

Racing, equine and farriery

FutureNow is the Western Australian Training Council for the creative, leisure and technology industries. The Council is a skills advisory body that represents the voice of industry, advising the State Government on the training and workforce development needs of our industry sectors.

Current industry environment

Horse and dog racing activities

Australia

In 2017–18 horse and greyhound racing contributed approximately \$1.4 billion to the Australian Gross Domestic Product. Further value-added income for the economy was generated by breeding, horse sales, prize money and wagering. Figures from Racing Australia suggest there are approximately 159,000 individuals involved in thoroughbred racing nationally, including over 82,600 racehorse owners, as well as various other participants, volunteers, and employees. Greyhound racing includes around 30,000 'registered participants' with figures from Greyhound Racing Australasia indicating that 7,000 people are directly employed in this industry, while tens of thousands are indirectly employed because of industry operations.¹

Western Australia

The racing and equine sector provides direct and indirect employment in both metropolitan and regional areas in racing and wagering activities, horse training, horse breeding, horse farming, farriery, supply and service businesses, hospitality, and tourism. There are 14,000 participants in the thoroughbred racing industry in Western Australia and more than 4,600 racing animals.² There are 35 thoroughbred racing clubs across the State, three greyhound tracks and 12 harness racing clubs.³ Racing and gambling activity provided \$75,995,287 total returns in WA⁴ and direct employment for race workers as detailed below:

2018/19 RWWA Industry Status Report

Registered Persons

	Trainers	Trainer / Drivers	Jockeys / Drivers	Apprentice Jockeys
Thoroughbred	511		57	24
Harness	198	274	52	
Greyhound	192			

Farrier services

Farriers provide specialist equine hoof care, including the trimming and balancing of horses' hooves and the placing of shoes on their hooves, as well as assisting veterinarians provide therapeutic hoof care. Care is critical for the success and sustainability of the breeding, racing and equine industries in Western Australia. Farriers are in strong demand in the racing industry and are well remunerated. There are about 1000 farriers working across Australia, with around 100 of those in WA. The Australian Government Job Outlook prediction is for numbers to remain stable.

Industry Developments

Horse and greyhound races are fixtures of Australia's sporting culture however industry participants have faced challenges over the past five years. There has been some decline in attendances and ticket sales at tracks, outside of feature meetings. Point of consumption taxes provide an opportunity for reinvestment in racetracks and training facilities.⁶

Animal welfare and overbreeding

The public's interest in animal welfare, care and management continues to escalate, driven by major events in Australia, including COVID-19, major bushfires, drought, and concern over the welfare of animals once they no longer work or participate in sport. The roles of pets, and companion assistance animals as a central component of human health and welfare has more recognition now, both through formal research and public attitudes.⁷ These developments have been pivotal in Racing and Wagering WA and other Racing Controlling bodies introducing welfare measures like rehoming and better tracking of all retired racing animals.

Overbreeding, (which is not an issue in Western Australia) and wastage remain difficult issues for the racing and breeding industries and have been addressed by the Racing and Breeding Industry Reference Committee when updating the training package. The impact of training package changes is not expected to be evident until RTOs are able to get the new products on scope and deliver them to learners. Immediate improvements are being driven through government and industry regulations.

The industry takes welfare issues seriously,⁸ and is committed to continually improving its awareness and actions to achieve better results for the animals. Currently, bodies within the national thoroughbred racing industry are working together to establish the Independent Working Group, to be Chaired by Dr Denis Napthine. The Working Group will also have members with backgrounds in the RSPCA, Australian Veterinary Association, and policy development.⁹

In November 2019, the WA Government announced planned changes to the state's regulation of the racehorse industry (especially its welfare standards), including the introduction of random inspection of knackeries and measures to track the location and condition of retired racehorses. In addition, RWWA has purchased property to support the rehoming of thoroughbred and standardbred racing horses.¹⁰

Sale of TAB

The WA TAB has been valued at between \$400 and \$500 million by the WA Government's commercial advisor Investec Australia.¹¹ If it proceeds, the deal will preserve operational funding for the racing industry and provide for a dedicated racing infrastructure fund from 35 per cent of the net sale proceeds. Initially It was expected that the sale would be completed mid to late 2020, but due to the impact of Covid-19 this has been delayed.¹²

Effects of COVID-19 on the workforce

Horse and dog racing are unique in the sport industry in having been allowed to continue operations, with strict biosecurity measures in place, during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Spectators were not permitted to attend races while there were limits on public gatherings. Only essential workers could access training and racing facilities. Event arrangements align with the phased easing of restrictions.

While there were limitations placed on the industry, the ability for some clubs and racing participants to continue to earn an income ensured the retention of much of the workforce for this industry. This was not the case for many other sport and recreation activities.

Race day operations in both metropolitan and regional areas are supported by RWWA officials transported from Perth. The hours of work increased for some RWWA officials and additional jobs were created to deal with cleaning, hygiene, biosecurity control and access requirements.¹³ The hospitality workforce within race clubs was impacted as spectators were barred and events cancelled. Race clubs contribute to the social vibrance of communities through

race related and general community events and this segment of the workforce was negatively affected.

The impact of the pandemic has so far been felt less in the south of the State where the 2020 season finished at the end of March, and more in the north where meets were cancelled, deferred or centralised. RWWA consolidated the 2020 program of race meetings to a smaller number of venues to better manage biosecurity and track access requirements with reduced resources. Prize money and bonuses were reduced by 20%. The Pilbara and Kimberley race seasons were cancelled, and no community race meetings were held for the 2020 calendar year.

The carnival races that normally attract horses and trainers from around the country were not supported due to travel and quarantine requirements, with only 2 thoroughbred horses travelling to WA and no harness horses coming at all.

Harness racing was reduced to three race clubs in March, extending to Northam in June, and increasing again as restrictions have eased. Harness Racing Australia extended the 2019/20 racing season (normally 1 September to 31 August) to 31 December.¹⁴ Greyhound race meetings were consolidated from three to two tracks with all scheduled race meetings transferred to Cannington and Mandurah.

These changes had potential to provide a significant impact on revenue and RWWA tried to reduce expenditure to sustain the racing industry. From 6 April, in addition to reductions in its own cost base, RWWA reduced prize money and breeding bonuses by 20% to help offset the decline in revenue.¹⁵ Reductions were made to internal operations, some staff were temporarily stood down and a hold placed on major projects.¹⁶ Prize money and breeding bonuses across all three codes of racing returned to 100% as of 1 August 2020. As returns on wagering (therefore income) was not affected to the levels expected.¹⁷

The farriery workforce was relatively unaffected by government restrictions. Farriers are easily able to maintain social distancing requirements when attending animals and public gathering limits do not usually affect their work. Work from racing activity provided continuity and demand from individual customers slightly increased as workers staying at home spent more time with their animals.

Horse ownership

Australia is unique in the thoroughbred racing world in that ownership of horses is spread across a broad spectrum of Australians and is not just the province of the wealthy. With just over 82,000 racehorse owners or part-owners in Australia, the economic downturn is likely to flow through to a reduction in investment as the capacity for discretionary spending decreases, although numbers of mares sent to stud have increased slightly in 2019 therefore racing horse numbers are likely to be maintained over the next few years.

Trainees and apprentices

The employment of current apprentices has been unaffected but RWWA, the largest employer of racing apprentices, decided not to take on new apprentices for the first few months of the Covid restrictions, however they have returned to normal recruitment numbers since 1 August.

Workforce opportunities

There continues to be a small shortages of jockeys, however track riders and farriers numbers are very short. These occupations were submitted for consideration for the Skilled Priority Occupation List in 2020.

Trackriders

There are 400-450 track riders currently riding on licensed tracks in WA. The most important skill required for the racing industry continues to be riding; jockeys riding in races and track riders for the exercise of horses.¹⁸ RWWA and horse training businesses face a constant challenge in attracting enough trackwork riders to sustain the industry given the very physical nature of the work, the small size and stature required for the role, the inherent risks in exercising horses, the timing of work (mostly in the early morning) and the part-time or casual nature of many

of the jobs. There were forty-seven completions of the Certificate III in Racing (Trackrider) between 2013-2019. Most of these graduates continue to complete the Certificate IV in Racing (Jockey) apprenticeship. The industry has traditionally relied on working holiday and other visa holders and experienced but unqualified track riders to address trackrider shortages. This source of workers is currently being affected by the national and WA border closures which limit access to international and interstate migrants.

RWWA is in the process of developing and accrediting a Certificate II qualification, an introductory short course, which will give riders resident in Western Australia training to enable them to undertake trackwork. The Department of Training and Workforce Development has given provisional approval for funding this course once it is accredited.

Jockeys

The Western Australian racing industry operates with low numbers of professional and apprenticed jockeys. The sector held 283 racing meetings during the 2018/2019 Western Australian racing year providing work for 57 licensed jockeys and 15 race riding apprentices. Industry indicates there is high demand for jockeys, and the current supply only just continues to meet it.

Farriers

The farrier workforce is ageing and experiences intermittent labour shortages. The current supply of qualified farriers to the industry in Western Australia is low with only six apprentices in training for the Certificate III in Farriery apprenticeship in 2020. There are not yet any enrolments in the newly implemented Certificate IV in Farriery apprenticeship. It is important for the industries farriers service that the supply of local graduates is sustained and if possible increased. Otherwise, there is a reliance on migrant workers and unqualified farriers to address shortages. Access to migrant workers has been affected by border closures during the pandemic.

Farrier training in Western Australia is provided by Education Services and Consultants, a registered training organisation based in South Australia. This arrangement has had industry support. Consideration is now being given to whether an interstate provider has the capacity to train and assess this very hands-on qualification while border closures are in place. The Peel Development Commission is currently in discussions with the local racing and equine sector and the Department of Training and Workforce Development to find ways to improve access to farrier training in the Peel region.

The small size of the workforce makes it vulnerable to minor changes in supply and to workers leaving this physically demanding work as they age. The occupation in WA will continue to experience intermittent shortages unless supply can be sustained or increased.

SKILLS AND TRAINING STRATEGIES

Horse and dog racing activities

There are too few trackriders to support the racing industry in Western Australia and the supply of jockeys only just keeps up with demand. These issues relate in part to the difficulties of attracting and retaining entrants to these occupations. Early retirement and migration to other markets has exacerbated these shortages. RWWA puts considerable effort into attracting and retaining workers but the demanding conditions of these jobs and the highly specialised skills needed limit the number of entrants. Both occupations are listed on the State Priority Occupation List at Priority Level 2. These occupations are in demand in the racing and equine industries and employment opportunities are readily available for graduates of accredited qualifications.

Proposed Trackrider Short Course

As mentioned previously, RWWA is currently investigating the development a short course for trackwork riders that it plans to accredit and deliver to a cohort of WA riders to reduce the industry's reliance on interstate and international workers.

The Department of Training and Workforce Development has given tentative support to funding the course, provided it is developed and accredited at AQF Level 2. RWWA may be able to co-fund the course to an extent to be agreed with the Department, by making an in-kind contribution of horses, equipment, training facilities and access to a racetrack.

There has also been a Skill Set for Trackriding identified in the Racing and Breeding Training Package that may be better suited to providing people with some riding skills the relevant training to gain employment as trackriders.

RGR Racing and Breeding Training Package

The Racing and Breeding Industry Reference Committee (RGR IRC) updated the industry training package in 2018 and 2019 so that it now covers animal welfare issues, including skills for re-training and re-homing horses and greyhounds, and training safety issues. The training package has also been updated to include all the general skills needed to work in the industry.

Additional skill sets, including a trackrider skills set, are being created and existing qualifications and skill sets are being simplified. Core units in the RGR20218 Certificate II in Racing Industry are being modified so that it is suitable for learners whose intended occupation is in greyhound racing. A change is being made in the RGR40218 Certificate IV in Racing (Jockey) to remove two imported BSB units from the core that have been found to be inappropriate for this cohort.¹⁹

Farrier services

There is a shortage of farriers in Western Australia. This is in part caused by the expense and time needed to train farriers, in an industry that is made of many sole traders with limited resources to support an apprentice, or benefits to the employer to take one on as they leave and establish their own business in competition as soon as qualified. The current training provider is based in South Australia making visits to WA as required. This arrangement has been impacted by the closure of Western Australia's state border, complicating access to apprentices in their workplaces. The Industry is currently in canvassing whether a WA based provider can be encouraged to take on training for this qualification. When WA TAFE was providing the farrier training numbers were similar.

ACM Animal Care and Management Training Package

The Animal Care and Management Industry Reference Committee (ACM IRC) supported by the WA Master Farrier's Association and racing and equine industries, acted in 2018 to restructure and update training package qualifications to make training more relevant to the industry and to establish a training pathway for prospective entrants. Farriers contribute to the care of valuable animals and often run a business as a sole trader. The Certificate III in Farriery was reclassified to the higher AQF Level IV to recognise the complexity of work being undertaken by farriers.

In recent years there have been many additional costs added to the provision of training in the racing, breeding and equine training. Up until 2016 Polytechnic West (now South Metropolitan TAFE) provided training for racing, farriery, and equine learners, however due to the costs and additional compliance requirements placed upon RTOs to provide training in this area, along with the relatively low numbers of enrolment they ceased delivery. Coastal and Rural Training are the only registered training organisation providing training for RWWA apprentice Jockeys through the Certificate III in Racing (Trackrider) and Certificate IV in Racing (Jockey). This training is heavily subsidised and supported by RWWA at a level not sustainable for a wider group.

Please get in touch with FutureNow

If you would be interested in providing your perspective on this snapshot or related workforce matters for your sector, our Industry Development Manager, Garry Scott, would appreciate hearing from you.

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