



Australian Thoroughbred Wellbeing Project

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MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

Researchers' fact-check anti-racing thoroughbred myths

As Victorian and national attention pivots to the Melbourne Cup Carnival, University of Melbourne Australian Thoroughbred Wellbeing Project researchers have collated facts and provided insights to debunk misinformation spruiked by anti-racers about thoroughbred horseracing.

The fate of horses leaving racing and potentially ending up in slaughterhouses is a contentious topic, according to equine veterinarian and the project's lead researcher Dr Meredith Flash.

"[RSPCA Australia's knowledgebase](#) incorrectly says 8,500 horses retire each year, largely based on previous [RSPCA Australia funded research](#) that 40% of thoroughbreds exit racing stables each year," Dr Flash said. "Anti-racing groups use this research as the basis for their erroneous claims that most of these horses are slaughtered, while only a few lucky ones are rehomed. This is not true."

Dr Flash said not all horses that leave a racing stable leave the industry permanently and that rest periods - or spells from racing - are a routine part of training and a common reason for horses exiting a stable.

"[University of Melbourne](#) research found less than 20% of the more than 37,000 thoroughbreds participating across Australia in the 2017 – 2018 racing season permanently left racing in that season. Most of these retired to the thoroughbred breeding industry or were re-homed outside the industry," Dr Flash said.

"Approximately 4,500 horses retire from racing and are rehomed each year, which is nearly half of previous estimates," Dr Flash said. "Most of these went on to undertake equestrian or pleasure-riding activities. Reliable estimates of horses retiring into the wider Australian horse industry are important to inform public debate and provide a benchmark for racing regulators to resource and monitor their off-the-track programs."

Dr Flash said another common strategy from anti-racers is to speculate about what happens to unraced thoroughbreds, and that the scale of this problem must be examined and understood.

"Two studies investigating thoroughbred [foals born in Australia in 2014](#) and in [Victoria over two separate breeding seasons](#), found the majority of horses started in at least one race, with more than 50% of the foal crop having at least one race start by the end of their 3-year-old racing season," Dr Flash said.

"And studies of the 2014 Australian thoroughbred foal crop revealed 11% of the foal crop died prior to entering the racing industry, with a further 4% of these young horses re-homed or retired before they entered race training."

Paddock related injuries most frequently sustained in a horses first year of life were the most significant barrier to a horse transitioning from the breeding farm to race training. The common outcomes of these paddock accidents were death, retirement to breeding or re-homing outside of the thoroughbred industry.

“Importantly, these findings challenge claims that horses are routinely being sent to slaughter for performance reasons, which couldn’t be further from the truth,” Dr Flash said.

“Across all our studies the proportion of horses being sent to abattoirs was less than 1%, which is similar to what industry data reports. These findings suggest racehorses that end up at knackeries and abattoirs come from **non-racing** homes. However, there is little information about why this is occurring and what racing authorities can do to stop it.”

Dr Flash said industry changes need to be measured and carefully implemented with an awareness of their potential unintended consequences.

“So, as you see the barrage of stories and social media posts from anti-racing protagonists during the Carnival, make sure ‘their truth’ is based on validated data and not miscalculation. The racing industry should absolutely welcome public debate, but it must be based on reliable and transparent data, not wild claims and misinformation.”

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About the Australian Thoroughbred Wellbeing Project

The Australian Thoroughbred Wellbeing Project is a University of Melbourne initiative that follows thoroughbred horses from birth through their racing careers. The Project combines survey insights with industry data to provide insights into the outcomes for horses in the thoroughbred industry and documenting the reasons for them leaving the thoroughbred racing and breeding industries.