tie event with alternatives that have a lesser impact on the welfare of the calves.</li> <li>• Discuss options to reduce the number of calves used at rodeos, or alternatively, to implement a voluntary phase out and cessation of this calf event.</li> </ul>
<b>Steer wrestling</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtain additional information to support or refute anecdotal evidence that steers are purposefully kept at low body condition for the purpose of competing in this event. Depending on the findings, MPI compliance involvement may be necessary.</li> <li>• Commission further research into the impact of experiences in the rodeo arena – particularly for, but not limited to, inflammation profile studies on the steers after the event, including 48 hours after the event when inflammation arising from injury is likely to be greatest.</li> <li>• Increased monitoring and record keeping of the animals being trained and used over a season, including the number of animals involved, and any animal injuries sustained.</li> </ul>
<b>Barrel racing (horses)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss with industry the necessity of using curb bits, spurs and whips during this event, and to determine whether there are alternatives that could be used instead.</li> <li>• Increase monitoring and record keeping of horses undergoing training for barrel racing.</li> <li>• Commission research into injury rates in the post-event period, and of longer term consequences of injury (e.g. arthritic joints in ex-barrel racing horses).</li> </ul>

<b>Team roping (steers)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase monitoring and record keeping of animals undergoing training for team roping.</li> <li>• Commissioning research into alternative equipment that would aim to reduce the impact that the event has on the animal, e.g. breakaway ropes.</li> </ul>
<b>Calf riding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase monitoring and record keeping of the animals used, including reporting injury rates 48 hours post-event.</li> <li>• Ensure children are weighed at each event before they ride calves to make sure that they comply with the maximum weight requirements as stated in the rodeo code of welfare.</li> </ul>
<b>Bull/steer riding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase monitoring and record keeping of the animals being trained, including the number of animals involved, and any animal injuries sustained.</li> <li>• Monitor and report injury rates 48 hours post-event.</li> </ul>
<b>Saddleback and bareback bronc riding (horses)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase monitoring and record keeping of training of these animals, including the number of animals involved, and injuries sustained.</li> <li>• Monitor and report injury rates 48 hours post-event.</li> <li>• Discuss the necessity of spurs and whether alternative equipment can be used.</li> </ul>

NAWAC therefore recommends that:

1. The above non-regulatory options are brought to the attention of the rodeo industry in order to address the concerns that NAWAC has around rodeos.
2. A forum that meets periodically is established where these options can be discussed. NAWAC would expect progress to be made on implementing the recommendations within 12 months and will periodically monitor progress thereafter.

If you choose to pursue these non-regulatory actions, the option to progress regulatory actions will remain as a tool to use in future should the industry refuse, or fail, to meet the requirements as agreed.

Sincerely,



Gwyneth Verkerk  
Chair, NAWAC