

Equine welfare and social licence to operate: Relevance for carriage driving

Roly Owers MRCVS

World Horse Welfare



Outline

1. World Horse Welfare
2. Equestrianism's challenge
3. Social licence concept
4. Maintaining driving's social licence



1. World Horse Welfare – overview

- Leading equine charity since 1927
- Actively promotes the horse-human partnership
- Horses in need, sport & leisure horses, work & production horses
- Care, research, education, influence
- 130+ employees
- Partnership working with governments, universities, regulators, other NGOs
- Strong veterinary credentials
- Active in policy – UK, EU, Globally



World Horse Welfare supports responsible horse sport



- Welfare advisor to sport regulators
 - International Equestrian Federation (FEI) – Code of Conduct for Welfare of Horse
 - FEI's Equine Ethics & Wellbeing Commission
 - International Horse Sport Confederation (IHSC)
 - British Horseracing Authority (BHA)
 - Informally to other national federations
- Associate Member of British Equestrian
 - Member of Equine Welfare and Ethics Advisory Group



2. Equestrianism's challenge

- Equestrianism is on an ethical tightrope walk



'PETA calls on Olympics to ban equestrian events'



'Dressage: A blood sport'



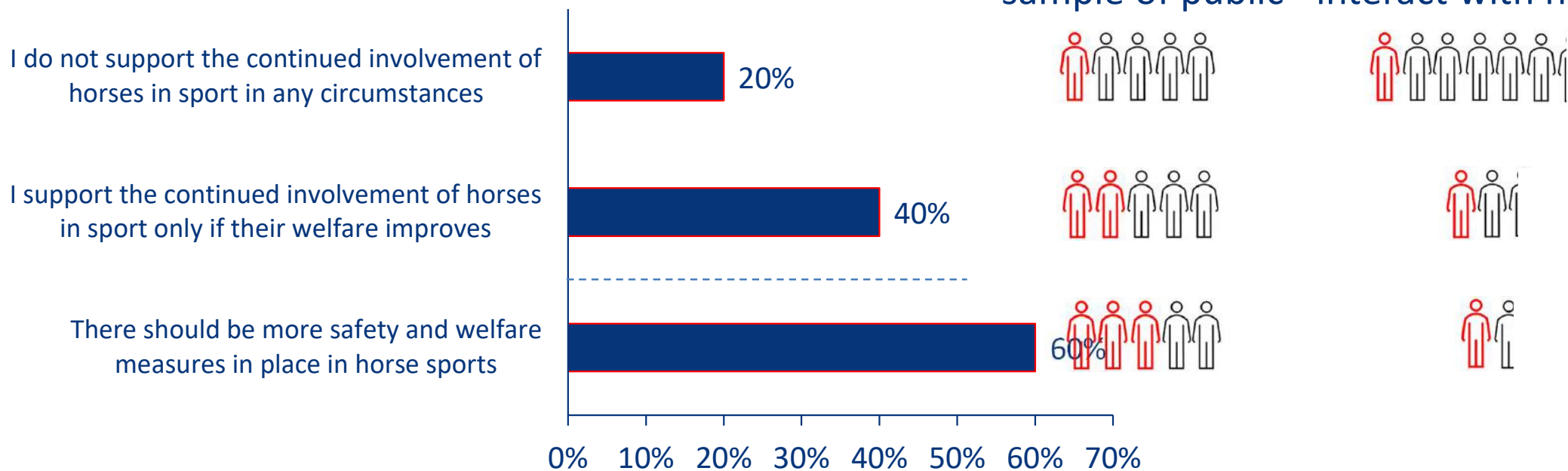
'Are our officials doing enough?'



Perceptions of public and 'horse people' re the use of horses in sport



Representative sample of public People who regularly interact with horses



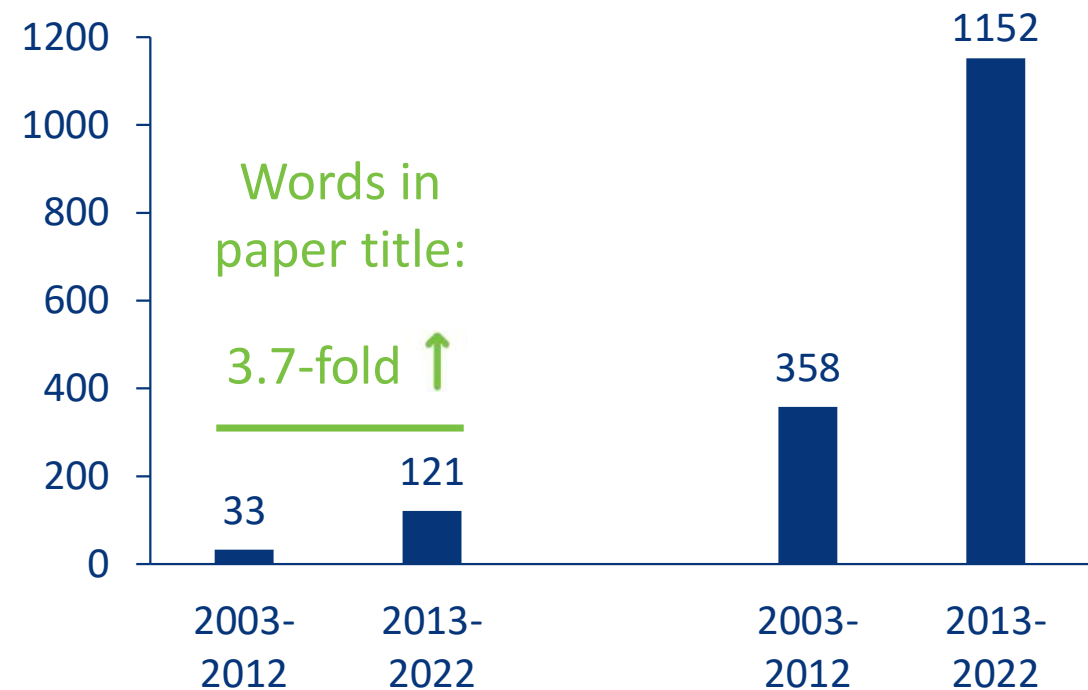
YouGov research conducted in UK 20-22 May, 2022

Scientific interest and knowledge

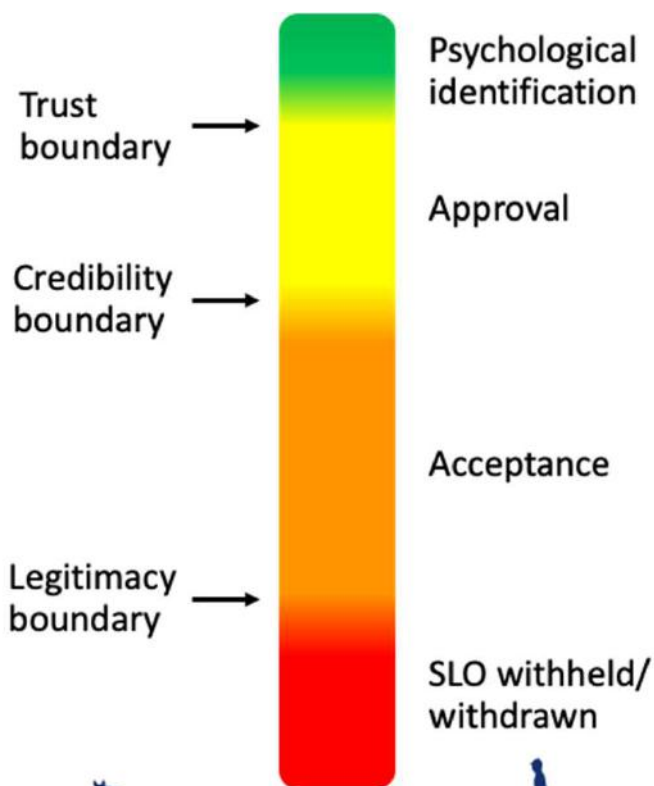
- PubMed search: “(horse OR horses OR equine) AND welfare”
- 3–4-fold increase between 2003–2012 and 2013–2022

Words anywhere
in paper:

3.2-fold ↑



3. Social licence to operate (SLO)



Graphic: After Thomson & Boutilier (2011)

The consequences of losing a social licence



Greyhound racing:
Banned in parts of
Australia and the USA and
under threat in the UK



Jump racing:
Disappeared from
most of Australia



Equestrianism:
Lost from modern
pentathlon after 2024
Olympics

How are social licences lost?



Loss of self-regulation – or the sport – could be the price that we pay for inaction



Society says:

“You regulate yourselves the way we would regulate [you] if we understood what you do, which we don’t. But we will know if you don’t self-regulate properly and then we will regulate you, despite our lack of understanding.”

Bernard Rollin (1943–2021)

Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Animal Sciences, and Biomedical Sciences, Colorado State University, USA



WorldHorseWelfare

www.worldhorsewelfare.org
Registered charity no. 206658 and SC038384

Some issues are a matter of perception

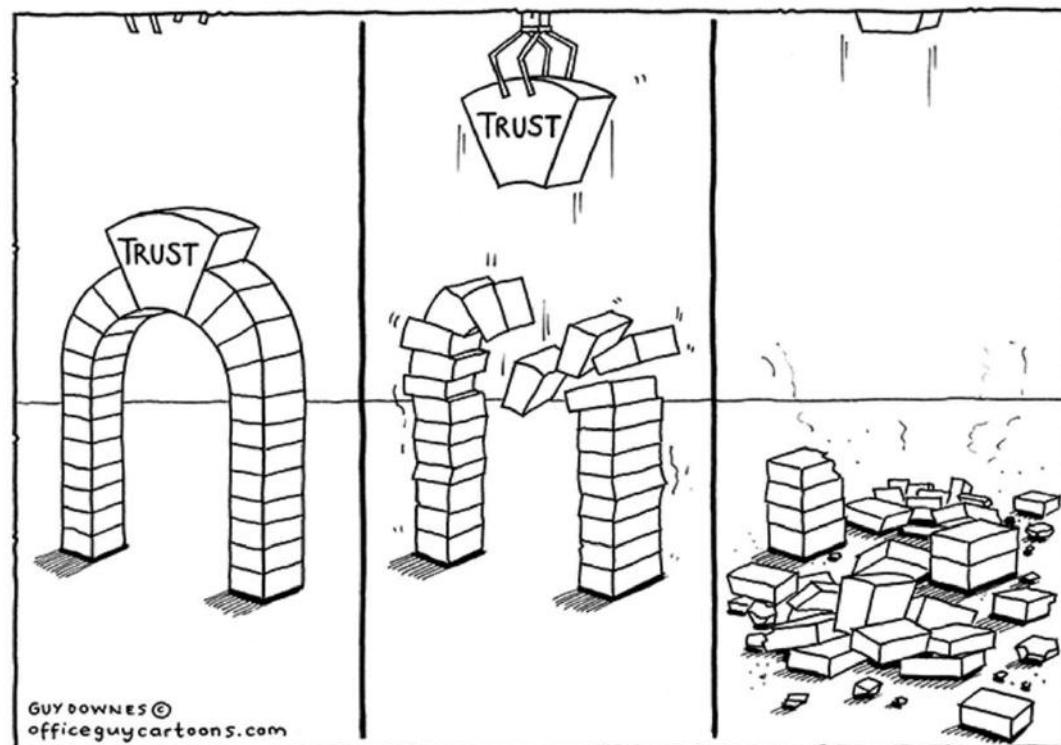


Some are a matter of reality



Social licence: Where are the goalposts?

- Trust is key
- Relevant for those outside and inside the sport



Public expectations regarding welfare

- Equestrianism needs to meet expectations of society
 - 5 Freedoms/5 Provisions
 - 5 Domains
 - 3 Fs (friends, freedom, forage)
 - Mental wellbeing
 - Positive welfare – Giving horses ‘a good life’

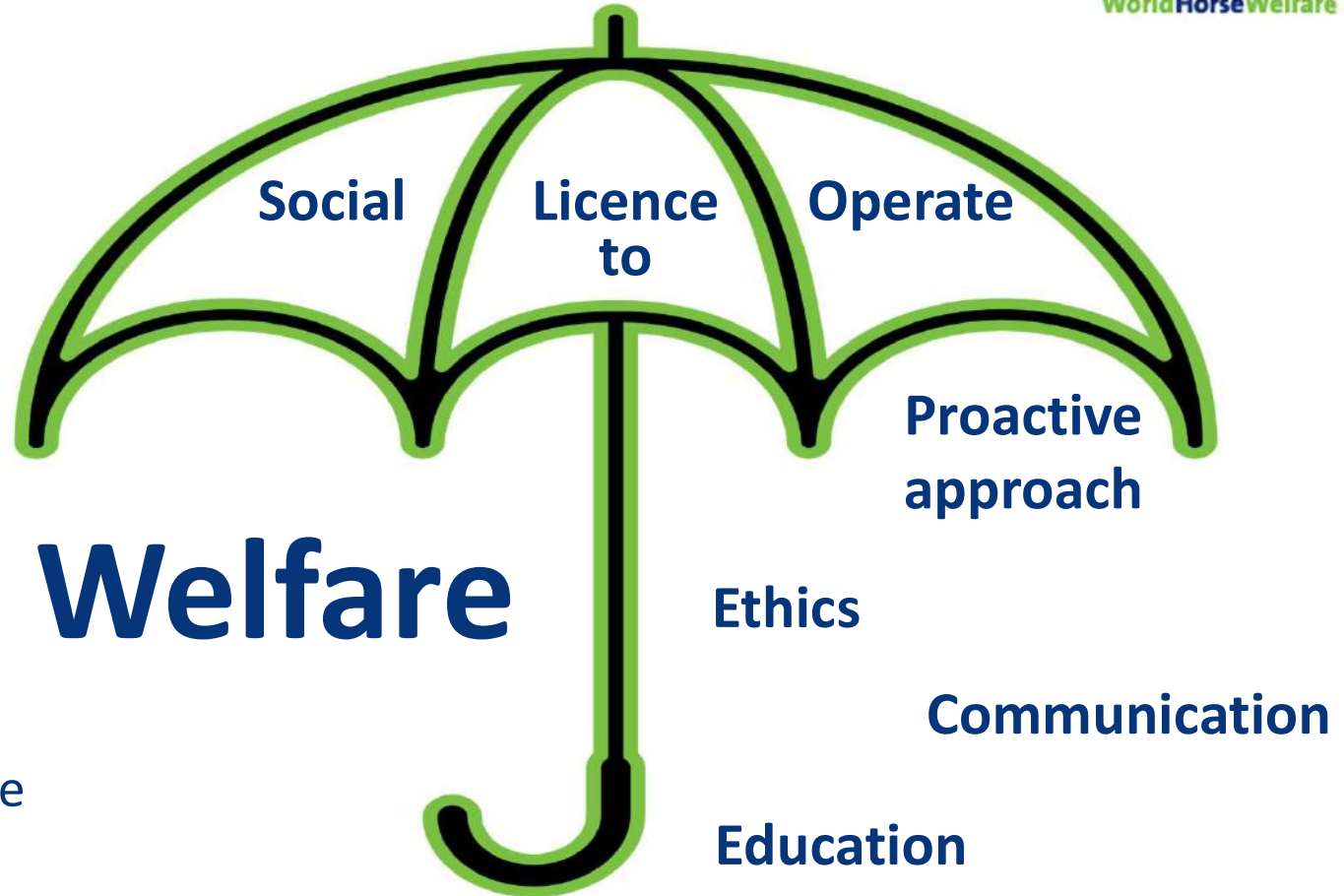


4. Maintaining driving's social licence



Strategic plan

“To promote and ensure the welfare of all horses involved in the sport of Horse Driving Trials”



Whose responsibility is it?

	Welfare	Ethics	Education	Communication	Proactive approach
Individual	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Regulatory	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



Welfare

- Take a holistic view of welfare
- Consider mental and physical welfare
- Promote positive welfare
- Improve equine safety
- Uphold rules and sanctions



Ethics

- Assess the ethics of all practices
- Ask ‘Should we?’ before asking ‘Can we?’

Article

An Ethical Framework for the Use of Horses in Competitive Sport: Theory and Function

Madeleine L. H. Campbell

Citation: Campbell, M.L.H. An Ethical Framework for the Use of Horses in Competitive Sport: Theory and Function. *Animals* **2021**, *11*, 1725. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani11061725>



Education

- Promote lifelong learning for all
 - Equitation science
 - Equine welfare
- Practice evidence-based horse management
- Challenge the status quo



Communication

- Communicate shared values to all stakeholders, including the public
- Engage positively and proactively with the media
 - MUST ‘walk the talk’



Proactive approach

Organisations

- Find out what drives all stakeholders, including the public
- Identify and mitigate threats
- Own the issues
- Commission independent experts
- Fund research on welfare issues, visible and ‘invisible’
- Embrace reform – engage meaningfully with reasonable critics



Individuals

- Work to improve your own knowledge, horse care, and communications

Specific welfare issues

Visible – driving-specific

- Whip (presence, noise)
- Blinkers
- Bits (sidepieces)
- Voice/shouting
- Horse:carriage weight ratio
- Indoor competitions – issues


Visible – most sports

- Accidents/injuries
- Blood
- Tight nosebands
- Conflict-/pain-related behaviours
- Equine obesity
- Stereotypies
- Rule enforcement


“Invisible”

- Effect of surface
- Bits (mouthpieces)
- Mouth lesions
- Veterinary interventions
- Training practices
- ‘The other 23 hours’
- Transport-related stress
- Wastage
- End-of-life issues

What can we learn from other industries?



animals



MDPI

Review

Social Licence to Operate: What Can Equestrian Sports Learn from Other Industries?

Janet Douglas ^{1,*}, Roly Owers ¹ and Madeleine L. H. Campbell ²

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What can we learn from other industries?

1. Find out what the issues are

4. Tell the world about what you are doing
But you **MUST** walk the talk

2. Embrace the public's values
Or have a good reason not to



5. Be open-minded and keep learning

3. Demonstrate that you are responsible

6. Play for Team Equestrian

Change is possible

Prevalence of mouth ulcers in dressage ponies at Danish National Championships

- **2020: 16.0%** (16/100)
 - Affected ponies eliminated prior to competition
- **2021: 1.2%** (1/82)
 - At least 21% of the 2021 ponies had competed in 2020, and at least 17% competed with the same rider



Uldahl et al. Animals 2022;12:616

Recognise that we are all responsible for equine safeguarding



○ Organisations/businesses

- Develop and advertise your process for reporting welfare concerns
- Support officials and individuals who report welfare concerns
- Encourage culture of zero tolerance for poor practices



○ Individuals

- Find out how to report welfare concerns constructively
- Be an 'active bystander'



What can driving do to maintain SLO?

- Educate those within driving about the risk to their sport
- Learn what good welfare looks like – aim for:
 - Optimal physical & mental equine wellbeing
 - Positive welfare
- Communicate your achievements & ethos to public
- Manage public perception



What can we all do?

- Regard the dialogue around social licence as an opportunity
- Challenge the status quo
- Ask not just ‘Can we?’ but ‘Should we?’
- Base recommendations and practice on high quality, up-to-date evidence
- Communicate proactively about horse welfare
- Incorporate human behaviour change principles into our work



animals



Review

Changing Hearts and Minds in the Equestrian World One Behaviour at a Time

Inga A. Wolframm ^{1,*}, Janet Douglas ² and Gemma Pearson ^{3,4}

Summary

- The risk posed by the public's attitude to equestrianism is real – and imminent
- We can regard this as a threat, or as an opportunity to up our game
- Prioritising equine welfare is a major key to preserving equestrianism
- Our understanding of welfare is changing – we need to make changes in how we breed, manage, train, compete, retire and end the lives of our horses
- This is a collective responsibility that must be based on the horse-human partnership
- It involves challenging the status quo, enforcing good practice, communicating effectively, and building trust



THANK YOU
@rolyowers
@horsecharity

