NEW ZEALAND THOROUGHBRED RACING
PUREI HŌIHO NĀTI O AOTEAROA

BEYOND THE TRACK

END-OF-LIFE GUIDE FOR THOROUGHBRED OWNERS

Supporting Owners to Make Informed Decisions

1. PURPOSE

This guide supports Thoroughbred owners and people responsible for their care to make informed, timely and welfare-focused decisions when a horse is approaching the end of its life, or when its ongoing quality of life is in question.

It provides guidance on:

- assessing a horse's quality of life;
- considering treatment, rehabilitation, management and other available options;
- recognising when humane euthanasia may be the most appropriate welfare outcome;
- planning for euthanasia where required; and
- meeting responsibilities following a horse's death.

End-of-life decisions can be difficult. The horse's welfare must remain the priority, including avoiding unnecessary or prolonged pain, distress or suffering.

This guide should be read alongside:

- The Animal Welfare Act 1999
- The Code of Welfare: Horses and Donkeys; and
- NZTR Thoroughbred Welfare Assessment Guidelines

Legal obligations under New Zealand law apply at all times.

2. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE HORSE?

Responsibility for a horse's welfare rests with its **owner and any person responsible for its care or management.**

Under the Animal Welfare Act 1999, both the **owner** and every **person in charge** of a horse have legal responsibilities for its welfare.

A person in charge may include anyone who has the horse in their possession or custody, or under their care, control or supervision.

Depending on the circumstances, this may include an owner, trainer, breeder, lessee, retrainer, rehomer, retirement or agistment provider, or another person caring for the horse.

Throughout this guide, **"owner or person in charge"** refers to the person or people responsible for ensuring the horse's welfare needs are met and appropriate action is taken where its welfare or quality of life is compromised.

Where the NZTR Rules apply, an **Accountable Person** may also have specific responsibilities under those Rules.

3. PUTTING WELFARE AND QUALITY OF LIFE FIRST

A horse's quality of life should be at the centre of any end-of-life decision.

The prevention of unnecessary pain and suffering must take priority over emotional, financial or other considerations.

The key question is:

Can this horse maintain an acceptable quality of life, including freedom from significant or ongoing pain and the ability to carry out normal behaviours, with appropriate care and management?

Where the answer is **yes**, reasonable welfare-positive options should be considered. These may include treatment, rehabilitation, changes to management, retirement, companion placement or other appropriate long-term care.

Where an acceptable quality of life **cannot be achieved or maintained**, humane euthanasia may be the most appropriate welfare outcome.

Choosing euthanasia is never easy, but allowing avoidable suffering to continue is not acceptable.

4. WHEN AN END-OF-LIFE DECISION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED

An end-of-life decision should be considered where a horse's physical or behavioural welfare is significantly compromised and is unlikely to improve within a reasonable timeframe with appropriate treatment, rehabilitation or management.

Circumstances may include:

- severe or untreatable injury;
- chronic or unmanageable pain;
- advanced age with significant decline;
- serious illness or poor prognosis;
- serious behavioural or safety concerns;
- ongoing distress or significantly reduced quality of life;
- severely compromised welfare; or
- circumstances where no safe and sustainable long-term welfare pathway can be identified.

The presence of one of these circumstances does not automatically mean euthanasia is required. Each horse's individual circumstances, prognosis, available options and likely future quality of life should be considered.

The table below provides a practical guide to some of the most common circumstances.

CIRCUMSTANCE	WHAT TO CONSIDER	PRACTICAL QUESTIONS	GUIDANCE
Severe or untreatable injury	Significant pain, distress or loss of function with little prospect of recovery.	Has a veterinarian confirmed that recovery is unlikely, or that the horse is unlikely to regain an acceptable quality of life?	Where meaningful recovery is not realistic, humane euthanasia may be the most appropriate welfare outcome.
Chronic or unmanageable pain	Whether the horse can remain comfortable without ongoing or unacceptable suffering.	Can pain be managed effectively and sustainably while maintaining normal function and behaviour?	If pain cannot be adequately managed, euthanasia should be considered.
Advanced age with significant decline	Comfort, mobility, body condition and ability to carry out normal behaviours.	Is the horse continuing to decline despite appropriate care and management?	Euthanasia may be appropriate where acceptable quality of life can no longer be maintained.
Serious illness or poor prognosis	Likelihood of recovery and the horse's ability to remain comfortable.	Is meaningful recovery or long-term comfort realistically achievable?	Where prognosis is poor and welfare is significantly compromised, euthanasia may be appropriate.
Serious behavioural or safety concerns	Ongoing risk to people, other horses or the horse itself.	Have appropriate behavioural assessment, retraining, management and suitable placement options been explored?	Euthanasia should only be considered where serious safety concerns remain and reasonable assessment, management and placement options are not suitable or sustainable.

CIRCUMSTANCE	WHAT TO CONSIDER	PRACTICAL QUESTIONS	GUIDANCE
Ongoing distress or reduced quality of life	Persistent pain, fear, distress or chronic discomfort.	Can an acceptable quality of life be restored or maintained through treatment, management, rehabilitation or another appropriate pathway?	If acceptable quality of life cannot be achieved or maintained, euthanasia may be the most humane outcome.
No safe or suitable long-term placement	Whether continued placement attempts may compromise the horse's welfare or safety.	Have appropriate behavioural assessment, retraining, management and suitable placement options been explored?	lack of an immediate home should not, on its own, determine euthanasia. Where no safe and sustainable welfare outcome can be identified, the horse's overall welfare should guide the decision.
Severely compromised welfare	Severe neglect, starvation, untreated illness or significant physical or behavioural compromise.	Is recovery to an acceptable quality of life realistically achievable within a reasonable timeframe?	Where recovery is clearly not achievable, euthanasia may be appropriate on welfare grounds. Where prognosis is uncertain, allow a defined period for reassessment.
End-of-life care	Whether comfort and dignity can continue to be maintained.	Can pain and distress be adequately relieved through appropriate care or palliative management?	Where comfort can no longer be maintained, humane euthanasia is an appropriate welfare outcome.

Central Principle:

Before an end-of-life decision is finalised, ask:

"Can this horse maintain an acceptable quality of life — including freedom from significant pain or distress and the ability to carry out normal behaviours — with appropriate care and management?

If **yes**, appropriate welfare-positive options should be considered.
If **no**, supported by appropriate veterinary advice, humane euthanasia may be the most appropriate welfare outcome.

Veterinary advice should be sought where there is uncertainty about pain, prognosis, treatment options or future quality of life.

Delaying or avoiding euthanasia may result in unnecessary suffering and may breach legal obligations.

5. LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN NEW ZEALAND

Under the Animal Welfare Act 1999, owners and people in charge of horses have legal responsibilities for their welfare.

These include:

- meeting the horse's physical, health and behavioural needs;
- taking appropriate action to alleviate unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress; and
- acting appropriately where a horse is ill, injured or suffering.

The Code of Welfare: Horses and Donkeys requires humane destruction to be carried out in a way that:

- minimises unnecessary pain and distress;
- rapidly renders the horse insensible;
- ensures the horse remains insensible until death; and
- is undertaken by a competent person.

Failure to meet animal welfare obligations may result in regulatory action or prosecution.

6. NZTR REQUIREMENTS

Where NZTR Rules or requirements apply, additional responsibilities may apply to an **Accountable Person**.

In accordance with NZTR's Thoroughbred Welfare Assessment Guidelines, any person who euthanises, or arranges the euthanasia of, a Thoroughbred must ensure that euthanasia is carried out by either:

1. intravenous injection administered by a veterinarian; or
2. a veterinarian or another competent person using a captive bolt or firearm in accordance with the Code of Welfare: Horses and Donkeys.

Where required by the NZTR Rules, the relevant Accountable Person must also notify NZTR of the horse's death.

7. Humane Methods of Euthanasia

Acceptable methods in New Zealand include:

- Veterinary-administered intravenous overdose (preferred method)
- Captive bolt or firearm, used by a competent and experienced person

In all cases:

- the horse must be rapidly rendered unconscious;
- unnecessary fear, pain and distress must be minimised; and
- death must occur without the horse regaining consciousness.

Untrained or inappropriate use of these methods is not acceptable and may be unlawful.

Where there is any uncertainty about the appropriate method, a veterinarian should be consulted.

8. Planning and Conduct

Where practicable, the owner or person in charge should:

- engage a veterinarian or suitably experienced professional to carry out or assist with euthanasia;
- select a quiet, familiar and low-stress environment;
- minimise distress to the horse and other animals present;
- ensure safe and practical access for the veterinarian or operator; and
- make appropriate arrangements for removal or disposal in advance.

Where applicable, NZTR-registered Thoroughbreds must not be transported live to an abattoir where humane euthanasia can reasonably be performed before transport.

In an emergency, the horse's immediate welfare takes priority and euthanasia should not be unnecessarily delayed.

9. After Euthanasia

9.1 Notification

Where NZTR notification requirements apply, NZTR must be notified within 30 days using the Retirement or Death of a Thoroughbred form (Rule 417) and provide details of the death.

9.2 Disposal

The owner or person in charge must ensure the horse's body is managed in a timely, safe and lawful manner in accordance with applicable local authority and environmental requirements.

Options may include:

- cremation;
- burial where legally and environmentally appropriate; or
- collection and disposal by a reputable provider.

Where burial is used, consideration should be given to:

- local council and environmental requirements;
- appropriate distance from waterways, drainage areas and flood-prone land;
- adequate burial depth to prevent scavenging or contamination; and
- use of a reputable provider where assistance is required.

Improper disposal may pose environmental, animal health and public safety risks and may breach regulatory requirements.

10. Key Principles

End-of-life decisions are a difficult but important part of responsible Thoroughbred ownership and care.

When making a decision:

- Put the horse's welfare and quality of life first.
- Seek veterinary advice where pain, health or prognosis is uncertain.
- Consider reasonable treatment, rehabilitation, management and placement options.
- Do not prolong suffering where an acceptable quality of life cannot be maintained.
- Do not base euthanasia solely on the absence of an immediate home where the horse otherwise has an acceptable quality of life.
- Where euthanasia is appropriate, ensure it is timely and humane.

A timely and appropriate decision can prevent avoidable suffering and support the welfare standards expected for all Thoroughbreds.

11. Resources

The following services may assist owners and people in charge when making or carrying out end-of-life decisions.

NZTR Welfare Support

- NZTR Thoroughbred Welfare – Provides guidance, resources, and support to assist with decision-making, rehoming pathways, and other welfare outcomes.
- NZTR Relief Programme – Financial assistance may be available in urgent welfare situations where cost is a barrier to necessary veterinary care, humane euthanasia or responsible disposal. Retrospective funding may be available in genuine emergencies where prior approval was not practicable. Eligibility requirements apply.
- NZTR Recovery Programme – Support for Thoroughbreds with significant welfare needs that have been uplifted into the care of recognised welfare organisations.

Veterinary Support

A registered veterinarian should be the first point of contact for advice on welfare and quality of life assessment, treatment options, prognosis and humane euthanasia.

Equine Cremation Services

- Rural Guardian Charitable Trust (Waikato facility)
- Truly Treasured Pet Loss and Cremation Services (North Island coverage)
- Equine Cremations Canterbury (Canterbury facility)

These providers offer controlled and environmentally responsible cremation services.

Transport, Burial and Aftercare Services

- Animal Burial – Richard Logan (North of Taupo coverage)

Professional providers can assist with safe, respectful, and compliant transport and burial services.

Note: This is not an exhaustive list. Owners and people in charge may engage another suitably qualified or reputable provider, provided all relevant legal, environmental and animal welfare requirements are met.

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END-OF-LIFE DECISION FLOWCHART FOR THOROUGHBREDS

1 **Is the horse experiencing significant pain, distress, declining function or compromised welfare?**
Consider overall health, comfort, behaviour and ability to cope.

→ NO → Continue appropriate care and monitor the horse's welfare.

YES

2 **Seek veterinary advice.**
Assess the horse's condition, prognosis, treatment and quality of life.

3 **Is treatment, rehabilitation or management likely to restore and maintain an acceptable Quality of life?**
Allow a reasonable timeframe.

→ YES → Develop an appropriate plan (treatment, re-habilitation or management). Reassess as required.

NO Uncertain

4 **Can an acceptable quality of life be maintained through retirement, companion placement, ongoing management or another suitable pathway?**
Consider safety, welfare and sustainability.

→ YES → Progress the most appropriate welfare-positive pathway. Reassess as needed.

NO

5 **Humane euthanasia may be the most appropriate welfare outcome.**
Ensure euthanasia is carried out humanely by a competent person using an approved method.

→ Complete any applicable NZTR notification and aftercare / disposal requirements.

KEY PRINCIPLE: The horse's welfare and quality of life must always come first. Seek veterinary advice when in doubt and do not prolong suffering.