



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP 2018/0214, 10 October 2018

e-petition debate on a new body for the protection of racehorses

This pack has been prepared ahead of the debate to be held in Westminster Hall on Monday 15 October 2018 at 4.30pm on an e-petition for a new independent body for the protection of racehorses. The debate will be opened by Mike Hill MP.

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Background

A parliamentary petition by the charity [Animal Aid](#) calling for the [creation of new independent welfare body to protect racehorses from abuse and death](#), ran from February to August 2018 and received a total of 105,361 signatures. The petition called for an independent regulatory body for horseracing welfare:

The British Horseracing Authority is responsible for race horse welfare. But around 200 horses die each year due to racing in Britain. We urge the government to set up an independent regulatory body, with horse welfare as its only interest, which will take meaningful action to stop horses dying.¹

The Petitions Committee agreed on 4 September that the petition should be debated.

The Government responded to the Petition in March 2018 noting that it “does not consider that it is necessary to create a new body to protect racehorse welfare.” It highlighted the role of the British Horseracing Association in regulating the sport, and that the *Animal Welfare Act 2006* protected the welfare of horses,

The [British Horseracing Association](#) is a self-regulatory body which is responsible for the governance, administration and regulation of horseracing and the wider horseracing industry in Britain. It also “leads on the development and growth of racing and prioritises the health and welfare of the sport’s participants”, including racehorse welfare:

The British Horseracing Authority (BHA) is the Government-recognised body responsible for the regulation of horseracing. Together with the RSPCA and World Horse Welfare, BHA is a leading signatory of the [National Equine Welfare Protocol](#).

British Racing employs over 6,000 people to provide constant care and attention for the 14,000 registered racehorses in training. The highest standards of horse welfare are demanded of all jockeys, trainers and racecourses and none of the approximately 1,400 fixtures held annually in Britain can take place unless key BHA equine welfare criteria have been satisfied.²

Further information on racehorse welfare can be found on the [BHA FAQ pages](#).

Racehorse fatalities

The Animal Aid petition called for a separate body, referring to the number of horses that are killed or destroyed on racecourses each year. The charity summarises its views and concerns as follows on its website:

An Animal Aid study of available evidence shows that around 200 horses died on British racecourses every year, and about the same number are killed in training or because they fail to make the grade.

Some 38% of these fatalities occur during, or immediately after, a race, and result from: a broken leg, back, neck or pelvis; fatal

¹ Parliamentary Petition, [Create a new independent welfare body to protect racehorses from abuse and death](#), 13 February 2018

² BHA, [Equine Health and Welfare – what we do](#) [webpage visited 11 October 2018]

spinal injuries; heart attack; or burst blood vessels. The other victims perish from training injuries or are killed after being assessed by their owners as no-hoppers.

Serious racing-related illnesses are now endemic. 82% of flat race horses older than three years of age suffer from bleeding lungs (exercise-induced pulmonary haemorrhage). Gastric ulcers are present in no fewer than 93% of horses in training, in whom the condition gets progressively worse. When horses are retired, the condition improves.³

Further details on the charity's concerns about welfare are set out in its report [The Trouble with Horseracing](#). Animal Aid has also commissioned a [YouGov Poll](#), carried out in September 2018, which found that 63% of respondents supported the creation of an independent organisation responsible for race horse welfare.⁴

In its [response](#) to the petition the Government made clear it does not support the need for a separate body, pointing to the role of the BHA and a reduction in horse fatalities in the last twenty years.

The British Horseracing Authority (BHA) is responsible for the safety of jockeys and horses at races in this country. The BHA works with animal welfare organisations like the RSPCA and World Horse Welfare to keep racecourses as safe as possible for horses.

According to the BHA the overall equine fatality rate in British racing has reduced by one-third in the last twenty years, from 0.3% to less than 0.2% of runners in 2017, the lowest figure on record.

Given that overall racehorse welfare is improving and fatalities at racecourses are falling, we do not see a need to set up another body responsible for racehorse welfare.⁵

Fatalities statistics

The British Horseracing Association (BHA) publishes figures on the number of fatalities as a result of horseracing. The table below shows available data from 2011 to 2017 on the number of fatalities and expresses this as a proportion of:

a) the total number of runners, and b) the number of individual racehorses running each year. The total runners figure counts individual racehorses on each separate occasion they run, so a single horse could be counted more than once. The individual runners figure simply lists the number of horses who entered at least one race that year.

The latest figures show that 167 racehorse fatalities occurred in 2017 representing 0.2% of total runners and 0.9% of individual horses. Over the past five years the average fatality rate for total runners was 0.2%, meaning that a death occurred in around 2 horses for every 1,000 horses running in any races. The average fatality rate for individual

³ Animal Aid, [Animal Aid Background Notes on the Horse Racing Industry](#), [webpage visited 11 October 2018]

⁴ Animal Aid, Over half the public want a new welfare regulator for horse racing, 28 September 2018

⁵ Parliamentary Petition, [Create a new independent welfare body to protect racehorses from abuse and death](#), 13 February 2018

horses over the same period was 1%, meaning that a death was associated with around 1 in every 100 individual runners.

BRITISH RACEHORSE FATALITIES					
	Fatalities	Total runners		Individual horses	
		Number	% fatalities	Number	% fatalities
2011	181	94,376	0.2%	19,329	0.9%
2012	211	90,174	0.2%	18,550	1.1%
2013	196	90,836	0.2%	18,506	1.1%
2014	189	87,531	0.2%	18,077	1.0%
2015	156	88,075	0.2%	18,318	0.9%
2016	171	89,616	0.2%	18,577	0.9%
2017	167	90,993	0.2%	18,946	0.9%

Sources:

[BHA Equine Injuries and Fatalities data](#)

[BHA Industry Statistics - Runners data](#)

Animal Aid's [Horsedeathwatch](#) website lists 136 horse deaths so far during or after a race in 2018.

Industry measures following recent fatalities

Following the deaths of 6 racehorses at the 2018 Cheltenham Festival the BHA announced a [review of safety at Cheltenham](#), which has not yet reported. Its terms of reference were set out as follows:

The review will be led by Brant Dunshea, the BHA's Director of Integrity and Regulatory Operations, and be coordinated by Emma Marley, Head of Racecourse Operations. It will also incorporate relevant internal and external experts to assist the review process, including recognised welfare organisations such as the RSPCA and World Horse Welfare.

The areas of focus will fall broadly into six main categories: The courses; the obstacles; participant factors; starts, safety factors and race tempo; programming and race conditions; and veterinary aspects.

The review is expected to be concluded in summer 2018, allowing sufficient time for recommendations to be implemented ahead of the 2018/19 Jump season.⁶

More generally, [an article](#) in Racing Post from May 2018, set out various aspects of horseracing being examined as part to the BHA's welfare strategy including whether horses that fall should have a rest period before they race can again, how to improve the traceability of racehorses so thoroughbreds can be tracked from birth to after their racing career and the introduction of a welfare standard to benchmark

⁶ BHA, [BHA confirms scope of review into welfare at Cheltenham racecourse](#), 5 April 2018

the industry.⁷ In addition, the BHA are in the process of changing the [colour of markers](#) on jumps to make them more visible to horses.⁸

BHA work with Charities

The [RSPCA position](#) on horse racing, and its policy of working with the industry, was set out in its response to the 6 horse fatalities that occurred at the Cheltenham Festival:

We're presented with a choice; to try to campaign from the outside to bring about the end of one of the UK's biggest spectator sports, or to work alongside the industry to do all we can to better the welfare of the racehorses and be involved in bringing about as much change as possible using our unique expertise.

We firmly believe that this is the best way for us to help the horses involved.

They go on to list changes that have been made to improve racehorse welfare and safety in the last 30 years in which they have been involved.⁹

[World Horse Welfare](#) also works within the race horing industry to improve the welfare of horses, setting out its position and some of its concerns as follows:

When horses are used in sport, a heavy burden of responsibility for their welfare rests on the shoulders of those who own, train, ride and care for them. Sport horses are generally exceptionally well cared for, thanks to the significant investment that flows into the industry and the vigilance of regulators. Standards of welfare in horse sport can be the highest in the world, and we believe our work with sports regulators over the years has helped. But there is much more to do.

There are still too many horse welfare challenges in sport. Overbreeding, questionable training methods, use of inappropriate tack, poor course design, limited access to grazing, excessive or unnecessary whip use, pre- and post-race care and retirement are all hot areas of debate within the horse community. These are issues we strive to address practically and responsibly using a collaborative approach.¹⁰

⁷ Racing Post, [Welfare strategy may force fallen horses to have a break before racing again](#), 20 May 2018

⁸ BHA, [Scientific research into equine vision leads to trial of new fence and hurdle design to further improve safety in jump racing](#), 10 October 2018

⁹ RSPCA, [When the going gets tough on racehorse welfare](#), 12 April 2018

¹⁰ World Horse Welfare, [Sport](#) [website page visited 11 October 2018]

2. The petition

The petition *Create a new independent welfare body to protect racehorses from abuse and death* closed on 13 August 2018 with 105,361 signatures.

The petition read:

The British Horseracing Authority is responsible for race horse welfare. But around 200 horses die each year due to racing in Britain. We urge the government to set up an independent regulatory body, with horse welfare as its only interest, which will take meaningful action to stop horses dying.

For more information visit <http://www.horsedeathwatch.com>

The Government responded on 19 March 2018:

The Government does not consider that it is necessary to create a new body to protect racehorse welfare.

The British Horseracing Authority (BHA) is responsible for the safety of jockeys and horses at races in this country. The BHA works with animal welfare organisations like the RSPCA and World Horse Welfare to keep racecourses as safe as possible for horses.

According to the BHA the overall equine fatality rate in British racing has reduced by one-third in the last twenty years, from 0.3% to less than 0.2% of runners in 2017, the lowest figure on record.

Given that overall racehorse welfare is improving and fatalities at racecourses are falling, we do not see a need to set up another body responsible for racehorse welfare.

Racehorses, like all domestic and captive animals, are afforded protection under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Under this legislation, it is an offence to cause any unnecessary suffering to an animal or for an owner, or keeper, to fail to provide for its welfare needs. Any person or organisation may initiate criminal proceedings where there is reason to believe that unnecessary suffering has been caused, or may report the matter to the police, local authority or RSPCA who will decide whether or not to institute a prosecution. The maximum penalty for an offence under the 2006 Act is a fine of £20,000 and/or six months' imprisonment.

If anyone has any concerns about the welfare of an animal or considers that its welfare has not been provided, then they should report the matter to the local authority who have powers under the 2006 Act to investigate such matters or to the RSPCA who can also investigate.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

3. News items and blogs

Animal Aid

28 September 2018

Over half the public want a new welfare regulator for horse racing

<https://www.animalaid.org.uk/public-want-a-new-welfare-regulator-for-horse-racing/>

Racing Post

13 August 2018

BHA welcomes parliamentary debate on welfare after petition meets threshold

<https://www.racingpost.com/news/bha-welcomes-parliamentary-debate-on-welfare-after-petition-meets-threshold/342418>

Animal Aid

20 July 2018

Shocking half-year race horse death figures highlight serious welfare problems in British racing

<https://www.animalaid.org.uk/shocking-half-year-race-horse-death-figures-highlight-serious-welfare-problems-british-racing/>

Racing Post

24 May 2018

Keeping track: BHA plans to trace horses from cradle to grave

<https://www.racingpost.com/news/keeping-track-bha-plans-to-trace-horses-from-cradle-to-grave/332553>

Racing Post

20 May 2018

Welfare strategy may force fallen horses to have a break before racing again

<https://www.racingpost.com/news/welfare-strategy-may-force-fallen-horses-to-have-a-break-before-racing-again/332213>

Telegraph

24 April 2018

British Horseracing Authority to investigate 'exceptionally rare' deaths of three horses at Hexham

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/racing/2018/04/24/british-horseracing-authority-investigate-exceptionally-rare/>

BBC Sport

Cheltenham Festival: BHA to carry out review after six horse deaths at event

17 March 2018

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/horse-racing/43438392>

4. Press releases

British Horseracing Authority

Britain's leading equine welfare organisations join forces again at Aintree

12 Apr 2018

The 2018 Randox Health Grand National Festival at Aintree Racecourse will once again see Britain's leading equine welfare organisations and charities come together to highlight the welfare factors which affect Britain's horses.

The British Horseracing Authority (BHA) will be joined by the RSPCA, World Horse Welfare, British Horse Society and Retraining of Racehorses (RoR) under the banner of The Horse Comes First at the three day meeting, which begins today, to host an information stand for racegoers at Aintree.

Over 140,000 people attended across the three days last year, and those attending in 2018 will have the chance to find out more about the important work done by each of the organisations in relation to equine welfare.

Representatives from each of the organisations will be on hand to chat and answer questions on both the high standards of equine welfare within British racing and other horse sports, as well as the wider issues which have an impact on the equine population of the country.

The Horse Comes First marquee will be located adjacent to the Red Rum Garden which overlooks the Parade Ring and will be open across all three days of the Randox Health Grand National Festival.

Racegoers will also have a chance to meet and greet former Grand National winners for the first time, which will be, located next to the Horse Comes First Marquee, and see a selection of former winners in the RoR parades taking place each day before racing.

John Baker, North West Regional Director for Jockey Club Racecourses, said:

We are delighted that the leading equine welfare organisations will be represented on The Horse Comes First stand at the Randox Health Grand National Festival.

Horse welfare is of paramount importance to all of us at Aintree and within racing more widely. This stand gives us a chance to promote not only the high standards of care within horseracing, but also the excellent work undertaken by the other charities and organisations representing the wider equine population.

The RSPCA's racing consultant David Muir said:

Our aim is to make racing as safe as possible for horses and working with the BHA there have been some significant changes to courses, fences and the rules to reduce the risks and improve welfare.

Our team looks forward to meeting racegoers at the stand this year to explain our work improving racehorse welfare and also rescuing hundreds of horses from neglect and cruelty each year.

World Horse Welfare Chief Executive, Roly Owers, said:

Collaboration is such an important aspect of our work and so we greatly value the opportunity to once again partner with our sister charities as part of the Horse Comes First Stand at Aintree. Good equine welfare lies at the heart of all responsible horse sport, including racing, and we look forward to chatting to many of the visitors to the Grand National meet over the next few days, with the help of our rescue pony, Hercules.

Gemma Stanford, Welfare Director at The British Horse Society said:

As the UK's largest equestrian charity and education provider we are very supportive of the measures that Aintree have taken to improve the safety and welfare of horses taking part during the Grand National meeting.

On Saturday the attention of the world will be on the elite equine athletes lining up for the Grand National but we mustn't forget the thousands of other unwanted and neglected British horses that are suffering and in desperate need of the help of the BHS and other equine welfare organisations. We are very grateful to Aintree for the opportunity to reach out to racegoers.

Di Arbuthnot, Chief Executive of RoR, said:

RoR, as British racing's official equine charity, regularly work alongside World Horse Welfare and the RSPCA, with our shared common goal of protecting and promoting the welfare of former racehorses. Working together with these two charities at Aintree is therefore a reflection of our day to day working relationship and it provides a great platform and opportunity to talk to racegoers on a range of horse welfare related topics.

The Grand National meeting also features a parade of former racehorses showcasing the work of RoR in helping more and more horses find fulfilling second careers after racing.

Robin Mounsey, spokesperson for The Horse Comes First, said:

British racing is proud of the welfare standards that exist within the sport, and of our good working relationship with the recognised welfare organisations. We work together to make racing safer and we are looking forward to speaking to the racing public about this at the iconic Grand National festival.

RSPCA

When the going gets tough on racehorse welfare

April 2018

Every year in April, the focus of the public turns to the Grand National, but for horse racing consultant David Muir and our equine inspectors, it's the culmination of months of advising, monitoring and working to try to get every horse through the race unscathed.

It's safe to say that for them all, the race itself is one of the longest and most intense nine minutes to endure.

And it's not just Aintree that they're focused on. David visits many other courses and high profile racing events every year, making recommendations to the management where necessary and monitoring the welfare of the horses.

We called for a comprehensive review into Cheltenham Racecourse after the very sad deaths of a number of horses, including six horses at this year's 2018 Cheltenham Festival. We and World Horse Welfare will now be fully involved in the review announced by the British Horseracing Authority last month (March 2018) and we hope this will lead to effective measures to reduce the likelihood of similar tragedies in the future.

Horse racing is a complicated issue that often divides animal lovers.

We're presented with a choice; to try to campaign from the outside to bring about the end of one of the UK's biggest spectator sports, or to work alongside the industry to do all we can to better the welfare of the racehorses and be involved in bringing about as much change as possible using our unique expertise.

We firmly believe that this is the best way for us to help the horses involved.

David Muir:

No horse death is ever justifiable; we do our utmost to be involved in preventing any fatalities.

How we've helped to change the racing industry

During the last 30 years we've been involved with discussions, research and reviews that have contributed to the following major changes in the racing industry:

- A pioneering, shock-absorbent 'whip' for jockeys to carry, which features new technology that's kinder to the horse and fulfils its purpose as encouragement when used in compliance of the whip rules.
- New whip rules which restrict the number of times a jockey can use the whip.
- Trials are due to commence of brand new state of the art 'safety hurdle' for racecourses – this is still under wraps right now.
- Run-out areas on courses that allow loose horses to leave the race safely and be caught.
- Further investment into watering equipment that ensures a softer, safer racing surface, and encouraging jockeys to ride at a speed appropriate to the track conditions.
- The continual review and if necessary, modification of fences to make them more inviting and forgiving to impact, with the removal of the solid fence cores.

- The widening of the first fence at Aintree's Grand National, so the horses are less likely to bunch together and fall in the rush to get ahead.
- The removal of many of the drops immediately after fences so that the horse doesn't land on a surface lower than where he took off, reducing the risk of falling.
- Tighter race entry controls for horses and riders; no amateur jockeys, higher handicap levels and the BHA can declare any horse unfit to race at any time.
- Jockeys can no longer re-mount horses and continue the race if they've fallen.
- Introduction of rubber walkways to prevent horses slipping and injuring themselves.
- Improved, smoother surface on hurdles, virtually eradicating the risk of 'glove' injuries (painful tears to the skin of the horse's leg.)
- Improved design of water jumps that now include non-slip liners and no lip on the landing area which can cause horses to trip.
- The introduction of state of the art 'cool down areas' at major race courses where the horses' temperatures can be safely brought back to normal and aids their post-race recovery.
- Research into the improvement of horse ambulances.
- Continued and improved research into the proper use and welfare issues surrounding 'tongue ties' – a piece of tack fitted to the bridle designed to stop the horse's tongue from moving.

Jockeys play a vital role in making racing safer and our racing consultant David Muir visits the Northern Racing College in Doncaster providing his own insightful course into welfare aspects of racing, and the work of the RSPCA in this area.

David's discussions include the ethics of when to decide to abandon a race and pull up a horse that is showing signs of tiredness, along with other welfare issues such as the appropriate use of the whip.

These changes over the last few years are something we're proud of, and we want to reassure our supporters and all animal lovers that we'll never stop working to improve the welfare of race horses in this country.

5. Parliamentary material

Tabled Parliamentary Questions – Awaiting Answer

[*Horse Racing: Animal Welfare*](#)

Tabled by: Cameron, Dr Lisa

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress the Government has made on the establishment of an independent horse welfare regulator for horse racing.

Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

PQ 176362

[*Horse Racing: Animal Welfare*](#)

Tabled by: Simpson, David

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his department has a policy on the protection of horses during racing.

Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

PQ 176174

[*Horse Racing: Animal Welfare*](#)

Tabled by: Godsiff, Mr Roger

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will ask the British Horseracing Authority to publish the number of (a) reviews it has undertaken into equine mortality rates at racecourses since January 2013 and (b) the number of those reviews that are publicly available.

PQ 175918

[*Horse Racing: Animal Welfare*](#)

Tabled by: Godsiff, Mr Roger

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the Government has requested from the British Horseracing Authority (a) information on racehorse deaths, (b) reviews by that authority of racecourses with unusually high mortality rates and (c) information relating to the number of racehorses killed in training.

Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

PQ 174616

[Horse Racing: Animal Welfare](#)

Tabled by: Godsiff, Mr Roger

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many times officials in (a) his Department and (b) other Government Departments have met with the British Horseracing Authority in (a) 2016, (b) 2017 and (c) 2018 to date to discuss horse deaths on racecourses.

Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

PQ 174615

Debate

Lords debate: Equine Welfare Standards

HL Deb11 January 2017 | Volume 777 c2019-

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2017-01-11/debates/CB1F9921-C5FE-40AB-9F75-142CDCC42320/EquineWelfareStandards#contribution-FEAF830F-397C-424D-ACF4-2F1F611C2559>

6. Useful links and further reading

British Horseracing Authority *Equine Health and Welfare*

<https://www.britishhorseracing.com/regulation/veterinary-welfare/veterinary-info/>

National Equine Welfare Protocol

https://www.britishhorseracing.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/National_Equine_Welfare_Protocol-1.pdf

Racing Foundation *Horse Welfare*

<https://www.racingfoundation.co.uk/making-a-difference/horse-welfare>

Animal Aid booklet *The Trouble with Horse Racing* 2011

<https://www.animalaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/troublingracing.pdf>

Animal Aid report *This Unsporting Life: Race horse deaths in British racing* 2005

<https://www.animalaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/unsporting.pdf>

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