



Chris Steel MLA

Minister for Transport and City Services

Minister for Skills

Special Minister of State

Member for Murrumbidgee

Mr Tom Duncan
Clerk
ACT Legislative Assembly
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 2 December 2020 regarding petition number 24-20, lodged by Ms Jo Clay MLA on behalf of Ms Inaz Roomiani and received by the Assembly on the same date, regarding ACT Government funding for the Thoroughbred racing industry. This letter is my response, pursuant to Standing Order 100.

The ACT Government notes the petitioners' concerns regarding funding for the local horse racing industry.

In July 2017, the ACT Government entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Canberra Racing Club and Canberra Harness Racing Club, under which the Government agreed to provide funding to the Racing Clubs of approximately \$7.5 million per annum until 30 June 2022.

In exchange for the ACT Government's support under the MoU, the Racing Clubs agreed to meet a range of expectations regarding industry management, including animal welfare obligations. Under the MoU, the Racing Clubs have made a commitment to adopt and participate in a retraining scheme and to cover costs associated with retraining and rehoming suitable horses following their retirement from racing.

The Racing Clubs also agreed to maintain strong adherence to the Australian Rules of Racing and Local Rules of Racing, which include a range of provisions aimed at ensuring retired racing horses' ongoing welfare.

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The objective of the MOU is to provide a well-managed, well-regulated and sustainable industry that works to ensure the ongoing welfare of its horses.

In 2020, ACT Labor made an election commitment to renew the MoU with the Racing Clubs on its expiry for a further term of at least five years. The Government also committed to enter into future discussions with the Racing Clubs concerning industry funding in good faith and in recognition that costs may have risen for the Clubs to maintain the necessary health, welfare and promotion of Club activities. An MoU provides certainty for the sector and sets out the Government's expectations regarding industry management in exchange for government support, especially the ongoing welfare of racing horses and the workplace rights of those employed in the sector.

The ACT Government understands the petitioners' concerns and is committed to maintaining and improving animal welfare standards in the ACT, including in the horse racing industry. Through successive terms of Government, the ACT Labor and Greens partnership has introduced some of the most progressive animal welfare reforms in Australia. For example, the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* (the Act) recognises the sentience and intrinsic value of animals, and that they deserve to be treated with compassion that reflects their intrinsic value. The Act creates a positive duty to care for the physical and mental welfare of animals. It achieves its overarching objects through a robust regulatory framework that includes inspectors with significant powers to investigate animal welfare concerns, and, where concerns are clearly evidenced, refer such matters for prosecution. Significant penalties apply to animal welfare offences, including fines, bans on owning an animal and terms of imprisonment.

In 2019, as the Minister for City Services, I asked the ACT Government Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AWAC) to conduct a review of the Animal Welfare Act Code of Practice relating to the welfare of horses, including racing horses. The AWAC expects to complete its review and report to me with recommendations for strengthening the Code of Practice in early 2021. I look forward to receiving the AWAC's advice.

My responsibility for the *Racing Act 1999* and the Animal Welfare Act allows me to closely monitor each portfolio, to ensure a balance that reflects the economic and social benefits of a financially viable racing industry and achieves best practice in the ongoing welfare of racing horses. I acknowledge the petitioners' concerns regarding the welfare of racing horses but also this Government's and the Racing Clubs' ongoing and demonstrated commitment to animal welfare in the horse racing industry.

Yours sincerely



Chris Steel MLA
Special Minister of State
17 February 2021