



NEW ZEALAND
THOROUGHBRED BREEDERS'



Welfare Guidelines

For Thoroughbred Breeding in New Zealand

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Foreword

One of the things I've learned working with breeders is that people do this because they genuinely care about the horse. Welfare isn't something that needs explaining or enforcing. It's there in the early mornings, the late nights, and the constant attention to small details that others might never see. I've seen that firsthand on breeding farms right across the country, where the horse comes first simply because that's how people believe it should be.

Breeding Thoroughbreds is demanding, hands on work. It relies on judgement, experience, patience, and a deep understanding of horses as individuals. No two farms are the same, and no two horses are the same. Good horsemanship takes many forms, shaped by people, place, and practice. These guidelines are not intended to override that experience or tell anyone how to do their job. They exist to support it.

This document brings together practical guidance and shared expectations across the breeding lifecycle, from foaling and youngstock through to sales preparation, transport, retirement, and end of life. Much of what is included here will already feel familiar. In many cases, it reflects what breeders, stud staff, and farm teams are already doing well, and provides a common reference point that people can lean on when making decisions or supporting others in their work.



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The guidelines sit alongside experience, common sense, and veterinary advice. They are not a checklist, and they are not about compliance for its own sake. Instead, they are there to support consistency where it matters, encourage good conversations, and help ensure horses are cared for thoughtfully and responsibly at every stage of their lives.

I want to acknowledge the people on the ground who live this every day. The breeders, managers, and stud staff whose care, observation, and judgement underpin good welfare outcomes. Their commitment is what gives these guidelines meaning.

Looking after horses properly is something the New Zealand breeding community takes real pride in. Being clear about what good care looks like helps protect the horses in our care, the people who work with them, and the confidence others place in our industry. As knowledge and experience continue to grow, these guidelines will continue to evolve as well.

They reflect our shared responsibility to give every Thoroughbred the care, respect, and dignity it deserves throughout its life.



Nick Johnson
Chief Executive
New Zealand Thoroughbred
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1. Introduction

These guidelines are written to support the care and welfare of Thoroughbreds bred and raised in New Zealand. They provide stud farms and breeding operations with a clear and practical reference for responsible horse care – from conception through to weaning, sales preparation, and eventual retirement.

While the Animal Welfare Act 1999 and the Code of Welfare: Horses and Donkeys set the minimum legal standards, these guidelines go further. They reflect the expectations of breeders, veterinarians, and the broader community, and align with the principle of a commitment to responsible stewardship and care.

New Zealand's breeding industry already demonstrates high standards of horse welfare. These guidelines aim to consolidate that good practice, promote consistency across the sector, and support continuous improvement – not just in how horses are treated, but in how their wellbeing is planned for, understood, and assessed.

The framework is based on the internationally recognised Five Domains Model, which views welfare through the lens of:

- Nutrition
- Environment
- Health
- Behaviour
- Mental state



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In each domain, the focus is not only on avoiding harm, but also on creating positive experiences. The goal is for Thoroughbreds to live a life where their physical, emotional and social needs are met – and where they are able to thrive as individuals.

These guidelines are intended for use by NZTBA members and the wider breeding community, and will be reviewed and updated periodically to reflect new science, evolving standards, and feedback from within the industry.



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2. Duty of Care

Every person responsible for the care of a horse – whether permanently or temporarily – has a legal and ethical duty to ensure that the horse’s welfare needs are met. This applies across all stages of a horse’s life – including foals, breeding stock, youngstock, retired horses, and those being prepared for sale or transport.

This duty is grounded in the **Animal Welfare Act 1999**, supported by the Code of Welfare: Horses and Donkeys, and reinforced through provisions in the Animal Welfare (Care and Procedures) Regulations 2018. It is also clearly reflected in the Rules of Racing, which apply to all registered Thoroughbreds and those managing them – including breeders, agistors, and transporters.

Minimum legal requirements include:

- Providing horses with adequate food and clean water
- Ensuring appropriate shelter and living conditions
- Enabling horses to express normal patterns of behaviour
- Protecting horses from pain, injury, disease, and distress
- Handling horses in a way that minimises fear and harm

These requirements are not limited to owners. Under the **Rules of Racing**, a registered Thoroughbred must have an “Accountable Person” – someone clearly responsible for its daily welfare, even when agisted or out of work. This duty includes maintaining records, providing timely care, and ensuring compliance with all relevant welfare standards.



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Practical responsibilities include:

- Monitoring horses at least once daily — more frequently during foaling, illness, or adverse weather
- Recognising and responding to signs of distress, injury, or abnormal behaviour
- Ensuring staff have the skills and supervision necessary to carry out care safely and humanely
- Keeping treatment and medication records as per NZTR requirements
- Having a plan in place for emergencies — including access to veterinary care, fire/flood response, and backup feed/water supply
- Planning ahead for retirement, rehoming, or humane euthanasia

Where horses are in shared ownership or under delegated management (e.g. foaling down or pre-sale), the person or business in possession of the horse must understand their responsibilities — both moral and legal.

Going beyond minimums: Best practice means:

- Caring for the horse as an individual — recognising age, temperament, health, and history
- Minimising stressful transitions through continuity of care and familiar environments
- Creating a culture where welfare concerns are encouraged, discussed, and acted upon
- Building systems that support good care — such as induction processes, SOPs, and health check logs

The correct treatment of horses benefits not only the animals themselves, but also the safety of the people working with them. Good horsemen and women understand that high welfare standards are the foundation of a productive, ethical, and sustainable breeding enterprise.



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3. Environment

A Thoroughbred's environment plays a central role in its physical health, safety, and mental wellbeing. Whether horses are kept at pasture, in yards, or stabled, the expectation is that their surroundings support natural behaviours, protect against harm, and promote overall welfare.

In New Zealand's predominantly pasture-based systems, environmental management must also take into account seasonal variation, pasture quality, parasite control, and weather extremes. The legal and ethical standards for housing and land use are detailed in the Animal Welfare Act 1999, the Code of Welfare: Horses and Donkeys, and the Rules of Racing.

Minimum requirements include:

- **Safe paddocks and fencing**

- Fencing must be secure, visible, and well-maintained, with no sharp edges, exposed wires, or loose boards.
- Electric fencing, where used, must be appropriate for horses and checked regularly.
- All paddocks should be free of hazards such as holes, rubbish, and toxic plants.

- **Shelter from the elements**

- Horses must have access to shade and protection from rain, wind, and sun — either via trees, hedges, natural features, or purpose-built shelters.
- Rugging may be used where appropriate, but is not a substitute for environmental protection.



- **Dry, clean resting areas**

- If stabled or yarded, floors should be dry, non-slip, and covered with suitable bedding (e.g. straw, sawdust, or shavings).
- Stables must allow the horse to lie down fully, turn, and stand without restriction. A minimum of 3.5 x 3.5 metres per horse is recommended.

- **Clean and accessible water**

- Horses must have access to clean drinking water at all times. Water troughs should be cleaned regularly and checked for freezing, contamination, or malfunction.

- **Ventilation and lighting**

- Indoor areas must be well-ventilated to prevent respiratory issues, heat stress, and ammonia build-up.
- Lighting should support natural circadian rhythms and enable safe handling during dark hours.

Best practice includes:

- **Enriched environments**

- Paddocks with varied terrain, shelter, and visual barriers can reduce stress and support behavioural expression.
- Environmental enrichment (e.g. scratching posts, hay nets, or visual contact with companions) may be particularly beneficial for stabled horses.

- **Stable social groupings**

- Where possible, horses should be kept in consistent groups to prevent hierarchy disruption and bullying.
- Isolation of social animals should be minimised unless medically necessary.



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- **Paddock rotation and pasture care**

- To maintain grass quality and reduce worm burden, paddocks should be spelled and rotated as part of routine land management.
- Overgrazed, muddy, or heavily compacted areas should be rested and reseeded as needed.

- **Environmental monitoring**

- Regular inspections of paddocks, water sources, and buildings should be documented.
- Emergency equipment (e.g. fire extinguishers, water shut-offs, halters) should be accessible and functional.

Emergency preparedness

Farms must have contingency plans for natural disasters such as floods, fires, or severe storms. This includes:

- Evacuation plans and property maps
- Emergency contact lists (vet, neighbours, staff)
- Ready access to halters, leads, and transport
- Back-up feed and water plans in case of supply disruption

A well-managed environment protects horses from harm, reduces stress, and promotes healthy development and behaviour. It also improves safety for staff and efficiency for farm operations.



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4. Behaviour and Mental Wellbeing

Behaviour is a window into a horse's mental and emotional state. A horse's ability to express natural behaviours — such as grazing, playing, grooming, resting, and social interaction — is fundamental to good welfare. Understanding, supporting, and responding to behavioural needs must be a priority across all stages of the breeding and management process.

This section aligns with the Behaviour and Mental State domains of the Five Domains Model, as well as expectations outlined in the Code of Welfare: Horses and Donkeys.

Minimum expectations:

- **Social interaction:**

Horses are herd animals. Except in specific short-term veterinary situations, they should not be kept in total isolation. Paddock mates or at least visual and tactile contact with other horses must be provided.

- **Freedom of movement:**

Horses must have regular opportunity to move freely — including walking, rolling, running, and lying down. Long-term confinement in stables or yards is not acceptable without regular turnout or structured exercise.

- **Predictability and routine:**

Daily routines should be consistent to reduce anxiety. Horses should be fed, checked, and handled at predictable intervals, especially during sensitive phases like weaning or sales prep.



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- **Handling and training methods:**

Horses must be handled calmly and competently, using techniques that reduce fear and build trust. Excessive force, shouting, rough handling, or punishment-based training are unacceptable and contrary to good horsemanship.

- **Monitoring mental state:**

Changes in behaviour – such as increased aggression, withdrawal, excessive alertness, or apathy – must be taken seriously. These are often early signs of underlying stress, pain, or environmental problems.

Signs of good behavioural welfare include:

- Calm, alert demeanour
- Curiosity and willingness to engage with surroundings
- Calm acceptance of routine handling
- Relaxed interactions with other horses
- Regular lying down for rest (especially in foals and youngstock)

Signs of poor behavioural welfare include:

- Stereotypies (e.g. crib-biting, weaving, box-walking)
- Overreaction to handling (e.g. rearing, bolting, head-shyness)
- Lethargy or depression (e.g. withdrawn, unresponsive)
- Aggression (e.g. biting, kicking, bullying others)
- Restlessness or excessive vocalisation

These behaviours should never be dismissed as “just the way that horse is.” They are often expressions of unmet needs or chronic stress and should prompt a reassessment of management, environment, and health.



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Best practice includes:

- **Group housing where safe and feasible:**

Keeping horses in small, stable social groups supports emotional resilience and development – especially in foals, weanlings, and retired mares.

- **Positive reinforcement techniques:**

Using food, scratches, or praise to reward calm, cooperative behaviour reinforces trust and can reduce anxiety.

- **Environmental enrichment:**

Mirrors, scratch posts, toys, and access to varied terrain can help reduce boredom and promote natural behaviours in confined or recovering horses.

- **Gradual desensitisation to new experiences:**

Horses should be gradually introduced to new equipment, environments, and procedures – especially during sales preparation or transport.

The behavioural domain is one of the most immediate and observable indicators of a horse's welfare. A well-adjusted, curious, and socially engaged horse is far more likely to thrive physically and emotionally – and to be safer and easier for staff to work with.



5. Health

Maintaining the health of Thoroughbreds is a core responsibility of every breeder, manager, and person in charge of horses. A healthy horse is more resilient, performs better, and is less likely to suffer prolonged illness or injury. Good health management includes both prevention and early intervention – and must be tailored to the needs of horses at every stage of life.

This section reflects the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act 1999, Animal Welfare (Care and Procedures) Regulations 2018, the Code of Welfare: Horses and Donkeys, and the Rules of Racing (particularly Rule 345 regarding treatment records).

Minimum expectations:

- **Daily observation and monitoring:**

All horses must be visually inspected at least once daily. Those foaling, ill, recovering, or in vulnerable categories (e.g. foals, geriatric horses) may require more frequent checks.

- **Recognition of health issues:**

All staff must be trained to recognise:

- Lameness or reluctance to move
- Nasal discharge, coughing, or breathing difficulty
- Signs of colic (e.g. rolling, pawing, stretching)
- Diarrhoea, bloating, or weight loss
- Swelling, wounds, or skin infections
- Dullness, reluctance to eat, or abnormal posture



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- **Veterinary care:**

A veterinarian must be consulted promptly when health concerns arise. Delaying treatment may breach both legal and ethical obligations.

- **Treatment and medication records:**

NZTR Rule 345 requires that all treatments (including supplements, medications, and drenches) are logged with:

- Date and time
- Horse name
- Substance, dose, and route
- Reason for administration
- Name of administering person and vet (if involved)

- **Hoof and dental care:**

- Horses must have regular hoof trimming or shoeing — typically every 6–8 weeks.
- Young horses, broodmares, and stallions must receive routine dental care, generally at least once a year or as recommended.

- **Parasite control:**

- A strategic worming programme should be based on faecal egg counts, seasonal risk, and individual need.
- Overuse of drenches should be avoided to reduce resistance.

- **Vaccination:**

- Horses should be vaccinated in line with veterinary advice and according to any requirements for sales, transport, or export.
- Common vaccines include tetanus, strangles, equine herpesvirus, and equine influenza.



Foal and mare health:

- Colostrum intake should be monitored within 2 hours of birth.
- Signs of Failure of Passive Transfer (FPT) must prompt immediate veterinary attention.
- Mares post-foaling must be checked for signs of retained placenta, colic, or reproductive tract injury.

Best practice includes:

- **Health records:**

Maintaining a written or digital file for each horse, including farrier visits, dental work, vaccinations, worming, illnesses, and treatments.

- **Regular body condition scoring (BCS):**

Using a 1–5 scale to assess nutritional status and adjust feed or workload accordingly.

- **Biosecurity protocols:**

- Isolate new or returning horses for a minimum of 7–14 days.
- Use dedicated equipment and avoid shared water or feed during quarantine.
- Disinfect stables and yards between uses.

- **Emergency readiness:**

- Have first aid kits stocked and accessible.
- Ensure staff know how to respond to colic, lacerations, choking, and laminitis.
- Know when and how to call the vet — including after-hours.

Health is not static. It's dynamic and influenced by nutrition, housing, stress, genetics, and handling. Proactive care — based on observation, training, and veterinary input — is the foundation of any high-welfare breeding operation.



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6. Reproductive Management and Foaling

Breeding Thoroughbreds involves close human interaction with mares, stallions, and foals. Each phase of the reproductive cycle – from teasing and covering to foaling and postnatal care – presents specific welfare risks and responsibilities. These must be managed with skill, patience, and respect for the horse.

This section outlines good practice in New Zealand stud environments, with an emphasis on safety, hygiene, and low-stress handling.

Mare Management (Pre- and Post-Cover)

- Teasing and heat detection must be carried out using calm, trained staff. Mares should be handled with care and never harassed or confined in ways that increase stress or risk of injury.
- Breeding hygiene is essential. Both the stallion and mare's genital area should be cleaned before natural cover. Tail wrapping and washing are standard.
- Restraint and sedation:
 - Should be used only when necessary, and never as a routine substitute for calm, experienced handling.
 - Twitches, hobbles, and sedatives must be applied correctly, under supervision, and for the shortest time possible.
- Monitoring of pregnant mares should include body condition, vaccination boosters, and regular health checks. Mares should be moved to their foaling environment no later than 320 days' gestation.



Stallion Handling and Covering Management

- Stallions should be fit, sound, and well socialised with staff.
- Breeding sheds must have:
 - Non-slip flooring
 - Clear exits for safety
 - Experienced staff to handle both mare and stallion
- Stallions should not be over-used or worked to the point of fatigue, frustration, or injury.
- Positive, consistent handling and a predictable routine help reduce aggression or anxiety in covering situations.

Foaling Environment

- **Location:**

Mares may foal in a well-grassed paddock with adequate shelter or a clean, well-bedded foaling box (minimum 4m x 4m recommended).

- **Foaling supervision:**

- Mares must be monitored closely in the final 2–3 weeks of pregnancy.
- Use of foaling alarms, CCTV, or night watch is strongly recommended.
- Staff must know signs of impending foaling (waxing, elongation of vulva, restlessness).

- **Cleanliness and hygiene:**

- Foaling boxes must be disinfected between uses.
- A foaling kit should be on hand and fully stocked (see Appendix A).



Foal Care in First 24–48 Hours

- **Standing and nursing:**
 - Foals should stand within 1 hour and nurse within 2 hours.
 - Delays require immediate veterinary advice.
- **Colostrum and passive transfer:**
 - Intake of high-quality colostrum is essential.
 - High-risk foals may need blood testing to confirm successful transfer of immunity.
- **Naval care:**
 - The umbilical stump should be treated with iodine or chlorhexidine soon after birth.
- **Early health checks:**
 - Check for limb abnormalities, entropion, cleft palate, hernia, or lethargy.
 - Monitor mare for retained placenta, uterine infection, or abnormal behaviour.

Red Flags That Require Immediate Veterinary Attention

- Dystocia (difficult birth)
- Foal not standing or suckling within expected timeframe
- Meconium impaction or signs of abdominal pain
- Mares showing signs of colic, haemorrhage, or prolonged labour
- Red bag delivery (premature placental separation)



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Best Practice Includes:

- Having a trained foaling team or 24-hour on-call vet access
- Keeping records of foaling dates, interventions, and postnatal checks
- Using consistent, quiet handling from birth to build trust and reduce stress
- Managing mare and foal turnout carefully to ensure safety and bonding
- Gradually introducing the foal to new environments and short separations

Reproductive management done well protects the health of mares and foals, reduces risk, and lays the groundwork for strong human-horse relationships. Poor handling or delayed response during this phase can result in long-term consequences – or preventable loss of life.



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7. Weaning and Youngstock

The transition from dam to independent life is a formative stage in a Thoroughbred's development. Good management during this time builds confidence, health, and resilience – while poor weaning can lead to lasting behavioural, physical, or social issues. These guidelines outline how to carry out weaning and manage youngstock in a way that prioritises welfare and long-term development.

Weaning

Weaning should be a planned, gradual, and low-stress process, suited to the individual foal's maturity and health.

Minimum expectations include:

- Foals should be at least 5 months old and in good condition before weaning.
- Abrupt or single-foal weaning should be avoided unless medically necessary.
- Weaning should take place in a familiar environment to reduce stress.
- Foals should be weaned in pairs or small groups, preferably with paddock mates they already know.
- Both mares and foals should be monitored closely for signs of distress, injury, or abnormal behaviour in the days following separation.



Warning signs to watch for:

- Excessive pacing, calling, fence-walking, or refusal to eat
- Diarrhoea, bloating, or colic signs
- Lethargy or lack of social interaction

Best practice includes:

- Progressive separation, where mares are moved out of sight gradually
- Introducing a companion gelding or older horse to help settle weanlings
- Ensuring weanlings have been introduced to hard feed and basic handling before weaning
- Avoiding other stressors (e.g. vaccinations, long travel) at the same time as weaning.

Youngstock Management (Post-Weaning)

After weaning, the focus shifts to growing horses safely – physically, mentally, and socially. The key goals are to promote balanced development, trust in humans, and good social behaviours.



Housing and environment:

- Youngstock should be kept in stable social groups with room to move, play, and establish social bonds.
- Paddocks must be safe and well-maintained, with shelter and good footing.
- Overcrowding or isolation should be avoided.

Nutrition:

- Diets must support steady, healthy growth — not rapid weight gain.
- Overfeeding, particularly with high-starch feeds, is linked to developmental orthopaedic disease (DOD).
- Access to good pasture, fibre-based feed, and clean water is essential.

Handling and training:

- All young horses should be trained to:
 - Be haltered and led quietly
 - Be groomed and have their feet picked up
 - Tolerate basic vet and farrier procedures
- Handling must be calm, consistent, and progressive, with sessions kept short and positive.



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Health care:

- Hoof trimming should start early and occur regularly.
- Dental checks should be done by around 12 months of age.
- Worming and vaccinations must be carried out according to veterinary guidance.
- Body condition should be assessed regularly using BCS or weight tape.

Behavioural Development

Social development is critical. Play, interaction, and hierarchy negotiation teach young horses valuable skills that translate into safety and trainability later on.

Avoid:

- Housing weanlings alone
- Constantly rotating paddock mates
- Delaying handling until the yearling stage
- Punitive or inconsistent responses to fear or confusion

The weaning and yearling period is a chance to “get it right.” Done well, it sets horses up to thrive through breaking, racing, and beyond. Done poorly, it can result in chronic behavioural issues, growth problems, and increased injury risk.



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8. Sales Preparation

Sales preparation is a high-pressure phase for young Thoroughbreds — involving changes in routine, handling, diet, and environment. While presenting horses in optimal condition is important for commercial outcomes, it must never come at the cost of health, welfare, or long-term soundness.

This section sets expectations for preparing horses for public auction in a way that protects both horse and handler, and maintains trust in the Thoroughbred breeding industry.

Minimum expectations:

- **Nutrition and body condition:**

- Horses must not be overfed or fattened in a way that risks joint health or developmental disease.
- Diet changes should be gradual, with balanced rations that support growth and coat condition without excess weight gain.

- **Exercise and movement:**

- Horses must be given daily turnout or structured exercise to maintain muscle tone, mental health, and joint mobility.
- Stalling 24/7 with no release is not acceptable.



- **Handling and presentation:**

- All grooming, leading, washing, and parading should be done using calm, consistent techniques.
- Training must allow time for the horse to learn without fear or force.
- Sedation must not be used to mask behavioural issues unless prescribed by a veterinarian for a specific purpose.

- **Health and veterinary care:**

- Horses must be sound, vaccinated, recently wormed, and appropriately trimmed or shod.
- Any lameness, infection, or abnormal condition must be investigated and treated promptly.

- **Transport to sales venues:**

- Must comply with transport welfare standards (see Section 9).
- Horses must arrive in good condition, rested, and with feed and water access during transit.



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Best practice includes:

- Tailoring preparation timelines to each individual, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all regime
- Avoiding excessive lunging or high-intensity exercise that risks injury or sourness
- Introducing horses gradually to new sights, sounds, and handlers to build resilience
- Maintaining records of all treatments, vaccinations, or interventions, and disclosing them as needed to prospective buyers
- Practising parading in a calm setting before arriving at the sale
- Ensuring social contact or visual companionship is maintained at sales yards where possible

Ethical considerations:

- Any physical alterations for cosmetic purposes that cause pain or distress (e.g. whisker trimming, tail blocking) should be avoided.
- Misrepresenting a horse's condition, temperament, or veterinary history undermines the integrity of the sales process and may carry legal consequences.

Where a horse is unfit for sale — due to injury, illness, or unsafe behaviour — it must be withdrawn, even if doing so is commercially inconvenient.



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After the sale:

- Vendors should make every effort to ensure the welfare of the horse continues — especially for horses sold without a clear racing or rehoming pathway.
- Documentation (health records, feeding guides, handling notes) should be provided where available.
- Horses should be transported safely and monitored closely during their adjustment to a new home or training environment.

Sales preparation is not only a marketing exercise — it's a welfare-critical period where horses face heightened risk.

With good systems, experienced staff, and a horse-first mindset, this phase can be managed without compromising the long-term wellbeing or reputation of the Thoroughbred.



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9. Transport

Transport presents significant welfare risks for Thoroughbreds. Whether moving horses between properties, to sales, for breeding, or export, it is essential that all journeys are planned, legal, humane, and appropriate to the condition and experience of the horse.

This section reflects the requirements of:

- The Animal Welfare Act 1999
- The Code of Welfare: Transport within New Zealand
- The Animal Welfare (Care and Procedures) Regulations 2018
- NZTR Horse Transport Guidelines (2024)

General Responsibilities

- Horses must be under the care of a competent person during loading, transport, and unloading.
- The person in charge must ensure that each horse is fit for transport prior to loading.
- The vehicle must be suitable for horses and meet relevant safety standards (e.g. WoF, CoF, RUC compliance).



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Fitness for Transport

Before loading, each horse must be inspected by someone familiar with horses and competent in assessing health and soundness.

A horse must not be transported if it:

- Has a significant injury, illness, or lameness likely to cause pain or worsen during transport
- Shows signs of infectious disease
- Is unfit for the intended journey length or road conditions
- Is in the final 30 days of pregnancy, unless for emergency veterinary care
- Is under 10 days old, unless travelling with the mare or under veterinary guidance

Exceptions apply only where a horse is being transported to a veterinary hospital for treatment.

If a horse becomes injured or sick during transit, emergency first aid or veterinary attention must be sought at the first safe opportunity.



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Transport Vehicles and Facilities

Vehicles must be:

- Roadworthy and registered with a current Warrant or Certificate of Fitness
- Designed specifically to transport horses safely, with:
 - Non-slip, safe flooring
 - Adequate space and headroom
 - Protection from adverse weather
 - Secure partitions to prevent falling or scrambling
 - Ventilation suitable for temperature regulation
- Cleanable and disinfectable, especially between horses from different properties

Loading and unloading areas must be safe, quiet, and free of hazards.

Handling During Loading and Transit

Personnel must be trained and competent in horse handling and transport procedures.

Best practice includes:

- Calm, confident, and low-stress loading techniques
- Avoiding yelling, striking, or using unnecessary force
- Whips, leads, or other tools used only for safety or direction, and never excessively or abusively
- Horses must not be suspended by mechanical means or handled in a way that causes pain or fear



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Journey Duration and Rest Periods

- No horse may be transported for more than 14 hours continuously.
- For journeys exceeding 12 hours, horses must be offloaded and given at least 10 hours rest, with access to:
 - Water
 - Pasture and/or roughage
 - Room to rest, urinate/defecate, and recover

Where delays arise (e.g. due to road closures or accidents), welfare takes priority.

Drivers may contact *555 or 111 for police assistance to resume movement and protect horse welfare.

Post-Transport Recovery

Upon arrival:

- Horses must be checked for signs of stress, injury, colic, or dehydration
- Fresh water should be provided as soon as it is safe to do so
- Feed should be reintroduced gradually
- Time must be allowed for recovery before exercise, covering, or sale preparation

Young horses, foals, and recently weaned individuals are at greater risk of travel-related stress and should be monitored more closely.



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For Exported Horses

Exported Thoroughbreds must meet MPI requirements, which may include:

- Pre-export isolation
- Testing and vaccination
- Veterinary certification
- Specialist air transport planning
- Mandatory rest and recovery periods at their destination

Working with MPI-accredited agents and veterinarians is essential for ensuring compliance and welfare during export.

Transporting horses is never routine. Even short trips involve significant risks that must be actively managed.

Planning, training, and vigilance are the best tools for ensuring every horse arrives safely — physically and mentally.



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10. End of Life and Rehoming

Responsible breeding includes planning for the horse's full life cycle – not just its commercial career. When a Thoroughbred retires from racing or breeding, its welfare remains the responsibility of the owner or person in charge until a humane and appropriate next step is found.

This section outlines best practice for both rehoming and end-of-life decision-making, based on New Zealand's legal standards and industry expectations.

Rehoming and Retirement

Many Thoroughbreds adapt well to life after racing or breeding. With the right handling and transition support, they can enjoy second careers or quieter paddock retirement. However, rehoming must be done with thought and accountability – not simply as a way to pass on responsibility.

Minimum expectations include:

- The horse must be sound enough for the intended purpose
- All known health, behavioural, or management issues must be disclosed honestly
- The new home or person must be suitable, competent, and informed
- Basic records (e.g. treatment history, feeding, dental, farrier) should be passed on
- Rehoming should not occur via unsuitable channels (e.g. unmonitored online auctions or low-welfare saleyards)



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Best practice includes:

- Using reputable rehoming organisations (e.g. NZTR Acknowledged Re-Trainer Network)
- Offering retraining support or a transition plan
- Following up periodically with the new owner or home
- Retaining the option to take the horse back if it becomes unsuitable

Under NZTR Rule 1429, all Thoroughbreds must have an “Accountable Person.” This duty continues until:

- The horse is humanely euthanised
- It is rehomed into a situation where welfare can reasonably be assured
- It is officially deregistered or exported

When Rehoming Is Not an Option

There are circumstances where rehoming is not viable or ethical. This includes:

- Horses with significant chronic pain or mobility issues
- Severe or unpredictable aggression or fear-based behaviours
- Conditions that would require ongoing pain management or special care beyond a typical home
- Horses with no clear pathway to meaningful quality of life

In these cases, euthanasia may be the most humane outcome.



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Euthanasia

Euthanasia must be:

- Prompt and humane, carried out by a veterinarian or competent person using a firearm or captive bolt in accordance with the Code of Welfare: Horses and Donkeys
- Done with minimal stress to the horse – ideally in a familiar environment, with a calm handler
- Reported to NZTR via the SR24 form if the horse is still registered

After euthanasia:

- Remains must be disposed of lawfully (e.g. burial, rendering, cremation)
- Microchips or brands should be recorded for traceability

Hesitation or emotional discomfort must never override the decision to act when a horse is suffering.

Planning Ahead

Best practice means having a plan before a decision becomes urgent:

- Review retirement options early, especially for older broodmares and stallions
- Identify potential companion homes or semi-retirement scenarios
- Discuss options with vets, staff, and owners during regular reviews
- Consider costs – transport, euthanasia, disposal – as part of ongoing horse care planning



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Every Thoroughbred deserves a respectful end to its life.

Whether through responsible rehoming or a timely and humane death, the focus must remain on dignity, compassion, and the avoidance of suffering.

This is the breeder's final duty — and one of the most important.



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11. Staffing and Competency

The standard of care a horse receives is only as good as the people delivering it. Staff who are knowledgeable, observant, and confident in their handling make a profound difference to welfare outcomes. Conversely, poor handling or oversight can quickly compromise safety and cause avoidable distress or harm.

This section outlines the expectations for training, supervision, and competency of all people working with Thoroughbreds on breeding farms and agistment properties.

Minimum Expectations

Anyone responsible for horses — whether full-time, part-time, or casual — must:

- Be competent in basic horse handling, including haltering, leading, grooming, and picking up feet
- Be able to identify signs of distress, pain, illness, or abnormal behaviour, and know who to report concerns to
- Understand the importance of calm, consistent, low-stress handling
- Be aware of and follow farm protocols for:
 - Emergency response (e.g. fire, flood, injury)
 - Veterinary care and when to seek it
 - Recording treatments and observations
 - Safe handling of stallions, mares with foals, and youngstock
- Treat horses with respect and patience at all times



Induction and Onboarding

All new staff and contractors should receive an induction that includes:

- A tour of the property and introduction to safety procedures
- Explanation of daily routines and who is responsible for what
- Familiarisation with specific horse requirements (e.g. known behaviours, health risks)
- Review of protocols for foaling, covering, transport, and emergencies
- Location and use of first aid kits, halters, fire extinguishers, and record books

Best Practice Includes:

- Ongoing training opportunities (e.g. equine first aid, foal handling, low-stress weaning, disease control)
- Mentorship or buddy systems for junior or inexperienced staff
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for common tasks:
 - Foaling attendance and intervention
 - Teasing, covering, and stallion management
 - Transport preparation and loading
 - Isolation and biosecurity protocols
- Clear reporting structures for concerns — including welfare issues, suspected mistreatment, or safety hazards
- Toolbox meetings or briefings to debrief incidents and review seasonal priorities



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Staff Ratios and Availability

There is no legal staff-to-horse ratio – but farms must ensure:

- There are enough trained people on-site to observe and care for all horses at least once daily
- During high-risk periods (e.g. foaling season, major transport, severe weather), additional on-call support is available
- Staff are not working beyond reasonable limits or expected to manage more than they can safely handle

Culture and Communication

A culture of welfare requires more than just training – it requires leadership. Managers should:

- Model calm, respectful handling
- Encourage staff to ask questions and raise concerns
- Support a no-blame approach to reporting welfare incidents
- Review and revise practices when better options emerge
- Recognise and reward good horsemanship, not just speed or task completion

People are the most important part of any welfare system. Investing in staff competence, confidence, and care sets the foundation for safe, effective, and ethical horse management – at every stage of a Thoroughbred's life.



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12. Indicators of Good and Poor Welfare

Welfare is not always about what we do – it's about how the horse responds to what we do. A Thoroughbred's physical condition, behaviour, and general demeanour offer the clearest signals of how well its needs are being met.

This section offers practical, on-farm indicators of good and poor welfare, organised by the Five Domains Model: Nutrition, Environment, Health, Behaviour, and Mental State.

These indicators help staff, managers, and inspectors assess horse welfare quickly and consistently.

Nutrition

Good welfare indicators:

- Horse has a healthy body condition (BCS 3–4 on a 1–5 scale)
- Clean water is freely available and regularly consumed
- Appetite is normal; horse eagerly eats offered feed
- Coat is glossy, skin supple

Poor welfare indicators:

- Ribs are visible or protruding; hip bones sharply defined (BCS ≤ 2)
- Crest fat, thickened tail head, or uneven weight distribution (BCS ≥ 5)
- Diarrhoea, bloating, or prolonged weight loss
- Long periods without access to food or water



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Environment

Good welfare indicators:

- Horses can lie down, roll, and move freely
- Paddocks are clean, secure, and hazard-free
- Shelter is available from wind, rain, and sun
- Horses are not confined for long periods
- Ventilation in stables is fresh, with no ammonia smell

Poor welfare indicators:

- Overcrowding or isolation
- Wet, muddy, or unsanitary conditions
- Broken fences, sharp edges, or toxic plants present
- Horses showing reluctance to enter stables or float
- Horses are confined 24/7 without turnout or movement

Health

Good welfare indicators:

- Clear eyes, clean nostrils, healthy hooves
- Good mobility and freedom of movement
- Regular veterinary, farrier, and dental care documented
- Normal urination and defecation

Poor welfare indicators:

- Lameness, wounds, swelling, or untreated illness
- Coughing, nasal discharge, or laboured breathing
- Long toes, cracked hooves, or reluctance to walk
- Signs of colic, bloating, or repeated rolling
- Out-of-date vaccination or worming records



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Behaviour

Good welfare indicators:

- Alert, curious, and engaged with surroundings
- Calm during routine handling
- Interacts appropriately with other horses
- Lies down to rest when safe

Poor welfare indicators:

- Stereotypies (crib-biting, weaving, box-walking)
- Excessive aggression, fearfulness, or shutdown behaviour
- Head-shyness, resistance to handling, or repeated refusals
- Avoidance of people, persistent vocalising, or fence walking
- Lethargy or signs of depression

Mental State (Emotional Wellbeing)

Positive indicators:

- Willingness to engage with humans
- Relaxed jaw, soft eye, lowered head posture
- Exploratory and confident in new environments
- Demonstrates play and curiosity

Negative indicators:

- High alert posture, whites of eyes showing, tense facial muscles
- Freezing, flinching, or flight responses during routine tasks
- Indifference to surroundings (shutdown behaviour)
- Signs of frustration (pinned ears, tail swishing, stomping)



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Summary Table

Domain	Good Welfare	Poor Welfare
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Nutrition	Ideal BCS, shiny coat, consistent appetite	Under/overweight, dehydration, gut issues
Environment	Clean, spacious, sheltered, safe	Hazards, mud, confinement, poor ventilation
Health	Soundness, clear eyes, healthy feet	Lameness, wounds, respiratory issues
Behaviour	Calm, curious, social, cooperative	Stereotypies, aggression, fear, lethargy
Mental State	Relaxed, confident, emotionally balanced	Stressed, anxious, shut down, hyper-alert

*This framework can be used in daily checks, formal audits, or welfare investigations. Observing horses in context – over time and across multiple domains – gives the clearest picture of how they are coping, and whether intervention is required.



13. Glossary

This glossary defines key terms used throughout the guidelines to ensure clarity, consistency, and shared understanding across the New Zealand Thoroughbred breeding sector.

Accountable Person

A person defined under NZTR Rule 1429 as responsible for the care, welfare, and management of a Thoroughbred. This includes owners, trainers, breeders, managers, or any person delegated to oversee the horse at any time.

Animal Welfare Act 1999

New Zealand's principal animal welfare legislation, which sets out the obligations of people responsible for animals, including the requirement to meet their physical, health, and behavioural needs.

BCS (Body Condition Score)

A numerical scale used to assess the fat coverage of horses. Most Thoroughbreds should fall between 3 and 4 on a 1–5 scale, where:

- 1 = Emaciated
- 3 = Ideal
- 5 = Obese

Biosecurity

A set of preventive measures designed to reduce the risk of transmission of infectious diseases, parasites, or pests between horses or properties.



Colostrum

The first milk produced by the mare after foaling. It is rich in antibodies and critical for providing passive immunity to the newborn foal.

Dystocia

Difficult or abnormal labour during foaling. It often requires immediate veterinary intervention to prevent injury or death to mare or foal.

Emergency Plan

A written plan detailing how horses and people will be protected or evacuated in the event of fire, flood, extreme weather, or other emergencies.

Five Domains Model

An internationally recognised model for assessing animal welfare across five areas: Nutrition, Environment, Health, Behaviour, and Mental State. It is used in New Zealand to guide welfare decision-making.

Fit for Transport

A legal and welfare requirement stating that horses must be in suitable health and condition before being transported. This includes being free from lameness, illness, and excessive stress.



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Foaling Kit

A collection of tools and supplies kept on hand during the foaling season to assist with the safe delivery of foals and immediate postnatal care.

Passive Transfer

The process by which a foal absorbs antibodies from colostrum. Failure of passive transfer (FPT) increases the risk of neonatal illness and sepsis.

Rehoming

The process of finding a new and suitable non-racing home for a Thoroughbred at the end of its commercial career. Rehoming must prioritise the horse's ongoing welfare and suitability for its intended use.

Stereotypy

A repetitive, fixed behaviour with no obvious goal or function, often developed in response to stress, boredom, or poor environment. Examples include crib-biting, weaving, and box-walking.

Treatment Logbook

A required record (under NZTR Rule 345) of all medications, supplements, or treatments administered to horses. Logbooks must include date, dose, route, reason, and person responsible.



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Twitch

A restraint tool used to apply pressure to the horse's upper lip. While commonly used during veterinary or breeding procedures, twitching must be applied correctly, used minimally, and only by experienced handlers.

Veterinary Certificate

A formal document issued by a registered veterinarian confirming the health, condition, or treatment of a horse. Often required for transport, sales, or racing clearance.

This glossary should be reviewed periodically to reflect updated industry terminology and practice. For technical veterinary terms, consult your equine vet or the New Zealand Equine Veterinary Association (NZEVA).



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14. Appendices

The following appendices provide practical, ready-to-use tools that support on-farm implementation of the welfare guidelines. They are intended to help standardise practice, support training, and offer quick reference material for staff and managers.

Appendix A: Foaling Kit Checklist

A fully stocked foaling kit should be kept close to all foaling areas, regularly checked and restocked during the season.

Recommended contents:

- Clean towels (3–5 minimum)
- Disposable gloves (long-arm and short)
- Antiseptic solution (e.g. iodine or chlorhexidine) for navel care
- Obstetric lubricant
- Scissors or scalpel (sterile)
- Foal enema (pre-packaged)
- Thermometer
- Stethoscope
- Foal resuscitator (Ambu bag or equivalent)
- Clean buckets
- Warm water source
- Foal ID bands (if used)
- Torch or headlamp
- Emergency phone numbers (vet, senior staff, backup contacts)
- Clock or stopwatch (or phone) to time standing/suckling milestones



Appendix B: Body Condition Scoring (1–5 Scale)

BCS	Description	Key Signs
1	Emaciated	Prominent spine, ribs, and hip bones. No fat coverage. Dull coat.
2	Thin	Ribs visible, hips defined. Light fat cover over shoulders and loin.
3	Ideal	Ribs can be felt but not seen. Rounded rump. Smooth topline.
4	Fat	Ribs difficult to feel. Fat over tail head, shoulders, and neck.
5	Obese	Heavy fat deposits. Cresty neck. No visible bone structure. Movement may be affected.

*Target BCS for breeding horses is generally 3 to 4.



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Appendix C: Sample Treatment Logbook Entry

01/08/25	Mare Tui	Penicillin	20ml	IM	Post-foaling infection	Dr L.Morris
01/08/25	Mare Tui	Iodine	5ml	Topical	Routine foal care	J.Richard

*All treatments must be recorded as per NZTR Rule 345.

Appendix D: Emergency Plan Template – Key Elements

Contacts:

- Vet (primary and backup)
- Fire and emergency services
- Neighbouring farms or transporters
- Staff phone tree

Property plan:

- Paddock layout and numbering
- Shelter and water points
- Halter and gear storage locations
- Fire extinguishers and hose points
- Evacuation routes and assembly zones



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Scenarios covered:

- Fire (barn, grass)
- Flood or earthquake
- Extreme weather (heat/cold/wind)
- Horse escape or injury
- Staff injury or illness
- Power/water outage

Response kits:

- First aid kit (human and equine)
- Emergency halters and leads
- Feed and water reserves

*Plans should be printed, visible in key areas, and reviewed annually.

Appendix E: Key Codes, Guidelines & Links

- [Animal Welfare Act 1999](#)
- [Code of Welfare: Horses and Donkeys](#)
- Code of Welfare: Transport within NZ
- [Animal Welfare \(Care and Procedures\) Regulations 2018](#)
- NZTR Rules of Racing
- NZTR Transport Guidelines



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Appendix F: Behavioural Red Flags Quick Reference

Behaviour	Possible Cause	Recommended Action
Crib-biting / wind-sucking	Boredom, lack of turnout, gut discomfort	Increase turnout, check diet, assess stressors
Weaving or box-walking	Confinement, lack of companionship	Provide social contact, enrichment, turnout
Sudden aggression	Pain, fear, poor handling history	Rule out medical causes, adjust handling approach
Withdrawal / depression	Chronic stress, illness, social isolation	Health check, review environment and interaction
Refusal to load or lead	Fear, previous trauma, poor training	Use calm, consistent desensitisation and support

*These red flags are not normal, and should always prompt a review of health, environment, handling, or workload.



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Conclusion

The welfare of Thoroughbreds is the foundation on which our industry stands.

These guidelines have been developed to reflect not only the legal responsibilities of those who breed and care for horses in New Zealand, but also the values we hold as an industry – responsibility, integrity, and respect for the animal at the centre of it all.

High standards of welfare are not achieved through compliance alone. They require commitment, planning, and the daily actions of people who understand that good care is good horsemanship – and that the way we raise and manage horses today will shape the future of our sport and breeding community.

Whether you're managing a large commercial stud or a small family operation, these guidelines are here to support you in providing consistent, informed, and compassionate care. They are intended to evolve with the industry, and we welcome feedback, reflection, and shared learning.

At every stage of life – from birth through to retirement – every Thoroughbred deserves a life of safety, dignity, and opportunity. That is the duty we share.



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