

Australian study reveals unacceptable use of whips in racing

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Use of whips in Australian horse racing does not align with international best practice, says Professor Paul McGreevy.

Evidence of the unacceptable use of whips in thoroughbred racing and the inability of stewards to adequately police Australian whip rules has been documented in University of Sydney research.

The study led by Professor Paul McGreevy, from the Faculty of [Veterinary Science](#), was published on 19 March by [PLoS](#), the [Public Library of Science](#).

It also shows evidence that the International Agreement on Breeding,

Racing and Wagering, to which Australia is a signatory, has been contravened.

"By analyzing 350 rider-horse interactions over 15 race finishes frame-by-frame, the study found at least 28 examples of apparent breaches of whip rules and highlighted the inability of stewards to effectively police the rules regarding whip use because of inferior technology," Professor McGreevy said.

Behavioral scientists assessed the area struck and the visual impact of so-called padded whips when used on horses.

In 2009 the Australian Racing Board implemented rules regarding the use of these whips with the intention that the padding absorbs the impact of the whip as it makes contact.

"Our analysis found that the unpadded section of the whip made contact on 64 percent of impacts, demonstrating that padding the whip does not necessarily safeguard a horse from possible pain."

"The study found that more than 75 percent of the time the whip struck the horse in the abdomen (also known as the flank), which according to the International Agreement on Breeding, Racing and Wagering as well as the British Horseracing Authority is unacceptable.

"This further highlights the need for Australia's use of whips in racing to align with international best practice."

Professor McGreevy said the study also showed that stewards were not being provided with adequate tools to police Australian whip rules.

"While we had access to and were analysing high-quality, high-speed footage, we had to discard the data relating to nearly one third of the

jockeys' arm actions because any resulting whip impact was obscured.

"Until stewards have access to cameras filming at 2000 frames per second from the inside, outside and head on, it is impossible for them to effectively police the rules surrounding whip use in thoroughbred [racing](#)."

Professor Rosanne Taylor, Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Sydney, said "This latest study by Professor Paul McGreevy shows just how easily whips can be misused by riders, with horses regularly hit with unpadded parts of the whip, and also how hard it is for horse whipping to be properly regulated in such a fast paced environment."

"Along with Professor McGreevy's [previous study](#) on horse whipping the scientific evidence of indentations, particularly when the whip hits sensitive regions of the abdomen, raises concern about current whipping practices, which are not in the best interests of the horses' welfare," said Professor Taylor.

"These studies are a great example of how new scientific approaches to tackling unresolved questions can inform our interactions with animals and by improving our interactions, we can improve the animals' performance and welfare."

Provided by University of Sydney

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