

Only 30% of show horse owners surveyed in Australia agreed with equine facial hair trimming ban, new study reveals

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New research published in the CABI journal *Human-Animal Interactions* has revealed that only 30% of show horse owners surveyed in Australia

agreed with a ban on the trimming of facial hair prior to its implementation in July 2022.

The research found that when asked if equine facial hair trimming should be banned in all equine competitions, most disciplines broadly agreed (60.5% to 84.6%) apart from showing with only 22.9% of respondents agreeing with a ban.

Indeed, some who took part in the research also believed that [horses](#) did not need muzzle or ear hairs for day-to-day living. However, in response to the question on whether facial hair trimming should be banned only in elite sports, all disciplines disagreed strongly with this statement.

The study highlighted that those who entered horses into show competitions believed they were more likely to win if they trimmed their muzzle and ear hair and that the [practice](#) was normal and common place in their discipline.

Despite this, equine organizations from around the world—including Australia—banned the practice at competitions on welfare grounds. This is because the hairs located around the muzzle and eyes have sensory functions that are important to horses.

The hairs are needed to help identify textures of grass and to aid spatial awareness and environmental navigation which is impeded by blind spots in front of their foreheads and below their noses.

Scientists from the University of Adelaide and the University of Newcastle, Australia, surveyed 422 horse owners from Australia of which 85% entered their horses into competitions with showing and dressage being the two most popular types.

Most respondents were female (96%) and lived in South Australia (56%)

with a good spread of ages from 18-24 to 55-64, and fewer aged over 65 years.

The study sought to determine the proportions of horse owners trimming equine facial hairs (ear and muzzle hair) across different types of equestrian disciplines in Australia, the types of facial hairs trimmed, whether horses were restrained for trimming, and attitudes related to the practice.

Dr. Kirrilly Thompson, a co-author on the paper, from the University of Newcastle, Australia, said, "The results of this study provide valuable insight into the widespread trimming of horse muzzle and ear hairs in some horse disciplines prior to the implementation of the ban in Australia in July 2022."

"The information gained may also be useful for the design and implementation of behavior change interventions for other management and presentation practices used for horses and other animals."

The German Equestrian Federation (FN) was the first federation to ban the trimming of whiskers and ear hairs in competitive horses—making it illegal in 1998.

The International Equestrian Federation (FEI) then passed a ban—except for where individual sensory hairs have been removed by a veterinarian to prevent pain or discomfort to the horse—in July 2020.

British Dressage in their 2022 rule changed banned the practice of trimming facial hairs stating: "Trimming of the horse's sensory hairs around the mouth, nose, eyes, and ears is not permitted as this may reduce the horses' sensory ability."

The researchers highlighted that there has been limited studies into how

people trim facial hair in horses and attitudes to this practice.

They add that their study provides preliminary results on how widespread the practice was in Australian equestrian sports prior to a ban being introduced, and the reasons and attitudes people in the equine industry have to the trimming of horse facial hairs.

Dr. Susan Hazel, lead author of the research, from the University of Adelaide, said, "Further studies are needed to determine if and how the practice and attitudes to facial hair trimming in horses have changed with the enforcement of the ban.

"Findings from the present study, however, may also be useful for understanding and addressing other non-regulated horse presentation practices that can compromise welfare, such as clipping hair from the ear canal and 'pulling' manes and tails."

More information: What's the fuzz: The frequency, practice and perceptions of equine facial hair trimming revealed in survey of horse owners in Australia, *Human-Animal Interactions* (2023). [DOI: 10.1079/hai.2023.0023](https://doi.org/10.1079/hai.2023.0023)

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