



**The Danish Animal Ethics Council:  
Statement on the use  
of horses for sport**



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## Summary

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The welfare of sport horses is currently a cause for concern and attention, as the demands of the sports may pose a risk to the horses' welfare. In recent years, there has also been increased research into training methods and horse welfare, and norms for the care and use of animals have developed. With this statement, the Danish Animal Ethics Council hopes to contribute to an evaluation and re-thinking of the use of horses for sport. The Council uses examples from dressage and show jumping but emphasises that the choice of these two disciplines is solely based on the delimitation of the statement, and that the Council's fundamental considerations and recommendations also apply to other disciplines. The Council has selected some areas of focus in the statement that may present particular challenges to animal welfare when horses are used for sport, namely the horse's soundness and longevity, housing, as well as training and competitions.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council does not find it problematic in itself that horses are used for sport, but the use entails a risk that the welfare of the horses is compromised. The Council emphasises that it is unacceptable for horses to be inflicted with pain, lesions, and other discomfort in the practice of sports activities. The Council believes that this must stop immediately and, in this regard, reminds of the current legislation. The Danish Animal Ethics Council recommends that practices and traditions surrounding equestrian sports be evaluated in light of the knowledge of horse behaviour and welfare today, as well as contemporary norms for the care and use of animals. The Council further believes that there is a need to break with the view of the horse as an athlete and recognise instead that the participation of horses in competitions is only about human interests and ambitions.

In the statement, the Danish Animal Ethics Council makes a number of recommendations regarding the education of individuals responsible for horse care, training, teaching, and organisation of competitions; the age limit for horses' participation in competitions and the like; housing prioritising horses' social needs and access to free movement; as well as limits on the extent to which a horse may be away from its familiar surroundings to participate in competitions or be at training camps. The Council also recommends the rethinking of training and the use of equipment and tack, including to cease the use of certain types of equipment and tack if in practice their application is coercive or is used to force the development of performance.

Regarding competitions, the Council recommends, among other things, that only performances that do not compromise the welfare of horses to a degree where conflict behaviour, pain, and other discomfort can be observed are rewarded; that all horses are checked both before and after competitions, that injuries are recorded in central databases, and that persons are trained in an independent setting to carry out this control. In terms of the use of doping, the Council recommends that significantly more testing be carried out for a period of time so that the results reflect the actual conditions. Furthermore, the Council recommends that it be clarified in the Horse Order that if a horse has received treatment that may affect its performance, it cannot participate in competitions until the effect of the treatment can be expected to have ceased. Therefore, the Council also recommends that medication of sport horses should be recorded, that the information should be made available to those who will check the horses at competitions, and that horses that are still within the period of the treatment's effectiveness should be denied participation. Finally, the Council recommends that surgical interven-

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tions that have an impact on the horse's performance be included in the horse passport so that a ban on participating in competition can be enforced.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council emphasises that the considerations and recommendations in the statement are relevant for the evaluation of all forms of equestrian sport, and that the recommendations should lead to immediate action from the industry. If the follow-up does not occur soon, the Council recommends that specific legislation be developed in Denmark for the use of horses for sport.



# 1. Background

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Horses have been used as riding and draft animals throughout history. Horses were used in warfare, and in peacetime there was a need to train both horses, riders, and drivers. This formed the basis for the use of horses in what later developed into various sports disciplines. Horse racing and classical horsemanship are described several hundred years BC, and already in the 1500s, special riding schools were established. Around the year 1900, the first riding clubs in Denmark were formed, and in 1912, there was equestrian sport for the first time at the Olympic Games. In 1917, the Danish Equestrian Federation was founded, and it was accepted as a special federation under the Danish Sports Federation in 1918. The interest in riding grew particularly in the 70s and 80s. Today (2022), the Danish Equestrian Federation covers about 450 clubs with a total of nearly 57,000 members, and the Federation organises about 2,000 competitions per year. The Danish Equestrian Federation does not have figures on how many horses are active in each discipline, and at lower levels, the same horses can be used in both dressage and jumping competitions. However, the Federation estimates that there are approximately 75,000 horses in total in the organised equestrian sport under their auspices. On the other hand, not all riders are members of a club under the Danish Equestrian Federation, and there are significantly more people who regularly practice riding. For example, the Danish Icelandic Horse Association has about 3,000 members with a total of approximately 38,000 Icelandic horses. In addition, there are horses used in other disciplines, such as horse racing.

Equestrian sport has evolved over time, both in relation to the old disciplines and in the introduction of new ones. There are now many different forms of equestrian sport, including dressage, show jumping, trotting, thoroughbred racing, eventing, western riding, and special gait competitions for Icelandic horses. Disciplines such as dressage and show jumping no longer focus only on strengthening the horse through the original gymnastic exercises but also on delivering a more show-oriented performance. Other disciplines have also evolved, for instance with demands for increased speed. Some forms of equestrian sport, such as dressage and show jumping, have been part of the Olympic program since 1912, and while sports riding was previously primarily reserved for military personnel and the wealthy, riding as a hobby and participation in amateur competitions are now more widely accessible. Today, there is often a debate about the keeping and use of horses, especially in connection with equestrian sport. Here, there seems to be a clash between views of horses as working animals with a resulting sense of the right to use the animal to pursue one's own sporting interests and ambitions, and views of the use of horses, where use should take place more on the horse's terms, with a greater focus on the nature of the horse.

Concerns for the welfare of horses appear to be increasing in recent years, both in and outside of the sport and within all equestrian disciplines. Increased opportunities for documentation and dissemination of observations, for example, through the use of recordings with mobile phones and sharing on social media, have provided greater insight into and attention to the fact that the demands of the sports may pose a risk to the welfare of horses and that even when there is a focus on the welfare of horses, it is the physical rather than the mental aspects that are noticed. In recent years, there has also been increased research into the welfare of horses, which has provided more knowledge about the effects of training methods on horses, and how horses react to physical or mental stress. As a result of this, there has been more focus on training and the use of equipment and tack, as well as methods for monitoring the consequences for horses of being used for sport. Thus, there is currently

a lot of discussion internationally about specific issues in horse sports, including what is perceived as welfare-inappropriate riding or use of equipment, sufficient control, and the general conditions in the lives of sport horses in terms of care and training.

In Denmark, legislation on the keeping and use of horses provides a general framework for horse welfare. However, there is not much legislation specifically addressing the special conditions for horses used in sports. Instead, guidelines have been developed by the federations that organise the sport and are consequently responsible for their enforcement. The elite within the various disciplines indirectly contributes to this by setting standards in their own work and functioning as role models for the more hobby-oriented part of the sport. However, there are reports of increasing pressure from ambitions on both the elite and amateur levels when using horses for sports, and thus an increased risk of compromising horse welfare.



*Competitions involve a risk that the horse may be under pressure to achieve a particular performance due to ambitions and/or economic interests.*

## 2. Purpose and scope

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Equestrian sports are tradition borne, but knowledge about horse welfare, training methods, and norms for the care and use of animals has evolved significantly in recent decades. The Animal Ethics Council believes that, in light of this, there is a need to take a closer look at the use of horses for sport. With this statement, the Council thus hopes to contribute to an evaluation and rethinking of the use of horses for sport.

The Animal Ethics Council has discussed how the topic of the use of horses for sport should be delimited. The Council has chosen that this statement should cover horses used in competition, i.e. situations where there is a risk that the horse, due to ambition and/or economic interests, is under pressure to achieve a particular performance. This applies to both elite and amateur levels. Although both ambition and the economic aspect may likely increase the pressure on horses at the top of the sport, the practices demonstrated there can also serve as role models and examples for amateur riders.

In this statement, the Danish Animal Ethics Council focuses on both animal welfare in relation to the actual performance of the sport and on aspects of the horse's life outside the competition situation, where participation in sport presents particular challenges. The Council does not discuss horse husbandry in general in this statement but refers instead to previous publications as presented in the section below on previous statements and consultation responses. The Council also does not discuss issues related to breeding or slaughter (and transportation in connection with this), as these issues are not particular to sport horses. Questions about insurance for retired sport horses are also not included.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council initially wanted to discuss several different disciplines within equestrian sports. However, it became clear after the initial exploration of the topic and the first discussions within the Council, that covering the conditions of the many existing disciplines was too extensive to be meaningfully addressed within the framework of a statement. Therefore, the Council has chosen in this statement to focus on two disciplines, namely dressage and show jumping, both of which fall under the Danish Equestrian Federation. The Council thus uses examples from the two selected disciplines as illustrations of conditions within equestrian sports generally, where, in the Council's view, work should be done to improve animal welfare.

The Council emphasises that the choice of dressage and show jumping as examples for the overall discussions on equestrian sports is based solely on considerations of the delimitation of the scope of the statement. The Council thus also emphasises that its basic considerations and recommendations are also relevant for other disciplines, such as the use of horses in trotting and thoroughbred racing and competitions with Icelandic horses. Therefore, the Council will also point out potential problem areas in disciplines other than dressage and show jumping that have come to the Council's attention during the preparation of this statement.

The statement describes and discusses several problem areas. Not all issues mentioned necessarily apply to both of the chosen disciplines, but most of the issues will apply to both as well as to other equestrian sports disciplines. For the sake of simplicity, general terms such as equestrian sports and sport horses are used in the statement. In this statement, these terms cover both the use of horses at an elite level and horses used for sport at a more hobby-oriented level. The term horses also refers to ponies.

## 3. Legislation and other frameworks

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### 3.1 Legislation

The keeping of horses for sport is subject to the minimum animal welfare requirements for keeping horses and the general rules for keeping animals, such as the Animal Welfare Act, the Keeping of Animals Act, and legislation regarding the protection of animals during transport (this is not an exhaustive list). Below is the legislation that the Council regards as relevant to the considerations in this statement, namely the rules that may be particularly important or present particular challenges in the keeping and use of horses for sport.

#### *The Animal Welfare Act<sup>1</sup>*

The purpose of the Animal Welfare Act is to promote good animal welfare, respect for animals as living and sentient beings, and to address considerations of animal ethics (section 1). The Act states at the outset that animals are living beings and must be treated properly and be protected as far as possible from pain, suffering, fear, permanent injury, and severe distress (section 2). The Animal Welfare Act also mentions that animals must not be trained or used for exhibition or similar purposes if the animal is thereby subject to severe distress (section 28). Furthermore, the Act gives the Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries the possibility to establish rules on, among other things, the training of animals, prohibition of treating animals for the purpose of hiding symptoms of disease, use of aids, and prohibition of the use of coercive equipment and tack (section 11). Finally, according to the Animal Welfare Act, the Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries may establish rules that the person responsible for a professional horse-keeping operation must be over 18 years of age and possess a relevant professional education (section 22). However, this possibility has not yet been utilised.

#### *The Horse Order (Executive Order on minimum welfare requirements for the keeping of horses)<sup>2</sup>*

The Order states that horses must be exercised for at least 2 hours 5 days a week or be given free movement in a paddock. Yearlings to two-year-old horses must be turned out in a paddock with conspecifics. Foals and horses under 1 year old must be turned out in a paddock with conspecifics for at least 2 hours 5 days a week, except for shorter periods of training. This may only be waived for veterinary reasons or in extreme weather conditions (section 16).

The Order also requires that the person responsible for a horse facility ensures that the horses are cared for by a sufficient number of people with relevant professional knowledge, skills, and qualifications, so that the horses can be properly cared for (section 22). Regarding handling and training, it must be ensured that the horse is trained at an early age to be handled. Training and use of the horse must be appropriate for the horse's age and physical and mental capacity, so that it is protected as far as possible from pain, suffering, fear, permanent injury, and severe distress (section 27). The equipment and tack used as aids on horses must be adapted to the individual horse and must not cause injury to the horse or be used as coercive measures (section 28). It is also not allowed to use any form of medication or treatment that aims to conceal symptoms of illness, so that the horse can

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1 LBK nr. 1597 af 08/07/2021

2 BEK nr. 1746 af 30/11/2020





*Horses bond with each other and are strongly motivated to be together with other horses. Lack of social contact and hindrance of social interactions increase the risk of developing abnormal behavior, including aggression towards other horses. Since 2021, it has been a legal requirement that horse keeping must consist of at least two animals. However, the degree of contact that the horses must have is not specified.*

train and participate in competitions (section 29). Finally, it is forbidden to use a remote-controlled or automatic device that is attached to the horse and applies electric shock or other significant inconvenience to the horse when activated (section 30).

As a new requirement from 2021, horse keeping must consist of at least two animals of either the horse species, donkey species, or crossbreeds of these (section 3). The requirement is titled “Contact with conspecifics”, but the degree of contact that the horses must have is not specified, for example, whether they should simply be able to see and hear each other or whether they should also be able to have physical contact, touch each other and possibly be turned out together. However, a horse can still be kept alone for a maximum of 4 months if one horse in a stable of two horses dies or permanently leaves the stable for another reason (section 3(2)). If the horse was acquired before January 1, 2021, and it has been kept without contact with conspecifics, it can still be kept that way until it changes ownership or dies (section 37).

#### ***Education of animal caretakers Order<sup>3</sup>***

The education of animal caretakers can be completed with a specialisation as a horse manager. The competence objectives for the specialisation as horse manager include, among others, daily care and feeding of horses, knowledge of horse anatomy and physiology, behaviour, welfare, and health, as well as common diseases, riding theory and elements of breaking in, lunging, and showing in hand based

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3 BEK nr. 497 af 22/04/2022

on knowledge of the young horse's natural behaviour, development, and basic training. It also includes guidance of riders in basic handling and riding, identification of basic riding technical errors and typical rider mistakes, legislation, and international guidelines for the keeping and transportation of horses (section 4).

### **3.2 Industry initiatives**

The horse industry has launched a number of initiatives aimed at increasing knowledge about horses and their welfare, as well as developing rules and guidelines for the use of horses for sport. These include the following initiatives:

#### *Horse Welfare Forum*

The Horse Welfare Forum (Hestevelfærdsforum) is a platform for a number of organisations related to horses in Denmark, including the Danish Equestrian Federation (Dansk Ride Forbund), Horse Racing Denmark (Dansk Galop), Danish Trotting Association (Dansk Travsports Centralforbund), Danish Icelandic Horse Association (Dansk Islandshesteforening), Hestens Værn (a horse protection organisation), relevant departments of SEGES (an agricultural organisation) and the Danish Veterinary Association. The purpose of the forum is to increase horse welfare, among other things by preparing joint consultation responses to relevant legislative proposals.

#### *Uanvendelig.dk*

Uanvendelig.dk is a website developed in collaboration between Hestens Værn and Clausardal.com. The purpose of the website is to create a forum where riders can find professionally based knowledge about injuries in horses, including both prevention and rehabilitation. The aim is to reduce the number of horses that have to be euthanised as a result of injuries.

#### *Hestelex*

Hestelex is an app developed by SEGES. The purpose of the app is to help horse owners get an overview of relevant legislation regarding stables and turnout areas, transport, registration, feeding, trading, and medication.

The individual equestrian sport disciplines have established rules and guidelines for the use of horses in their sport. Relevant examples from the Danish Equestrian Federation's general rules and guidelines, as well as those specifically aimed at dressage and show jumping, are given below.

#### *The Danish Equestrian Federation*

The Danish Equestrian Federation adopted a number of benchmarks in 2020, including a focus on horse welfare. The Federation covers not only dressage and show jumping, but also the disciplines of eventing, endurance, vaulting, multisport, and para-dressage. An overview is provided below of elements from the Danish Equestrian Federation's guidelines, regulations, and educations that the Council finds relevant to the discussions in this statement. The Council refers to the relevant documents for a more detailed description of the Federation's own framework for equestrian sports. Violations of the rules can be reported to the current competition jury, the Federation's disciplinary committee (for violations of the Federation's statutes), and the appeal committee (for doping of horses and riders). In 2020, the Danish Sports Confederation introduced a whistleblower scheme on behalf of all its special federations. So far (spring 2022), no reports from equestrian sports have been made to the whistleblower scheme.

- *Ethical Guidelines*<sup>4</sup>

The Danish Equestrian Federation has developed guidelines for ethically correct use of horses in equestrian sports. The guidelines must be adhered to both in everyday use and in competition. Among other things, it is stated that consideration for the horse and its physical and mental health must have the highest priority, and that its welfare must take precedence over, for example, the interests and desires of the trainer, rider, and owner. The guidelines also address the use of caring and competent training methods that do not harm the horse; use of the horse that is adapted to its capacity; development of the rider's knowledge and skills as well as education in training and handling; matters of general care and maintenance; and an emphasis that veterinary treatment of a horse must solely aim to promote its health and well-being. The guidelines also specify that the horse must not be subjected to physical or psychological violence, understood as jerking/pulling/see-sawing on the bit in the mouth; use of the whip beyond what is characterised as correction and/or reprimand; unrestrained use of spurs; other violence that has the features of punishment; as well as rollkur and hyperflexion, understood as bending the horse's neck under coercion.

- *General Regulations*<sup>5</sup>

The Danish Equestrian Federation also has a set of general regulations for the sports disciplines under the Federation. Among other things, the general regulations state that it is an aim for the equestrian sport to develop the horse into a "happy athlete." Therefore, the horse's welfare and soundness must be prioritised. It is stated here, as in the ethical guidelines, that riding must never include physical or psychological abuse or violence against the horse, and punishment and excessive correction must not be used (this is specified as incomprehensible, unnecessary, and/or excessive use of physical or verbal influence on the horse, including the use of whip, reins, spurs, legs or other tools, or jerking or yanking on the mouth which causes pain or discomfort). Aids such as whip, spurs, and bit may only be used to guide and correct the horse in relation to the horse's natural behavioural response patterns and learning potential and never as punishment. Excessive forward driving on a tired horse or riding an exhausted horse is considered abuse of the horse. If correction is needed, the cause of the horse's behaviour should be identified and included in a plan for correcting the problem.

It is further emphasised that the rider and/or the person responsible for the horse always has a duty to handle the horse based on an understanding of the horse's natural behaviour and to get acquainted with the horse's normal behaviour and body language, including signs of pain, discomfort, conflict, and flight response. The Danish Equestrian Federation also encourages everyone involved in equestrian sport to continually educate themselves on the correct handling and training of the horse.

The regulation further states that the horse must be prepared for training and competition situations through sufficient environmental training, and the methods used during training and handling of the horse must be based on knowledge of behaviour and learning theory so that the horse is positively motivated as far as possible. Additionally, the horse must only participate in training and/or competition that corresponds to the horse's physical and mental capacity and age.

The horse's equipment and tack must never harm the horse, for example due to incorrect use or abuse, be used to hide injuries that may result in sanctions, be used to inhibit the horse's natural

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4 Dansk Ride Forbunds retningslinjer for etisk korrekt anvendelse af hesten til ridesport (gældende fra 1. januar 2021)

5 Dansk Ride Forbund. Fælles Bestemmelser (gældende fra 1. januar 2023)



*According to the Danish Equestrian Federation, the horse's equipment must never harm the horse or be used to hinder the horse's natural senses or ability to express discomfort or conflict behavior, and the horse's natural freedom of movement must always be prioritised. If a noseband is used (as it is here in combination with a second strap around the mouth), it must not be too tight. The Danish Equestrian Federation requires that there must be at least 1.5 cm between the noseband and the bridge of the nose.*

senses or ability to express discomfort or conflict behaviour, and the horse's natural freedom of movement must always be prioritised. When using a noseband, there must be at least 1.5 cm between the horse's noseband and the bridge of the nose.

The rider's balance, weight, and proportionality must be evaluated in relation to the horse and its expected performance. If a horse is considered to be uncomfortable due to the rider, the horse and rider may be denied entry into a competition.

According to the regulations, horses must not participate in competitions before May 1st of the year they turn four years old. There are also limits on the number of classes per day in which the horse may compete. However, there are stricter age requirements in some disciplines, as specified below in the regulations of the respective disciplines.

Lame, sick, or neglected horses must not be trained or participate in competitions. Horses with lesions and injuries must be excluded from competition unless the damages are insignificant and do not cause discomfort or pain to the horse. Insignificant damages can, for example, be bleeding from a superficial wound that stops immediately when lightly wiped, or a superficial scrape on the skin or swelling on the horse's body where there is no pain or discomfort. Lesions or injuries caused by equipment, aids, and/or rider cannot be considered insignificant damages. If lesions, injury, or bleeding are observed during warm-up, the warm-up must be stopped, and the horse must be evaluated, and start may be refused.

Regarding the use of doping and medication, the regulation states that horses must not participate in equestrian events under the influence of pain-relieving, performance-enhancing, stimulating, or calming substances. It is also mentioned that horses are subject to the IOC's (International Olympic Committee), FEI's (International Equestrian Federation, Fédération Equestre Internationale), and DIF's (Danish Sports Confederation) regulations in force at all times on doping and medication for horses, riders, and athletes.



Horses are also not allowed to receive preventive medication by injection or fluid treatment at international competitions, either in Denmark or abroad. If there is a need for medication of horses at a competition site in Denmark, permission must be obtained at national competitions from the Danish Equestrian Federation's veterinary consultant.

Furthermore, horses are not allowed to participate in competition, not even abroad, if there is reduced or increased sensitivity or pain in a limb or parts of a limb, and it is not allowed to compete on horses that have undergone neurectomy (de-nerving), or where sensory hairs have been clipped, shaved, or otherwise removed (unless the hairs have been removed for veterinary reasons). Finally, it is not allowed to train or compete on horses with a braided tail or other types of tail stiffening, which can make the tail act as a whip when the horse swishes it.

- *Discipline regulations*

In addition to the general regulations, there are also specific regulations for each discipline that elaborate on particular aspects of that discipline.

The dressage regulations<sup>6</sup> specify that only equipment, tack and products mentioned in the regulations are allowed. Specific requirements for the approved equipment and tack are then outlined, including the use of whips and spurs. The use of a noseband is mandatory, and the requirement for at least 1.5 cm between the noseband and the bridge of the nose is reiterated for both the upper and lower nosebands. Bits must not be shaped to immobilise the horse's tongue, and the use of blinkers, bit discs, sunglasses, tongue straps, and auxiliary reins is prohibited. In addition, age limits for participation in competitions are specified, and the higher the level of difficulty, the older the horse must be.

In the show jumping regulations<sup>7</sup>, it is stated that rapping is prohibited. Rapping is defined as measures to prevent the horse from touching the obstacles, such as the use of jumps that are not allowed in the warm-up area, deliberately inducing the horse to hit an obstacle during jumping, or the use of foreign objects, chemicals, or the like under boots or bandages. It is also a requirement that the rider must treat the horse so that it does not suffer physical or psychological harm and so nobody will have reasonable cause to be offended by the sight. Concrete requirements are also outlined here for the use of equipment and tack, including whips, spurs, nosebands (with the aforementioned distance requirement between the noseband and the bridge of the nose), and leg protection. The use of tongue ties or other fixation of the tongue is not allowed. Age limits for participation in competitions are also specified in the jumping regulations, and the higher the level of difficulty, the older the horse must be.

### *FEI (Fédération Equestre Internationale)*

At international competitions in dressage and show jumping held in Denmark, the rules of the international equestrian federation FEI<sup>8</sup> apply regardless of the rider's nationality. The international rules may differ from those of the Danish Equestrian Federation. The rules of the Danish Equestrian Federation may be more specific than the international rules, for example with the requirement of 1.5 cm between the noseband and the bridge of the nose, where FEI requires the more imprecise "one finger's width"; the rules may be less demanding, for example, with the Danish Equestrian Federation's optional use of the double bridle in dressage and of spurs in dressage and show jumping, where this

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6 Dansk Ride Forbund: Disciplinatsnit – Dressur (gældende fra 1. januar 2023)

7 Dansk Ride Forbund: Disciplinatsnit – Springning (gældende fra 1. januar 2023)

8 Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)

is a requirement at certain levels under the FEI; or the rules may be stricter, for example, where the Danish Equestrian Federation has specified that riders are not allowed to participate in competitions on horses that have undergone de-nerving, which is not as clearly stated in the international rules. If medication is needed for horses at international competitions in Denmark, permission must be obtained from a so-called “veterinary delegate”.

In June 2022, FEI established a new independent “Social License Commission” to address societal concerns related to the use of horses for sport. The Commission consists of members external to the FEI, as well as FEI nominated representatives. When setting up the Commission, FEI elaborated on the concept of “social license to operate” and its relevance to the Commission’s work<sup>9</sup>. It states here, among other things, that “social license to operate” is understood as acceptance from both those involved and those outside of a particular practice and is based on trust that the organisation complies with written and unwritten norms and rules for its activities and fulfills its commitments. According to FEI, the Commission should analyse the various aspects of “social license” related to FEI’s activities to develop recommendations that can ensure and strengthen the general acceptance of FEI’s activities by all stakeholders in society.

At the founding meeting, however, the members of the Commission decided to change the name to “Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission”, which the members believed better reflects the aims and mission of the group’s work. In its own description of its purpose, the Commission stated that by addressing concerns for sport horses, it must not only ensure ongoing societal acceptance of using horses for sport but also ensure that horse welfare is paramount<sup>10</sup>. In October-November 2022, the Commission published interim reports on concerns among equestrian stakeholders within and outside FEI<sup>11</sup> as well as among the general public<sup>12</sup>, and on preliminary recommendations regarding equipment and tack<sup>13</sup>. The Commission has also published a combined presentation of the material to FEI<sup>14</sup>.

The report on concerns among equestrian stakeholders shows that 75 % of those who responded to the survey are worried about one or more aspects of the welfare of sport horses. However, the report also shows that there is a significant difference in the degree and nature of concerns in the responses from individuals within and outside of the FEI. The level of concern is higher among, for example, veterinarians and leisure riders than among those affiliated with the FEI. And there is a significant difference in the type of concerns seen among respondents affiliated with the FEI and those who are not. Respondents outside of the FEI were significantly more concerned about issues related to training and equipment and tack, ability to identify physical and emotional stress, accountability, enforcement, knowledge, and the horse’s life outside of competition, while respondents with affiliation to the FEI were significantly more concerned about issues related to whether the horse was fit to compete and possible masking of health problems. In the report with specific recommendations regarding equipment and tack, the Commission recommends that the use of the double bridle in dressage and spurs

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9 Social License to Operate FEI Commission Terms of Reference (2022)

10 Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission

11 Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission (FEI) (2022) Opinions of Equestrian Stakeholders on the use of Horses in Sport: Survey Results (November 2022)

12 Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission (FEI) (2022) Public Attitudes on the Use of Horses in Sport: Survey Report (November 2022)

13 Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission: Further supporting information related to Tack and Equipment Early Recommendations 2022 Review of relevant research (August – November 2022)

14 Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission: Report to the FEI General Assembly South Africa November 2022

in all disciplines should be optional at all levels, and that an evidence-based method for consistent measurement of noseband tightness should be developed.

In its combined presentation to FEI, the Commission concludes that the material clearly shows the need for changes. The Commission ends the presentation by stating that everyone involved in equestrian sports needs understand the responsibility they have to optimise and prioritise equine welfare, both because it is the right thing to do and in order to be seen to be doing so.

### **3.3 Previous statements and consultation responses from the Danish Animal Ethics Council**

The Danish Animal Ethics Council has previously commented on horses in both a statement and a number of consultation responses. Below are the parts of previous statements that are relevant to the considerations in the current statement.

#### *Statement on the Keeping of Horses (1998)<sup>15</sup>*

The Danish Animal Ethics Council's statement on the keeping of horses also addressed the use of horses for sport. In the statement, the Council recommended, among other things, to set up a committee with the task of proposing rules for the keeping and use of horses. The Council further recommended the development of an ethical code for the training and use of horses, which could be included in the education of "horse people" at all levels. In connection with this, the Council emphasised that associations that organise riders and others practicing equestrian sports have a duty to make a consistent and targeted effort to prevent horses from being subjected to unnecessary coercion during training and competition, being under pressure to increase performance through medication or physical aids, or suffering injury due to premature and incorrect use. Finally, the Council pointed out that everyone who works professionally with horses should have an education that ensures they have insight into the horse's behaviour, diseases, and nutritional needs. The Council's view was that several existing education programs, including trainer and riding instructor training, lacked thorough and independent education in these subjects, which the Council recommended should be corrected.

#### *Consultation response to the report on the keeping of horses by the working group of the Ministry of Justice (2006)<sup>16</sup>*

In 2003, the Ministry of Justice set up a working group on the keeping of horses, among other things, with reference to the recommendation from the Danish Animal Ethics Council. The report from the working group was sent out for consultation in 2006. In relation to questions about exercise and social contact, the Danish Animal Ethics Council noted that expensive competition horses are often kept without contact with conspecifics and indoors. The Council found that these horses, despite probably only being in competition for a part of their lives and representing a significant value, should be given access to free exercise with other horses.

The Council also noted that the report mentioned that many horse owners do not have sufficient knowledge of horses. The Council found that this was one of the points where action should be taken. The Council pointed out that it can be difficult to control whether the law is being complied with regarding initial use and training, and therefore suggested a recommendation in this area. The Council

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15 Det Dyreetiske Råd: Udtalelse om hold af heste (1998)

16 Det Dyreetiske Råd: Høringssvar til rapporten om hold af heste afgivet af Justitsministeriets arbejdsgruppe (2006)



*The Danish Animal Ethics Council has previously made statements about horses and recommended that horses – including sport horses – have access to free exercise with conspecifics.*

also welcomed the proposal for requirements that persons responsible for professional horse husbandry should have relevant education, and the Council recalled that it is important that the concept of “relevant professional education” is defined more precisely.

#### ***Consultation responses to the Horse Act (2012<sup>17</sup> and 2016<sup>18</sup>)***

The Horse Act was introduced in 2007 (and came into effect on January 1, 2008). The Danish Animal Ethics Council has submitted consultation responses on several occasions regarding legislation on the keeping of horses. Below are the most relevant aspects related to sport horses, respectively from the consultation responses in 2012 and 2016.

In 2012, the Danish Animal Ethics Council reiterated its concern that horse owners’ knowledge may be insufficient and called for attention to whether their knowledge could be improved through legal measures. The Council also took the opportunity to draw attention to the methods used for horse training. The Council recalled its focus on this issue in its statement from 1998, but as far as the Council was aware, certain inappropriate and harsh training methods were still being used in some places. Therefore, the Council also called for a look into this area and whether it could be improved through legal measures or better use of existing rules.

In 2016, the Danish Animal Ethics Council reiterated its consideration of the need to improve horse owners’ knowledge through legal measures and to reduce the use of inappropriate, harsh, or directly harmful training methods. The Council also still found that for all horses, not just young ones, there should be a requirement for access to turnout with conspecifics to ensure social contact and the opportunity to express social behaviour with other horses. The Council also continued to find that it should be made clear that access to turnout cannot be replaced by riding exercise.

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17 Det Dyreetiske Råd: Høringssvar om hesteloven (2012)

18 Det Dyreetiske Råd: Høringssvar om hesteloven (2016)



## 4. Horse sport in Denmark

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As a background for the discussions on equestrian sports, relevant aspects of the biology and behaviour of horses are initially outlined as well as the sports disciplines that the Council's considerations are based on.

### 4.1 The biology and behaviour of horses

Despite being domesticated for over 5000 years, part of a horse's behaviour is still similar to its ancestors. If the needs of horses are not met, the risk of abnormal behaviour increases.

As a species, horses are adapted to life on open plains, where they live closely together in herds. They form strong bonds with each other and engage in social interactions such as mutual grooming, which strengthens their bonds. Horses are highly motivated to be with other horses, and a lack of social contact and hindrance of social interactions increases the risk of abnormal behaviour, including aggression towards other horses. However, horses may also need to be able to keep a distance to other horses. It is important for horses to interact with other horses from a young age so that they learn normal social behaviour.

Horses are herbivores and under natural conditions they will spend most of the day moving and seeking food. Thus, the horse's digestive system has evolved to handle a continuous intake of fiber-rich food. Free movement is essential for the horse's balance and coordination, and it is particularly important for the development of the body in foals and young horses. As a potential prey animal, horses are very attentive to their surroundings, and reactions such as kicking and fleeing are natural for them.

Horses have a very wide field of vision, but there are also blind spots, which means that horses need to move their heads to fully orient themselves and estimate distances. One of the blind spots is



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around the muzzle. Muzzle hair and sensitivity in the skin help the horse to orient itself, for example, to find food.

## 4.2 Dressage and show jumping

As mentioned, the Danish Animal Ethics Council uses examples from the sports disciplines of dressage and show jumping, both of which are under the Danish Equestrian Federation. Dressage is a competition where the horse's obedience, suppleness, physique, abilities, and the rider's work with the horse are judged. During competition, a program is ridden with different exercises based on the horse's gaits – walk, trot, and canter. The exercises include, among other things, calm stepping in place; a gait where the horse briefly appears to stop before putting its hoof down; the horse walking diagonally forward while its legs on one side cross over the opposite legs; turning on the spot; movement to the side, where the horse's head should point in the opposite direction; and backward movement. According to the Danish Equestrian Federation's judging criteria for dressage<sup>19</sup>, the horse's head position should be kept constant, with the nose in or slightly in front of the vertical, and with the poll as the highest point. The mouth should be closed, and the horse must not show resistance or stiffness, and it should move in pure rhythm with the natural movement pattern in the three gaits.

There are several levels of dressage with increasing difficulty, and there may be differences in which exercises are required in different competitions. Some types of bits are only allowed at higher levels



*In dressage, the horse's obedience, suppleness, physique, abilities, and the rider's work with the horse are judged. During competitions, a program is ridden with different exercises that are based on the horse's gaits – walk, trot, and canter.*

19 Dansk Ride Forbund: Fordringer i dressur & bedømmelsesgrundlag



*According to the Danish Equestrian Federation's judging criteria for dressage, the horse's head position should be kept constant, with the nose in or slightly in front of the vertical, and with the poll as the highest point. The mouth should be closed.*

of difficulty, as they require experience on the part of the rider and understanding of the horse's sensitivity in the mouth, and permission to use whip and spurs also follows the level of difficulty.

In show jumping, the horse and rider must complete a course of up to 18 jumps. The jumps vary in height and appearance, such as walls or jump stands with poles in between, and they can be arranged as a single jump, a double jump, or a combination of three jumps. The course must be completed within a certain time and as far as possible without faults, such as the horse knocking down a pole or refusing a jump. There are different classes of jumping competitions, but they all require the course to be ridden in the specified manner. The goal is to complete the course as quickly as possible with the fewest faults.

#### ***Training for riding teacher, riding instructor, riding master (bereiter) and judge<sup>20,21,22</sup>***

The Danish Equestrian Federation offers training for riding teacher, riding instructor, and riding master in collaboration with the Danish Riding Instructor Association. The courses last for two years each and are structured as a progressive modular program with training for riding teacher in the first two years, for riding instructor in the next two years (i.e. a total of four years), and for riding master in the final two years (i.e. a total of six years), if the students meet the admission requirements for the next level. The courses are aimed at young people who want a competency-giving education to work professionally with teaching, running of riding clubs/centers, as well as horses and riding. The purpose of the courses is to ensure the correct training of the horse so instructors must have knowledge of the horse's anatomy and physique and be able to contribute to ensuring horse welfare and advise riders/owners on the correct use of the horse and handling. The educations are a mixture of theory and practice and include topics such as riding theory, anatomy and physiology, horse behaviour and welfare, legislation, ethics in training, interaction between horse and rider, as well as rules for medi-

20 Dansk Ride Forbund: Uddannelserne til Ridelærere, Rideinstruktør og Berider

21 Dansk Ride Forbund: Dressurdommeruddannelsen

22 Dansk Ride Forbund: Krav til springdommere under DRF – Uddannelse og autorisation af springdommere



cation. In the education to become a “riding master”, one can choose to either become an all-round “riding master” or specialise in jumping or dressage. The Danish Equestrian Federation has also approved an education as a riding trainer, offered at Aalborg Sports School.

Judges who judge competitions under the Danish Equestrian Federation must meet a number of requirements. The requirements are increased as the judge is to judge higher classes. For dressage judges, for example, the judge, in addition to being a rider at competition level, must take a course (later an exam) and have served as a secretary (later assistant) to a more experienced judge. As the classes increase, there are also increased requirements for judge experience. Ongoing participation in courses/exams and other maintenance is required, and if this is not met, the class in which one can function as a judge is downgraded. For judges in show jumping, there are also requirements for courses, exams, practice, and judge experience, while personal riding experience is seen as an advantage but not a requirement. There are also requirements for maintaining judge status in this field.

*In show jumping, the horse and rider complete a course with various obstacles. The course must be completed within a certain time and in a specific order, while avoiding faults such as the horse knocking down a pole or refusing a jump.*





## 5. Selected focus areas for the Council's discussions

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Horses can be under pressure in several ways in connection with sports. For example, there may be wishes for the horses to run faster, slower, jump higher, or have specific head and leg positions and perform movements that they would not naturally choose in those situations if given the opportunity. In addition to and in connection with training, various equipment and tack can be used to help drive, brake, direct, and shape the horse for the desired expressions and performances. Furthermore, the life of a sport horse can also entail some special challenges beyond what is directly related to training and competition, such as the way they are kept.

In this statement, the Danish Animal Ethics Council has selected some focus areas that can pose particular challenges for animal welfare when horses are used for sports. The Council reviews a number of potentially problematic conditions that form the basis for the Council's discussions. Potentially is in this context understood as an expression of the difficulty in determining to what extent there are general problems in horse sports in Denmark. The existence of the mentioned problems is documented through research and experience, but the Council is only aware of a few studies that can shed light on the extent of the mentioned challenges and problems in Danish equestrian sport.

### 5.1 Soundness and longevity of the horse

#### *Age at initial use*

Exercising and handling horses can advantageously start early in order to strengthen the horse's body and introduce them to the way they will be used. However, as mentioned in the Horse Order (section 27), training and use of the horse should be appropriate for the horse's age and physical and mental capacity, i.e. exercise and handling should be carried out with respect for the animals' developmental stage. Many horses begin training at the age of 3 and are used as riding horses at the age of 4. However, a horse's skeleton is not fully developed until the age of 5-6, and the back and upper body are the last to develop. Too much pressure on the body too early can increase the risk of soreness, lameness, and injuries. Desires for rapid development of the horse and its performance, for example for the purpose of participation in competitions, can thus entail a risk to the horse's welfare. At the same time, premature use of equipment and tack can give a false impression that the horse is further along in its physical and mental development than it actually is, as the equipment can potentially be used to push the horse's physique and force the development of its performance. It is therefore crucial for the horse's soundness that sufficient time is allocated for development so that the horse has both acquired the necessary strength and balance, for example, to carry a rider and is mentally ready for the tasks of the sports discipline. Additionally, the horse needs to get habituated to the environment that is associated with competitions.

The Danish Equestrian Federation requires that horses have a certain age before they can participate in dressage and jumping competitions. Dressage and show jumping horses must be 4 years old before participating at the lowest level, and the age requirements increase with the level of difficulty up to 8 years old (dressage) and 7 years old (jumping), after which there are no age restrictions for participation. However, the calendar year, not the horse's actual birth date, determines the horse's age classification. Therefore, a horse is considered to be, for example, 4 years old on January 1st of

the year in which it turns 4, even if it was born later in the year. 4-year-old horses are not allowed to compete before May 1st of the year they turn 4, but they may thus still be under 4 years old when they start competing. The Federation does not have guidelines for when training and habituation can begin. At stallion shows and other forms of assessment of young horses (possibly under other equestrian organisations), the horses may be younger, down to 2-3 years old.

### *Combination of horse and rider*

When horses carry a rider, it is crucial that they are physically sufficiently developed and trained for it. However, the combination of horse and rider is also essential for the welfare of the horse. As humans become bigger and heavier, the rider's weight in relation to the horse's size has drawn attention to potential effects on the horse. Indeed, studies have also shown changes in the horse's physiology and movement with increased rider weight during training at moderate to high intensity. However, one study also suggests that an increase in the rider's weight during riding at a low to moderate level did not affect the horse's physiology, behaviour, or symmetry in movement. This suggests that weight (up to a certain limit) may not play such a significant role in the short term if the horse is ridden at a level typical of leisure horses. However, the significance of the rider's weight may play a larger role, the greater the demands placed on the horse's performance. The latter study also showed that horses are influenced by the rider's balance and motor skills. Poor motor skills in the rider thus resulted in increased conflict behaviour. Finally, the rider's and therefore the saddle's size, regardless of the rider's weight, may also affect the horse's welfare, as the saddle must be placed and kept within the front and strongest part of the horse's back. According to the Danish Equestrian Federation's general regulations, a horse must not show clear signs of being uncomfortable due to the rider and may be refused to start or disqualified if it does. The rider's balance, weight, and proportionality in relation to the horse and its expected performance are also taken into account in the assessment.

### *Retirement from the sport*

A horse can live up to 25-30 years. Even if a horse can no longer compete at a certain level, it may still function well as a riding horse at a hobby level. Many horses change owners several times during their lives because the owner's level of ambition and the horse's performance level no longer match. However, a high number of ownership changes and relocations over the course of a horse's life can be stressful for the horse. Each time, the horse must adjust to new conditions, both in terms of physical surroundings, people, and other horses.

In 2019, SEGES (their horse section) conducted a survey collecting data from horse owners on the reasons why horses had died. The data in the survey include all kinds of horses, not just horses used for sports. According to the survey, horses in Denmark live an average of about 17 years. Generally, ponies and small horses live longer than large horses. There may be a slightly lower average age for dressage and jumping horses, but the basis for the numbers is uncertain because the horses may have retired from sports at the time of data collection. According to the survey, about 3 % of horses are slaughtered, while about 91 % are euthanised. Reasons include issues such as limb problems (about 30 %), age-related illness (about 16 %), various diseases such as digestive and respiratory problems as well as bone fractures, and finally, a few cases of accidents, behavioural problems, poisoning, or sudden death. Limb problems include laminitis (inflammation in the hooves), arthritis, lameness, and spavin (inflammation and arthritis in the hock joint). However, this is only one study, and the numbers reflect the causes of death for the horses included in the responses, but the numbers do not necessarily apply to all horses in Denmark.

Agria Animal Insurance reports to the Danish Animal Ethics Council that horses insured with them live to an average of 9-13 years old. It is not recorded whether the horses have been used for sports. The five most frequently recorded reasons for euthanasia/death are colic, suspensory ligament injuries (the suspensory ligament is a ligament in the lower part of the limbs), laminitis, ataxia, and lameness. However, Agria Animal Insurance has only offered horse insurance in Denmark for the past five years, and not all horses are insured here. Therefore, these numbers may not necessarily apply to horses in general.

## 5.2 Housing

### *Social contact*

Horses are social animals and form strong bonds with other horses. It is a legal requirement since 2021 that horses must be kept with other animals of the same species, but it is not specified how close the contact between horses should be. Horses can therefore still be kept individually in stalls and paddocks where they can hear, see, and smell other horses, but where they do not have the opportunity to interact physically with each other. When horses are kept together all the time, injuries are rare. However, it is important that horses get accustomed to being around other horses and have been socialised, and that they as far as possible are kept in stable pairs or groups so that the relationships between the horses are stable.

Some sport horses are only turned out individually to protect them from injuries if they appear to not get along with others. But if horses are only together occasionally, the limited contact can lead to the interaction between them becoming more intense when they finally meet, and the horses become less adept at communicating with each other, which increases the risk of more violent reactions. As a consequence, the risk of injury can increase. Giving stallions access to physical contact with other



*Some sport horses are only turned out alone or primarily exercised on a treadmill or similar in order to protect them from injuries. However, when horses are habituated to being around other horses and kept together all the time, injuries are rare. And it is important for horses' health to get out and move freely because the opportunity for free movement strengthens the horse's musculoskeletal system and recovery from training.*

horses can be a particular challenge to accommodate because they typically have grown up being kept individually. However, stallions are also social animals and can also be kept together with others, but this requires special demands regarding e.g. early socialisation, physical facilities, and the combination of horses. The Danish Equestrian Federation recommends that all horses have daily access to visual and physical contact with conspecifics.

### *Exercise and feeding*

It is important for the physical and mental health of horses to have the opportunity to get out and move freely. However, the Danish Animal Ethics Council has been informed that some sport horses only have access to a small paddock and are primarily exercised on a treadmill, walker, or through lunging, as free movement in a large turnout area is feared to increase the risk of injury. Research, however, indicates that the opportunity for free movement strengthens the horse's musculoskeletal system and recovery from training. The opportunity for free movement also has a positive effect on the horse's mental welfare. The tendency to only exercise horses on treadmills or through lunging is said to be particularly common for dressage horses. The Danish Equestrian Federation recommends that all horses have daily access to free movement in a turnout area.

As previously mentioned, under natural conditions, horses move slowly through the landscape and graze, thus taking a long time to consume their daily feed ration. Horses need to consume roughage, which requires a long chewing time, as this stimulates saliva production, which can neutralise gastric acid. If the gastric acid is not neutralised, the risk of the horse developing ulcers and colic increases. In addition, a lack of roughage can mean that the horse's behavioural needs are not met. There is a high incidence of gastric ulcers in sport horses where providing roughage has been perceived as too inconvenient. However, there is reportedly now more focus on the benefits of ensuring that the horse receives adequate amounts of roughage. The Danish Equestrian Federation therefore recommends in their general regulations that the horse's need for chewing time is met through regular feeding of hay or access to grass distributed over the 24 hours of a day, and that periods without access to chewing time (hay or grass) should not exceed 3-4 hours.

## **5.3 Training and competitions**

### *Training*

A large part of horse communication happens through visual signals. If the other horse does not respond to these signals, the communication can escalate to threatening behaviour and even physical contact. In this way, a horse can put pressure on another horse, e.g. to make it move, and when the other horse moves, the pressure stops.

The principle of putting pressure on horses, which is removed when the horse does as desired, is also used by humans when training horses. This is called negative reinforcement, and pressure can be applied using e.g. the legs or reins. However, in practice, the pressure is not always removed, either because the trainer or rider is inattentive to removing it, or because equipment or tack is used that applies a constant pressure, or because more pressure than necessary is applied. In order for the horse to understand the signals and relax during training, it is crucial that the trainer understands that as little pressure as possible should be applied, and that the training effect lies in the reward that the horse experiences when the pressure is relieved. Horses can also be trained through positive reinforcement, where they receive a reward for responding to a specific signal, such as getting a carrot if they come when called. In recent years, there appears to be a growing interest in using training methods with positive reinforcement in horse training.





*Curving of the horse's neck so that the head is held behind the vertical is only allowed by the Danish Equestrian Federation in the "low, deep, and round" version. However, it is unclear how this can be distinguished in practice from the prohibited versions of the curved neck, "rollkur" and "hyperflexion". Curving of the neck, even with a vertical nose, can, among other things, affect the horse's airways and increase the risk of problems in both the back and legs.*

Horses need basic training in e.g. wearing different equipment such as a bit and a saddle, and carrying a rider on their back. They also need to learn to adapt to the pressure from the saddle and the rider's weight, as well as to respond appropriately to signals such as changes in the rider's weight distribution, pressure from the legs or reins, and cues from spurs and whips. Additionally, horses need to be trained to handle the different contexts involved in the sport, such as transportation, sounds, and the nature of the surroundings.

Of course, horses also need to be trained to perform the specific skills required in their sport discipline. In both dressage and show jumping (as well as in other disciplines), there is a desire for the horse to hold their head and neck in a particular position. This is achieved through a combination of training and equipment. Restraining the head and neck in a certain position has been the subject of much attention in recent years, as more knowledge has become available about the consequences of restricting the horse's freedom of movement, e.g. by making a curvature of the neck. This curved neck is commonly referred to as "rollkur," "hyperflexion," or "low, deep, and round." According to the ethical guidelines of the Danish Equestrian Federation, rollkur and hyperflexion are understood as the bending of a horse's neck under coercion and are no longer allowed. The position of low, deep, and round is still allowed as the Federation considers it to be part of beneficial gymnastic exercises during warm-up and after training and competitions, and a position that the horse assumes without coercion. However, there is no clear scientific evidence of these gymnastic effects. It is also unclear how low, deep, and round can be distinguished in practice from other versions of a curved neck, including whether the essential part is the element of coercion, the degree of curvature, or a combination of both. However, there is research showing that a curved neck typically also causes a sharp angle of the horse's pharynx, which affects the conditions in the horse's upper airways, even with the slight curvature seen in the permitted position during competitions with a vertical nose. It is unclear, however, whether the constriction of the pharynx itself affects the horse's breathing and performance, or whether it causes discomfort. However, a curvature of the horse's neck can alter the angles in other parts of the horse's anatomy because a ligament along the horse's back connects its neck with its



*During both training and competitions, it is important to pay attention to whether the horse shows conflict behavior, for example, because it has difficulty coping with discomfort. The horse here has its head behind the vertical, its tack has a double bridle, and the rider has a whip and wears spurs. When the horse swishes its tail, has an open mouth, a pointed upper lip, triangular eyes, and dilated nostrils, this can be signs of discomfort, pain, and/or conflict behavior. (Horses in some of the other pictures also show such signs). The Danish Equestrian Federation has special rules for the use of equipment and tack in connection with competitions.*

back and loins. The curvature of the neck can make it harder for the horse to keep its back up and get its hind legs under its body, and in that way, the curvature can increase the risk of problems in both the back and legs. Finally, the fixed and possibly curved neck can limit the horse's field of vision, and both this and inhibitions in the pharynx, airways, and/or the ability to move the head and neck freely can make the horse insecure and anxious.

Therefore, it is important during training as well as competition to be aware of whether the horse is showing signs of conflict behaviour. Horses show conflict behaviour when they struggle to handle mental or physical discomfort. For example, the horse may shake its head, grind its teeth, open its mouth, pin its ears, pull on the reins, swish its tail, have muscle tension, or show aggressive behaviour. The occurrence of conflict behaviour appears to be related to the difficulty of the exercises that the horse is required to perform, because the risk increases of the horse not being adequately prepared or being too immature for what is required. Other challenges may include physically and mentally complex exercises combined with unclear signals from (possibly inexperienced) riders or the specific use of equipment such as tight reins, where the horse is restricted in moving or lifting its head. The restriction of the freedom of movement of the head can cause both physical and mental discomfort and make it more difficult for the horse to use its senses to judge the obstacle it needs to jump. Some types of equipment used to make horses perform the desired exercises may also

contribute to the occurrence of conflict behaviour, and depending on the way the equipment is used, more specific reactions and signs of lesions, scars or marks can sometimes be seen from certain types of equipment (see more about this below).

Uanvendelig.dk, in collaboration with the Danish Equestrian Federation, conducted a study on the incidence of injuries in horses<sup>23</sup>. However, the results only apply to horses that were included in the survey and cannot be generalised to all horses. Most of the responses came from horses used in dressage (about 58 %) and show jumping (about 24 %). Over half of the riders who participated in the study had experienced tendon and joint injuries in their horses. Tendon (about 34 %) and joint injuries (about 21 %) were among the five most common injuries, along with radiographic changes, hoof problems, and back injuries. Just under half of the injured horses returned to the same level as before the injury, with the rest either returning to the sport at a lower level or retiring from the sport altogether. Uanvendelig.dk concluded that the high incidence of tendon injuries, in particular, may be due to inappropriate wear and tear and suggested preventive measures to avoid these injuries.

Agria Pet Insurance has investigated the relationship between reported injuries in riding horses and their use<sup>24</sup>. Lameness due to joint and tendon problems is the most common in both dressage and show jumping horses (and in other sports disciplines). The back is particularly vulnerable. Agria believes that jumping horses put pressure on the front part of the back when landing after obstacles, and that the high speed and possible imbalance can also increase the risk of inflammation in the back's joints and ligaments in the limbs. Similar injuries can be seen in dressage horses, but Agria believes that these injuries are more often caused by incorrect and monotonous movements, possibly exacerbated by riding on a uniform surface, which overloads the joints and tendons. Agria further suggests that strain of the hind legs is more common in dressage horses because they must bear more weight on the hindquarters at higher levels of competition. Agria recommends preventive training, including training the horse's muscles, tendons, and joints, as well as balance, to avoid injuries.

### *Equipment and tack*

There are many kinds of equipment and tack used for horses (the term equipment also covers tack in this statement). Equipment can be used as an aid to guide the horse in line with its natural behavioural response patterns. However, equipment can also be used as a form of coercion, where the horse through discomfort and possibly pain is under pressure to perform. The same type of equipment can thus be used both as an aid and as a coercive tool depending on how it is used. The use of all equipment therefore carries a risk of causing discomfort and actual harm to the horse. It can be difficult to identify certain equipment as a direct cause of a horse exhibiting conflict behaviour, as the effect depends on how the equipment is used, but a correlation has been found between the occurrence of injuries and/or conflict behaviour and the use of combinations of certain types of equipment such as bits, tight nosebands, and spurs. Certain types of bits have not been identified as a particular risk, as they must be assessed in combination with the rider's use. Clear signals to the horse are important, and the use of multiple types of equipment increases the risk of reinforcing possibly conflicting signals given simultaneously, such as slowing down (via reins to the nose and mouth) and speeding up (via pressure from behind). Incorrect use of the equipment can thus increase discomfort for the horse, e.g. by pulling too hard on the reins, or where a whip and spurs put more pressure on the horse than the

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23 Uanvendelig.dk: Resultat af rytterundersøgelsen 2017

24 Agria Dyreforsikring: Halthed hos heste - Almindelig skade hos rideheste



rider's boot. If a horse exhibits conflict behaviour, there may also be a risk that this is handled with an escalation in the form of harsher use of the equipment used (such as even harder pulling on the reins) or the use of other equipment with a harsher effect (such as a different bit). According to the Danish Equestrian Federation's general regulations, equipment must not be used to hinder the horse's ability to show signs of discomfort and conflict behaviour, and the horse must be excluded from competition or disqualified in case of lesions and injuries to the horse's body caused by equipment, aids, and/or rider.

Examples of the most commonly used equipment:

- *Reins and bits:* The horse's headgear includes bits (metal pieces inside and across the horse's mouth) and reins, which connect the ends of the bit to the rider's hands. There are many different types of bits, which can exert varying levels of pressure on the horse's mouth. There are also headgear options without a bit. Auxiliary reins can also be used, which potentially restrict the horse from making unwanted movements with its head and can increase pressure on the corners of the mouth as well as on the bridge of the nose.

The rider uses reins and bits to control the horse's speed and direction. Unintentionally, the reins can also be used to help the rider maintain balance. Lesions (ulcers) can occur in the horse's mouth from the use of bits, typically as a result of prolonged pressure and minor trauma inflicted over a long period. Studies have shown that the occurrence of oral ulcers is higher in horses ridden at high competition levels, including in dressage, but there are also differences in occurrence between disciplines. According to the Danish Equestrian Federation's general regulations, a horse must be excluded from competition if there are ulcers, possibly with bleeding, in the horse's mouth. However, ulcers are just a sign of current strain on the horse's mouth. If there are scars and special pigment changes, it may be a sign of previous problems.



*The horse's tack includes, among other things, a bit and reins that connect the ends of the bit with the rider's hands. Auxiliary reins can also be used, which can restrict the horse's ability to make unwanted movements with its head and can increase pressure on the corners of the mouth and bridge of the nose. Here, the horse's tack includes a double bridle, auxiliary reins, and an extra strap for the noseband.*



The horse's mouth is a sensitive area, and horses can, as mentioned earlier, exhibit behavioural signs of stress in many ways before physical changes in the mouth can be observed. Some examples include the horse chewing on the bit, grinding its teeth, opening its mouth, shaking its head, swishing its tail, showing triangular eyes, and displaying the white of its eyes. These behaviours are not seen in horses that move without pressure and discomfort, and the rider's influence on the horse through the use of equipment such as bits and tightening of reins can be one of the primary causes of conflict behaviour. The position of the horse's head also affects its experience of stress and discomfort. Knowledge about horse conflict behaviour and responses in behaviour and facial expressions when stressed has increased significantly in recent years. The problem of stress and pain resulting from the use of bits and related equipment may, therefore, be underestimated if the focus continues to be solely on physical changes in e.g. the horse's mouth, and there is no awareness or attention to the behavioural signs that the horse exhibits. As a consequence of the focus on the risk of oral lesions (ulcers) and other forms of stress caused by the incorrect use of bits, there is increasing interest in riding without the use of bits, even within the horse sports community. However, at present, there is limited and partly conflicting knowledge about how it affects the horse when pressure from the bit is instead distributed over the headgear, as well as how it affects safety when handling the horse and also the horse's performance.

- *Noseband:* As a part of the horse's headgear, there can also be a noseband, which is a strap that goes over the bridge of the nose and around the lower jaw. There are many different types of nosebands, some combined with an extra strap around the lower jaw, and they are used for both aesthetic reasons and to support the position of the bit in the horse's mouth, as well as to get the horse to accept the bit without, for example, opening its mouth. If the noseband is too tight, the sustained pressure can cause damage to nerves and blood vessels in the horse's face, and possibly also changes in the underlying bone tissue. A tight noseband can also contribute to mouth injuries, and it can also stress the horse, as it reduces its ability to perform normal behaviours such as chewing, swallowing, and yawning. Finally, a tight noseband can mask the horse's expression of pain and discomfort. The Danish Equestrian Federation requires that there is at least 1.5 cm between the horse's noseband and the bridge of its nose. The use of a noseband is mandatory in dressage.

*Wound at the corner of a horse's mouth after the use of a bit. Only a minority of mouth lesions (ulcers) are located externally on the skin in the corners of the mouth. Most are located internally on the mucous membrane of the mouth. Oral lesions from the use of a bit typically occur as a result of pressure over a prolonged period of time. A horse must be excluded from competition under the Danish Equestrian Federation if oral lesions are found. However, the strain and pain caused by the bit may be underestimated if only physical changes in the horse's mouth are considered, and not the behavioural signs shown by the horse. The photo is kindly provided by Mette Uldahl. The photo is published in the article by Uldahl et al. (2022): "Assessment of Skin and Mucosa at the Equine Oral Commissures to Assess Pathology from Bit Wear," cf. the list of literature, where there are additional examples and more detailed information.*



- *Whip*: A whip can be used to guide the horse, where a light tap with the whip can help to get the horse's attention, increase the speed, activity level, or movement in a certain direction. The whip can thus supplement the signals that the horse receives through the reins and the rider's legs. However, the whip can also be used for harder hits, which can both hurt and stress the horse, and there is no evidence that this improves the horse's performance. Harsh use of the whip can leave marks on the horse in the form of swelling and bleeding. In dressage, the whip is only allowed during competition at certain difficulty levels. In show jumping, it is specified that the horse may be corrected with light taps from the whip in case of disobedience, but the whip must never be used as punishment, and use of the whip more than three times in a row is considered excessive use, which according to the rules must lead to disqualification. Marks, skin lesions, or bleeding from the whip must also lead to disqualification in jumping.
- *Spurs*: Spurs are pieces of e.g. metal or plastic attached to the back of riding boots. They provide a precise pressure when the riders press their legs and heels against the horse's sides and can thus be used to direct the horse towards the desired behaviour. To use spurs correctly, the rider should then use less force when applying pressure to the horse's sides. More forceful or uncontrolled use of spurs can cause damage to the horse in the form of abrasions, hair loss, and bleeding. There is not much research in this area, but a Danish study has shown a correlation between the length of spurs and horse lesions, and that lesions were more frequent at lower competition levels. The higher incidence among less experienced riders may be due to poorer riding technique, where more experienced riders can use spurs more carefully. However, for all levels, an aggressive use of spurs will increase the risk of injuries to the horse. Only certain types of spurs are allowed in dressage and show jumping, and there are requirements for their length. Both disciplines are subject to the Danish Equestrian Federation's general regulations on lesions and injuries caused by equipment, meaning that the horse must be excluded from competition or disqualified for lesions and injuries caused by equipment and/or rider. Both disciplines also require, according to their own regulations, that marks after the use of spurs must result in disqualification.

### *Transport*

It is well-documented that transportation can be stressful for animals. Transportation involves handling, loading, the transport itself, unloading, and adjustment to new surroundings. Even though horses that participate in competitions are transported under good conditions compared to transportation of slaughter animals, transport can also be a stress factor for sport horses. Studies have shown that both transport and staying in new surroundings can be stressful for horses, even though they can to some extent get used to it. The most commonly used dressage and show jumping horses can be away from their familiar surroundings for up to a third of their active career due to transportation and housing during participation in competitions or training camps. When they are away, they can spend a lot of time in a stall, and it is not necessarily that often that they get access to a paddock.

### *Monitoring*

When horses are used for sports, the pressure on their bodies can be significant, increasing the risk of injury. There is a risk of injury both during training and at competitions. Injuries are typically seen as lameness due to overloading of bones, tendons, and ligaments. According to the Danish Equestrian Federation's general regulations, a lame, sick, or neglected horse must not be trained or used in competition. There is no systematic check of all horses, but if there is suspicion of problems before a competition, the horse must be examined by an official (and possibly also a veterinarian), and the horse may then be allowed or denied participation based on their assessment. If problems are observed during the competition, such as lameness, the horse must be disqualified.



*Spurs are pieces of e.g. metal attached to the back of riding boots. They provide a precise pressure when the riders press their legs and heels against the horse's sides. Forceful or uncontrolled use of spurs can cause damage to the horse. A horse must be excluded from participation in competitions under the Danish Equestrian Federation or be disqualified if marks are found after the use of spurs.*

As mentioned, there is also a risk of lesions and injuries due to the rider's impact or welfare-inappropriate use of equipment. When participating in activities under the Danish Equestrian Federation, only equipment approved by the Federation is allowed. The Federation continuously checks whether the rules are being followed, both through announced and unannounced inspections at competitions, and since 2020, there has been more focus on equipment inspections. The inspection can cover a whole group of horses or just be random checks. The inspection is carried out by officials of the Danish Equestrian Federation, or a veterinarian appointed by the Federation. The inspection assesses, among other things, whether the equipment is approved, properly fitted, and whether the horse has injuries that can be linked to the equipment. If the use of equipment – and/or the rider in other ways – has caused lesions and injuries to the horse, it must lead to exclusion from participation in the competition, disqualification, and possibly sanctions. At the inspection at a high-level competition in June 2022, all 64 horses were examined<sup>25</sup>. In four cases, starting was refused due to oral lesions (ulcers), while in seven cases, critical remarks were given due to changes in the oral cavity or wear marks in the area where the rider's leg has contact with the horse, but permission to start was still given. Also, in June 2022, random inspections were carried out at a competition at a slightly lower level. Initially, 11 horses were inspected, and of these, five had to be excluded due to oral lesions. As a result of the high incidence of oral lesions, the remaining riders were also checked. Here, two more were excluded, and two received critical remarks. The Danish Equestrian Federation emphasises, in continuation of this, that it is still important to think preventively and to check the horses regularly.

Complaints about decisions regarding violations of Danish Equestrian Federation's rules regarding abuse, misuse, or unethical use of horses, including the use of equipment, can be reported to the disciplinary committee. According to the Federation's website, there have been a few complaints each year in recent years. The complaints concern, among other things, decisions regarding the discovery of oral lesions, the use of nosebands, spurs, and whips, as well as the conditions for conducting equipment inspections. There is no control over what happens outside of competitions, and injuries are not recorded in any central database.

### ***Doping and other performance-enhancing measures***

In some cases, a horse's performance can be improved by enhancing its ability or by masking factors that may hinder it, such as pain or anxiety. Performance can be affected by the use of medication,

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25 Dansk Ride Forbund: Sådan gik udstyrskontrollen ved DM (9. juni 2022)

surgery, special equipment, or by limiting the horse's movements or senses. If, for example, pain perception in a limb is inhibited, the horse may spare the limb less, which can mean that it performs better, but it can also increase the risk of further overloading or injury.

As previously mentioned, according to the Horse Order (section 29), it is not permitted to use any form of medication or treatment that aims to conceal symptoms of illness so that the horse can train and participate in competitions. Indeed, a number of well-known ways to influence performance have also been banned according to the industry's own rules, and both horses and riders under the Danish Equestrian Federation must follow the international anti-doping rules, in accordance with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Equestrian Federation (FEI), and the Danish Sports Federation (DIF). The Danish Equestrian Federation has established an appeal committee to handle cases of doping and medication.

Thus, the use of Danish horses in competitions is not allowed (not even in international competitions held in Denmark) if they have undergone prohibited procedures or have been medicated with certain substances. This applies, for example, to de-nerving (where nerves to a painful area, such as a sore hoof, are cut so that the horse cannot feel the pain), removal of sensory hairs on the horse's face, and the use of painkillers, performance-enhancing, stimulating, or calming substances. However, there may be exceptions if the measures are justified by a veterinary requirement, meaning that it is permitted to treat a horse if it shows symptoms of an illness or injury. The Danish Animal Ethics Council has been informed by the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration that their assessment is, that according to the provision, the horse cannot participate in competitions until it is symptom-free, meaning that the illness is considered over or the injury is considered healed, and until the medication used to treat the horse can no longer conceal symptoms of illness.

At international competitions, there are requirements that the use of medication must be logged in the horse's documents if used. In Denmark, there is only a requirement for registration of medication of horses if they are potentially slaughtered for consumption. There is no requirement for the registration of medical treatment for sport horses excluded from consumption. If a horse is deemed to require treatment with legal substances immediately before or during a competition, this is also permitted in certain cases, but it requires approval from the responsible veterinary consultant and the competition management.

Some forms of medication are thus completely prohibited and must not be detected, either in or outside of competitions, while other forms of medication are common in the treatment of certain diseases and can therefore be used outside of competition. Doping tests are conducted both at and outside of competitions. Different types of samples can be collected, such as urine, blood, skin, and hair, and horses can be tested for changes in sensitivity and heat emission. However, some things can be difficult to detect, such as whether a horse has been de-nerved, if it has not been logged in the horse's documents. According to the Danish Equestrian Federation's website, in the last few years, 6-8 horses were tested at a small handful of competitions, where no positive samples were found<sup>26</sup>. Thus, only a few horses are tested, and it is therefore unclear whether and if so to what extent the rules for the use of performance-enhancing substances are violated. The Danish Equestrian Federation reports that it has found a few cases in the past.

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## 6. Considerations and recommendations of the Danish Animal Ethics Council

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The Danish Animal Ethics Council has noted that several of its previous general recommendations regarding horses have been followed up on. Today, there is legislation on horse keeping, including requirements for keeping at least two horses together and requirements for exercise, and the Danish Equestrian Federation has developed regulations and ethical guidelines for training and use of horses. However, the question is to what extent the Federation's rules and guidelines, including sanctions, are complied with. The Council has thus noted incidents where the Federation's rules do not seem to be enforced, such as where horses' heads are held behind the vertical, where there is excessive use of the whip, and where horses have oral lesions after riding. The Council also notes that there is still a lack of legislation regarding education on horse welfare, including requirements for the content of the education, for the persons responsible for the keeping and training of horses.

Additionally, the Danish Animal Ethics Council has discussed the purpose of using horses for sports. The act of riding a horse and training it to perform certain movements and putting performance pressure on it without any other purpose than to promote human ambitions and pleasure raises a number of fundamental ethical questions about the use of animals. These preconditions must be accepted, according to the Council's opinion, if one wishes to ride horses and especially if one wishes to use them for sports.

The Council's members do not find it problematic in itself that horses are used for a purpose such as sports, which primarily serves entertainment, and that the horses are involved in, for example, special training and activities. The Council's members are aware that in this way, horses have good opportunities to have their needs fulfilled for exercise and other stimulating activities, such as training. However, the Council also notes that the use for sports purposes also entails a risk of horses being under pressure and restricted in ways that can compromise their welfare, both in terms of physique, physiology, and behaviour. The Council believes that there is a need for a discussion of where the limit is and, in this context, that more focus should be placed on how horses can be used for sports while their welfare is prioritised and catered for to a greater extent.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council finds that the practices surrounding horse sports largely rely on traditions, and that there is a need to evaluate these practices in light of the knowledge about horse behaviour and welfare today, as well as contemporary norms for keeping and using animals. An essential factor in this process is that the level of knowledge among individuals who deal with horses is updated. As previously described, there are educations such as horse managers, and educations under or approved by the Danish Equestrian Federation, such as riding trainer, riding teacher, riding instructor, and riding master. The Council recommends ensuring that these educations adequately cover horse behaviour, including conflict behaviour, and that they are up to date with knowledge about training methods and norms for horse welfare. This knowledge is a prerequisite for being able to respond appropriately to the horse's behaviour and signals in general, including signals of pain and discomfort, as well as conflict behaviour. This need for education and knowledge about horse welfare is particularly pressing when it comes to individuals who deal with sport horses, as these horses are at risk of being subjected to significant pressure due to the competitive element. Therefore, the Council believes





*The Danish Animal Ethics Council finds it crucial that the level of knowledge among individuals who deal with sport horses is up to date in relation to, among other things, training methods and horses' conflict behaviour. The elite within the various disciplines, as well as those who are responsible for horse care, training, teaching, and organising competitions, serve as role models and have a responsibility to set standards and convey knowledge and good practice in the training and use of horses to the more hobby-oriented part of the sport.*

that the need for education particularly applies to those responsible for horse care, training, teaching, and organising competitions, including judges. The Council thus finds it crucial that the standard is ensured among role models such as riding masters and trainers, who have a responsibility to convey knowledge and good practice in the training and use of horses, as well as judges, who through their awarding of prizes show which behaviour is acceptable. The Council emphasises that this recommendation also covers knowledge about the horse's welfare outside of training and competition, such as in connection with transport and housing. The Council therefore recommends that rules be established for the education of the person responsible for professional keeping of horses, such as riding schools, in accordance with the possibility in section 22 of the Animal Welfare Act to make such requirements. Similar requirements are made for individuals responsible for the commercial keeping of pigs, dairy cows, broilers, egg-laying hens, mink, and dogs, and there are also requirements for pet shop operators and individuals involved in commercial transport of a range of animal species (including horses). The Council sees no reason why the commercial keeping of horses should be exempt from similar educational requirements.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council has noted that the Danish Equestrian Federation has developed a number of rules and guidelines for the use of horses in dressage and show jumping. The general regulations state that “the aim of equestrian sport is to develop the horse into a ‘happy athlete’ through a harmonious education. The welfare and soundness of the horse in the sport should be prioritised both in the short and long term.” The Council acknowledges that both through this aim and the other guidelines, signals are sent about where the boundaries should be. However, the Council notes that there is still work to be done to incorporate the principles that the Federation adheres to into the practices which can be observed. It is also unclear how one evaluates whether the horse is a “happy athlete”, whether the education is harmonious, and to what extent the welfare and soundness of the horse should be prioritised. The Federation itself states in its ethical guidelines with regard to prioritisation that “within all equestrian sports, consideration for the horse must take precedence over everything else,” and that “the welfare of the horse must come before the interests and desires of the breeder, trainer, rider, owner, horse dealer, competition organiser, sponsor, and officials.” However, here the Danish Animal Ethics Council also finds it unclear how this is compatible with much of the practice surrounding equestrian sports, where the welfare of the horse must be assumed to be better at home in familiar surroundings than during transport, continuous introduction to new surroundings, and carrying out exercises that are not self-selected and typically involve some form of restriction or pressure.

Overall, the Council finds that there is a need to break with the view of the horse as an athlete. The horse is an animal with its own biological needs and limitations, and the Council believes that there is a need to recognise that the participation of horses in sport is only about human interests and ambitions.

In line with these considerations, the Danish Animal Ethics Council recommends that the criteria for awarding prizes for horse performances in competition should also be challenged. If the welfare of horses is in fact to be prioritised, only that which does not compromise the horse’s welfare to a degree where conflict behaviour and signs of pain and other discomfort can be observed should be rewarded. This means that even if, for example, all dressage exercises and jumps are performed flawlessly, the Council believes that sanctions should be imposed if there are signs that the horse is uncomfortable during the performance. The Council points out that similar proposals have been made at a recent workshop on welfare in sport horses, which included attendance by researchers in animal welfare and practitioners of equestrian sports.

Therefore, the Council further recommends that the equestrian sports industry make additional efforts to clarify what can and cannot be accepted, disseminate knowledge of the Danish Equestrian Federation’s rules, exercise a higher degree of control over compliance both during and outside of competition, and finally, that (further) sanctions be imposed if the rules are not followed. The Council has noted that the Danish Equestrian Federation already sets a higher standard than international equestrian sports rules in some areas. The Danish Animal Ethics Council encourages the Danish Equestrian Federation to continue this development, also to serve as inspiration for international equestrian sports.

The Council has noted that the president of the Danish Equestrian Federation, Ulf Helgstrand, in an opinion piece in 2020<sup>27</sup>, states that not everyone in the sport is aware of what is acceptable and unacceptable, and that the Federation will take responsibility for examining where it is not doing well enough. The president also emphasises the need to focus on horse welfare in various educations,

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27 Ulf Helgstrand om Hestevelfærd

and to get an increasing equipment control in the late summer of 2020 as part of a major process of enlightenment and education. The Danish Animal Ethics Council welcomes this statement from the president of the Danish Equestrian Federation. The Council believes that the Federation should follow up on this with further controls and ensure that its own regulations are followed, including reporting and sanctions when violations are observed during training. The Council notes here that the earlier mentioned results of the equipment controls in June 2022 are only examples, but they are still signs that there is a need for a strong and targeted effort to prevent especially oral lesions.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council further points out that the Danish Equestrian Federation's guidelines are extensive and that information about horse welfare considerations must be found in several different documents. This makes it difficult to gain an overview of the topic. Therefore, the Council recommends that the guidelines be revised so that everything related to horse welfare is gathered in a clear and easily accessible way. Finally, the Council calls for caution in the selection of and any changes to terminology, keeping in mind for example, the ambiguity in definitions regarding the curvature of the horse's neck. The Council recommends using simple and easily understandable terms that make it clear what is being talked about.

Finally, the Danish Animal Ethics Council has noted with great interest the work of the FEI in establishing an independent Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission in 2022, and the first reports from this Commission. The establishment of the Commission and the release of the reports occur at the conclusion of the Council's work on this statement. The Council notes that the Commission expresses the same concerns as addressed by the Council in this statement's considerations and recommendations. However, the Council also notes the process surrounding the establishment of the Commission, which is independent of the FEI and the changes of both its name and purpose in relation to the original presentation from the FEI to place more emphasis on equine welfare rather than primarily on the reputation of equestrian sports. In addition, the survey shows that equestrian stakeholders affiliated with the FEI are less concerned about a number of issues relevant to equine welfare than, for example, veterinarians. The Danish Animal Ethics Council warmly welcomes the initiative from the FEI. Nevertheless, in the Council's opinion, the industry's apparent lack of attention to equine welfare as a focus point that is significant in itself undermines the "social license to operate" that the FEI seeks to promote through this initiative.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council has been considering whether the recommendations put forward in this statement can be incorporated by the horse sports industry itself or whether there is a need for further legislation. Legislation can set some limits on what is socially acceptable, but the possibility of control and sanctions in everyday life may be limited. One of the advantages of self-regulation in the industry is that the effect can be faster and more comprehensive in all situations, as the people who have the opportunity to observe, make changes, and subsequently sanction accordingly are part of the everyday life of horse sports. However, this presupposes of course that the industry takes on this responsibility and has the will and ability to work with attitude changes, rules, control and sanctions.

The Council is aware that the work of FEI and the new Commission happens in an international context and does not necessarily reflect the approach in Denmark to the use of horses for sport. However, the Council still finds that the process and material mentioned cause concern and weaken the trust that the industry, with the attitude that is documented internationally, will be able to handle the task itself, especially in light of the aforementioned Danish examples of the industry's existing guidelines not always being followed, controlled, or enforced. Some of the Council's recommendations already point to the need for legislative initiatives. For the remaining recommendations where the Council has suggested that the industry itself follows up, the Council therefore emphasises that the recommendations should



lead to immediate action from the industry. If the follow-up does not occur soon, where possible, and otherwise within a year, the Council recommends that specific legislation be developed in Denmark for the use of horses for sport.

In addition, the Danish Animal Ethics Council has discussed the following selected focus areas.

### **6.1 Soundness and longevity of the horse**

The everyday life of a sport horse is affected by several aspects, including housing conditions, training, and participation in competitions, as well as transportation. The Danish Animal Ethics Council notes that each of these factors can contribute to supporting or limiting the soundness and longevity of the horse as a sport horse – and perhaps as a riding horse in general. In addition, the age of the horse at initial use and the combination of horse and rider may also be important.

As mentioned, there is an age limit of 4 years before a horse can participate in dressage and show jumping competitions. The Council sees an advantage in horses starting handling and habituation to the relevant sports discipline early, as long as this is done with respect for the horse's level and development, as well as need for socialisation. However, it is essential to allocate sufficient time to train the horse and to focus on whether the individual horse is physically and mentally ready for competition, or whether it may need to wait for another year. The use of equipment can to some extent contribute to promoting the horse's performance at an early age, but it takes time to develop the horse's physical strength to perform the exercises desired in dressage and jumping, without increasing the risk of strain on the back and legs. Therefore, the Council finds, that participating in competitions already as 4-year-olds, even though the horses seem able to perform the exercises, involves an unnecessary risk to the welfare of the horse. This risk is reinforced by the fact that the age classification follows the calendar year, not the horse's birth date, and the horse may therefore actually be younger than 4 years. The Council does not exclude the possibility that some horses may be ready as 4-year-olds, but the Council recommends raising the age limit by at least one year to ensure that the horses participating in competitions have been sufficiently habituated to the competition environment and have had enough time to build up sufficient physical and mental strength and resilience before performing under the pressure that competition participation entails. The Council further recommends that the age limit also be raised for breeding licensing and other assessments of young horses, so that the same age limit applies to young horses for participation in a competition-like situation, regardless of purpose and context (including the organisation behind the event). The Council also recommends that regardless of where the age limit is set, the horse's actual age should be used as the basis for participation in competitions and similar events, i.e. the horse's birth date.

The Council further recommends that there should be a greater focus on riding technique, cooperation between horse and rider, and the combination of rider, horse, and ambition level. This is especially important when it comes to children and young people, where coaches and other adults should contribute to promoting an understanding of the importance of working also on the horse's terms and not risking the horse's welfare due to ignorance and high ambitions. Regarding the question of rider weight, the Council believes that the rider's size in itself must not be burdensome for the horse, and at the same time points out that it is essential for riders to train balance and technique, as this also seems to have an effect on whether the horse is burdened by the rider.

Finally, the Council has discussed the question of what should happen to the horse if it cannot be used for sport. The Council recommends that responsibility be taken for the horse under all circumstances, even if one does not wish to keep it when it can no longer be used for sport or used at the desired

level. According to the Council, this means that as an owner, one ensures that the horse is either passed on to a life where it can function well in terms of management and the demands placed on it (e.g. for hobby riding and with housing under conditions that, as far as possible, resemble what the horse already knows), or it is euthanised or sent for slaughter with as little transport time as possible.

## 6.2 Housing

The Danish Animal Ethics Council has discussed certain aspects of the housing of horses, where the use of horses for sports means that special conditions apply. The Council reiterates that the time outside of competition constitutes the majority of the horse's life, and therefore is also important for the welfare of sport horses. The Council recommends here that the horse is kept in accordance with its nature, for example regarding social contact with conspecifics and opportunities for free movement, and that the horse's social needs are prioritised over human needs for the horse to deliver a certain performance. The Council also restates that the requirements of the Horse Order (sections 3 and 16) regarding exercise and social contact with conspecifics also apply to sport horses.

### *Social contact*

The Danish Animal Ethics Council recommends that horses are always socialised so that they can interact with other horses, and that they are kept together with familiar horses as far as possible so that their relationships are stable. The Council acknowledges that physical contact with conspecifics involves a balancing of the risk of injury, for example due to kicks and bites, against the benefits of horses being able to engage in social behaviour. However, the Council believes that the social behaviour of horses should be prioritised, except in very particular situations, such as horses that have be-



*The Danish Animal Ethics Council recommends that horses are always socialised so that they can interact with other horses, and that they are kept together with familiar horses as far as possible so that their relationships are stable. This also applies to stallions. The Council further recommends that all horses on a daily basis have access to free movement in paddocks and are not only exercised during training or in other ways with restricted freedom of movement.*

havioural challenges that do not allow for full physical contact. In such cases, partial physical contact or visual contact may be an alternative. This recommendation applies as a starting point also to stallions, but the Council acknowledges that the existing keeping of stallions may be challenged by the fact that the stallions have not grown up being habituated to being with other horses. The Council therefore recommends that the industry focuses on changing the keeping of stallions in the future with a view to better meeting the stallions' social needs.

### *Exercise and feeding*

The Council further recommends that all horses on a daily basis should have access to free movement in paddocks, for the sake of both their physical and mental health, so that they are not only exercised in connection with training or in other ways with limited freedom of movement. If the paddock does not have sufficient grass cover, the Council recommends (also in accordance with the Danish Equestrian Federation's own recommendations) that the horses regularly receive sufficient amounts of grass and/or roughage in another way, so that their need to chew and digest coarser feed is met. The Council draws attention to the fact that sport horses may have a special need for focus on this to avoid developing behavioural disorders and gastric ulcers.

## **6.3 Training and competitions**

The time during which the horse participates in competitions represents a relatively small part of the horse's life. However, competitions are associated with high intensity and the risk of stress and overloading. In contrast, the preparations for competitions, i.e. training and the use of equipment, are a part of the horse's daily routine. The considerations of the Danish Animal Ethics Council regarding training and the use of equipment apply both in training and competition contexts. In relation to competitions, the Council has also discussed transport, monitoring of the horse's welfare, and the use of performance-enhancing substances.

### *Training*

As previously mentioned, the Danish Animal Ethics Council finds that knowledge of normal equine behaviour, including body language, response patterns, conflict behaviour, signs of pain and discomfort, and the like, is a crucial prerequisite for ensuring the welfare of horses. This is particularly important when horses are trained with the aim of competition. Although horses generally like to run and jump, expectations of performance levels can put pressure on the horse to run faster and jump higher than it would otherwise do. The Council agrees with the Danish Equestrian Federation that the horse's welfare should be a priority, also to protect the horse's long-term soundness. Therefore, as previously mentioned, horse training should be based on updated knowledge of learning theories and behaviour in horses, including the use of positive reinforcement. The Council recommends that everyone working with horse training and assessment knows the signs of a horse being physically or mentally overloaded. Furthermore, the Council recommends that the horse is given sufficient time to get used to handling and training, as well as to the environments in which it should function.

When reinforcement is used in horse training, the Council emphasises, in continuation of the above, that this must not cause the horse pain or any other unnecessary discomfort. The Council recognises that in some contexts, it may not be possible to avoid an element of coercion in handling horses, but the Council emphasises that this must still be done with respect for the horse's responses. The Council therefore believes that there should be a reasonable proportionality between the importance of the training purpose (e.g. rider safety) and the degree of coercion during training. The Council thus believes that promoting performance goals is not in itself a sufficient reason for subjecting the horse to a higher degree of coercion and possibly pain. Further to this, the Council recommends that the light-

est possible signal be used to achieve the desired effect and that the horse not be pushed beyond its physical limits, e.g. regarding the fixation of body parts. The Council here draws attention to the ethical guidelines of the Danish Equestrian Federation, which emphasise that training methods must not include physical or psychological violence. In line with the introductory general remarks, the Council further recommends that the level of education should be raised and that sanctions should be imposed if violations of these guidelines come to the attention of the Federation.

Updated knowledge about horses and training should also be taken into account if the horse shows signs of pain or discomfort, or when there is a need to correct the horse's behaviour, so that methods that are incomprehensible to the horse or unnecessarily harsh are not used. If the horse does not respond as expected to training attempts, the cause should be identified so that necessary measures can be taken. The Council recommends that individuals with specialised knowledge of horse training and welfare be consulted if necessary to correct the situation.

### *Equipment and tack*

The Danish Animal Ethics Council has discussed the use of equipment and tack such as bits and reins, whips, and spurs. Overall, the Council is concerned whether the practices observed in some cases when horses are under pressure during equestrian sports, and which are confirmed by the aforementioned equipment inspection results in June 2022, meet the intentions of the Animal Welfare Act sections 2 and 28 and the Horse Order sections 27-28. According to these sections, the horse must be protected as far as possible against pain, suffering, and severe distress, and equipment and tack must not cause harm to the horse or be used as a means of coercion. The occurrence of lesions and injuries resulting from the use of equipment or otherwise is unacceptable in the Council's opinion, and the Council recommends that if this occurs, the cause must be identified, and the necessary measures taken. The horse must also get rest for recovery.

In its ethical guidelines The Danish Equestrian Federation has presented some examples of what is considered unacceptable physical and psychological violence against horses, such as "use of whip beyond what is characterised as correction and/or reprimand," "unrestrained use of spurs," and "other violence that has the features of punishment." However, like the introductory quotes from the Federation's general regulations and ethical guidelines, these formulations leave unclear where the limits are. What use of the whip for reprimand is acceptable? When is the use of spurs unrestrained? And when is other violence characterised as punishment?

The Council recognises that equipment can have an important function in helping to give clear signals to the horse about what is desired for it to perform. But the Council finds that there is a need to evaluate the use of equipment so that it is not used to force the horse to perform inappropriate movements or to push it too hard, e.g. due to the rider's (excessive) ambitions. Examples of excessive pressure are, in the Council's opinion, if the equipment compensates for insufficient training (i.e. more/better training could achieve the same result with gentler use of equipment) or if the horse's anatomy, physiology, and movement or mental state are affected to a degree where the horse shows conflict behaviour, signs of pain, or gets injured. The Council thus emphasises that equipment should be used with caution and to guide the horse, not as part of physical coercion by causing pain and discomfort. It should also be ensured that the selected equipment is appropriate for the horse and rider, including – and perhaps especially – at lower levels of the sports disciplines, to reduce the risk of the horse getting injured or receiving conflicting signals.

In continuation of this, the Danish Animal Ethics Council has discussed whether there is a need to ban certain types of equipment and tack. However, the Council does not generally find that there is evidence



to identify certain equipment as a problem in itself (see section on other disciplines though), but that equipment can be used in a welfare-inappropriate manner – perhaps due to traditions, ignorance, and lack of experience, or to make the horse perform better. The Council points out that in some contexts, there may be a need for a cultural change and again refers to the necessity of greater focus on the horse and knowledge of how the equipment works, such as when the use of it causes pain and discomfort.

On that basis the Danish Animal Ethics Council therefore recommends a fundamental rethinking of the use of equipment and tack. In the Council's opinion, equipment and aids should be reviewed based on contemporary norms and knowledge of animal welfare. The Council thus believes that there is a need to consider the purpose of the equipment in question and whether that purpose can be achieved using less "harsh" equipment or perhaps without equipment at all. To the extent that some equipment is still deemed necessary following this, the Council recommends that, within the relevant disciplines, there should be greater emphasis on both clarifying how the equipment in question is used correctly and imposing sanctions (or imposing harsher sanctions) if the equipment is used incorrectly. The Council emphasises again that this applies both in connection with training and competitions, and also during warm-up. In line with this, the Council recommends ensuring that the use of equipment adheres to the following principles:

- Equipment must be used only to guide the horse to understand what it should do, not for coercion or punishment.
- Equipment must not alter the horse's natural movement patterns, hinder the horse's senses or physiology, or fix a body part or the horse's body position, causing the horse to show signs of e.g. discomfort, pain, or conflict behaviour, and equipment must not hinder the ability to read the horse's signals about this.

The principles are in line with principles already outlined in the Danish Equestrian Federation's general regulations, but the Council recommends that these principles are given considerably more weight in practice.

In the first instance, the Council recommends that horse sports organisations take responsibility for this evaluation and that the use of certain kinds of equipment be discontinued if their use in practice constitutes a form of coercion where the horse's normal behaviour and movement patterns are limited or completely prevented, or if the equipment is used to force performance development that could otherwise be achieved with appropriate training, or if the risk of injury is high. The Council emphasises that this evaluation should take into account that although some equipment may be used without discomfort or similar issues for the horse in certain situations, the equipment may be so difficult to use correctly that its use should either be discontinued altogether or restricted to persons who are particularly qualified to both use the equipment and at the same time recognise the horse's possible conflict behaviour or signals of discomfort or pain. The Council believes that particular attention should be paid to the use of complex bits, tight nosebands, tight reins and auxiliary reins, as well as clear criteria for the use of whip and spurs. The Council once again emphasises that it is unacceptable for horses to be inflicted with pain, lesions, and other discomfort in the practice of sports activities, and this must stop immediately. In this context, the Council also reminds once again of the existing legislation, namely that horses must be protected as far as possible from pain, suffering, fear, permanent injury, and severe distress according to the Animal Welfare Act (section 2), and that horses must not be trained or used for exhibition or similar purposes if they are thereby subjected to severe distress (section 28), and that the equipment used as aids on horses, according to the Horse Order, must not cause harm to the horse or be used as coercive measures (section 28).



*The Danish Animal Ethics Council emphasises that it is unacceptable for horses to be inflicted with pain, lesions, and other discomfort in the practice of sports activities, and this must stop immediately. The Council recommends that everyone working with horse training and assessment knows the signs of a horse being physically or mentally overloaded. The horse here has its head behind the vertical and a bridle with multiple bits. When there are signs such as an open mouth, triangular eyes (with visible white), pinned ears, and dilated nostrils, it can be signs of discomfort, pain, and/or conflict behavior. (Horses in some of the other pictures also show such signs).*

### **Transport**

The Danish Animal Ethics Council notes that transport of horses in a sports context typically takes place under better conditions than those seen in the transport of animals for slaughter. However, the Council notes that horses can be transported frequently, and that they can become stressed both during transport and during housing and competition in new physical surroundings and social environments. The Council therefore recommends that horses be habituated to being transported, preferably together with another known and transport-savvy horse the first few times. The Council further recommends that the industry establishes an upper limit on how much a horse can be away from its familiar surroundings to participate in competitions or training camps.

### **Monitoring**

The Danish Animal Ethics Council finds that there is a need to focus on reducing the risk of injury to horses during training and competition. The Council recommends that all horses be inspected and checked for lesions etc. both before and after competitions, to ensure, as far as possible, that the participating horses are fit to perform, and that follow-up is done if a horse shows signs of overload or has injuries or lesions, including oral lesions.

In continuation of this, the Council points out that it should also be checked whether the horse shows signs of previous overloading, e.g. lesions in the process of healing, scars, and changes of pigmentation. The Council further recommends that injuries be recorded in central databases, and that the development be monitored so that measures can be taken if necessary to reduce the incidence of injuries. The Council emphasises that monitoring of horses by inspection and registration of injuries should be mandatory for all horses at all competitions, and that monitoring should be based on a solid and up to date scientific basis, regarding both the horse's physical and mental health. Therefore, the Council recommends that a sufficient number of people be trained to carry out this inspection, for example as part of the training of judges. The training should be conducted in an independent setting, i.e. a knowledge base should be developed in collaboration with but not solely selected by equestrian organisations themselves. In continuation of this, the Council recommends a general focus on promoting a greater degree of impartiality in monitoring and control.

Finally, the Council emphasises that there must also be a focus on the welfare of the horse outside of the competition itself, and therefore recommends that warm-up areas always be monitored, and that individuals (with the above-mentioned training) be given responsibility for intervening at clearly defined criteria, e.g. in relation to signs of overloading of the horse.

#### *Doping and other performance-enhancing measures*

According to the Danish Animal Ethics Council, medication or other measures intended to mask pain and injuries or otherwise enhance the horse's performance should not be used. This applies to both medication and other measures, and indeed this is not allowed under section 29 of the Horse Order or the Danish Equestrian Federation's own rules. If a horse is injured, the Council believes it should be treated if necessary and given the rest and rehabilitation it needs before returning to competition. If a horse's behaviour needs to be calmed or stimulated, this should be done with appropriate habituation and training.

The Council notes that there appears to be little use of doping according to the reported test results. However, it is difficult to determine whether this is due to insufficient testing or whether doping is actually also rarely used. The Council therefore recommends that significantly more testing be carried out for a period of time – also outside of competition, so that the results reflect the actual conditions. Such an initiative will likely also have a preventive effect and lead to increased focus on the use of performance-enhancing substances.

The Council further believes that there is a need to look more closely at the gray area where, for example, an approved pain treatment means that a horse can participate in a competition where it might otherwise have had reduced performance due to pain or even lameness. Although section 29 of the Horse Order does not allow any form of medication or treatment aimed at hiding symptoms of illness so that the horse can train and compete, the text does not directly forbid that a horse treated for pain with pain relief in mind can subsequently participate in a competition when it no longer shows lameness. However, this requires that the Danish Equestrian Federation's veterinary consultant approves the treatment prior to participation in the competition, and the Council has been informed that there are only a few cases annually.

Nevertheless, the Council does not believe that horses should be made "usable" for competition with reference to the need for pain relief if the horse would not be able to perform or perform as well without the treatment. As previously mentioned, pain treatment can also increase the risk of potential injury. The Council has noted the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration's assessment of the purpose of section 29 of the Horse Order, but recommends that it be directly clarified in the Order that if a horse has received a treatment that could affect its performance, it cannot participate in competitions until the effect of the treatment can be expected to have ceased, to ensure that any symptoms are not just suppressed by medication but the horse has in fact recovered from its illness or injury. Therefore, the Council further recommends that medication of sports horses should be recorded, and that this information should be made available to those who will perform checks of the horses at competitions, and that horses still within the period of the treatment's effectiveness should be denied participation.

Finally, the Council recommends that surgical procedures that affect a horse's performance, such as de-nerving, should be noted in the horse's passport, and that this should also be checked prior to competitions to ensure compliance with the Danish Equestrian Federation's own ban on participation in competitions with de-nerved horses.

#### 6.4 Other disciplines besides dressage and show jumping

During the initial work on this statement, the Danish Animal Ethics Council also gathered information about harness racing, thoroughbred racing, and sport with Icelandic horses. As previously mentioned, the Council chose, for resource reasons, to limit the factual review of this statement to examples from dressage and show jumping. In closing, the Council would like to remind that the issues discussed in this statement regarding the use of horses for sport apply to all horse sports disciplines. Therefore, the Council would like to emphasise that the considerations and recommendations are also considered relevant for other forms of horse sports than the two disciplines included as examples in this statement. Here, the Council is particularly concerned with the need to ensure sufficient knowledge regarding horse welfare and conflict behaviour, that signs of conflict behaviour, pain, and discomfort are taken into account in the assessment at competitions, and that age limits for participation in competitions are set with respect for the fact that the horse must be both physically and mentally prepared for the pressure that competition entails. The Council also finds that there is a need for rethinking and evaluating training methods and the need for and use of equipment and tack such as bits, nosebands, spurs, and whips in other horse sports disciplines. The studies that the Council has seen indicate, for example, that problems with oral lesions in e.g. racehorses and Icelandic horses are at the same level as or may be greater than what is seen in dressage and show jumping. The Council further believes that the use of tongue ties should be prohibited as this is equipment that that only serves as a coercive measure and is assumed to cause great discomfort to the horse (a tongue tie is, for example, a piece of string or elastic band that is tied around the tongue and fastened under the jaw to hold the horse's tongue in place, typically in racing). Thus, the Council recommends that other horse sports disciplines in Denmark also evaluate their practice of horse sports in light of this statement and that, if necessary, other disciplines also be included in any new legislation on the use of horses for sport.



*The Danish Animal Ethics Council emphasises that the considerations and recommendations presented also apply to other forms of horse sport than those used as examples in this statement. The Council recommends that other horse sport disciplines also evaluate their practice of horse sports in light of this statement, and that, if necessary, they are also included in any new legislation. This recommendation applies to all other horse sport disciplines, not just trotting and thoroughbred racing as illustrated here.*



## Conclusion

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The Danish Animal Ethics Council does not find it problematic in itself that horses are used for sports purposes, but the Council notes that the use for sports purposes entails a risk that horses are under pressure and restricted in ways that can compromise their welfare. The Council believes that there is a need to focus more on how horses can be used for sports while their welfare is prioritised and catered for to a greater extent. Therefore, the Council assesses that the practices and traditions surrounding equestrian sports need to be evaluated in light of the knowledge about horse behaviour and welfare today, as well as contemporary norms for keeping and using animals.

In connection with this, the Council recommends that it is ensured that the training of individuals who are responsible for the care of horses, training, teaching, and organising competitions, sufficiently covers horse behaviour, including conflict behaviour, and is up to date with knowledge about training methods and norms for horse welfare. The Council therefore recommends further that rules be established for the education of the person responsible for professional keeping of horses, in accordance with the possibility in section 22 of the Animal Welfare Act to make such requirements.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council has noted that the Danish Equestrian Federation has developed a number of rules and guidelines for the use of horses for sport. However, the Council points out several ambiguities and finds that there is a need to break with the view of the horse as an athlete and instead recognise that the participation of horses in competitions is only about human interests and ambitions. In connection with this, the Danish Animal Ethics Council recommends the criteria for awarding prizes for the horses' performances in competition be challenged, so that only that which does not compromise the horse's welfare to a degree where conflict behaviour and signs of pain and other discomfort can be observed is rewarded. Finally, the Danish Animal Ethics Council recommends a revision of the guidelines of the Danish Equestrian Federation so that everything related to horse welfare is gathered in a clear and easily accessible way, and that simple and understandable terms are used to make it clear what is being talked about.

Some of the Council's recommendations already point to the need for legislative initiatives. For the remaining recommendations, the Council has suggested that the industry itself follows up, provided that this is done immediately. If the follow-up does not occur soon, where possible, and otherwise within a year, the Council recommends that specific legislation be developed in Denmark for the use of horses for sport.

In addition, the Danish Animal Ethics Council has discussed the following selected focus areas:

### **Soundness and longevity of the horse**

The Danish Animal Ethics Council does not exclude the possibility that some horses may be ready to participate in competitions as 4-year-olds, but the Council recommends raising the age limit by at least one year to ensure that the horses have become sufficiently habituated to the competition environment and have had enough time to build up sufficient physical and mental strength and resilience before performing under the pressure of competition participation. The Council further recommends that the horse's actual age, i.e. the horse's birth date, be used as the basis for participation in competitions and similar events, rather than just the calendar year as is currently the case. The Council

also recommends a greater focus on riding technique, cooperation between horse and rider, and the combination of rider, horse, and ambition level. If one does not wish to keep the horse when it can no longer be used for sport or used at the desired level, the Council recommends taking responsibility for what should then happen to the horse.

### **Housing**

The Danish Animal Ethics Council recommends that horses be kept in accordance with their nature, for example regarding contact with conspecifics and opportunities for free movement, and that the horse's social needs be prioritised over human needs for the horse to deliver a specific performance. The recommendation for social contact applies as a starting point also to stallions, but the Council acknowledges that the existing keeping of stallions may be challenged by stallions not being habituated to being with other horses. Therefore, the Council recommends focusing on changing the keeping of stallions in the future to better meet the stallions' social needs. The Council further recommends that all horses have daily access to free movement in paddocks and finally the Council draws attention to the fact that sport horses may have a special need for focus on meeting their needs to chew and digest coarse feed to avoid developing behavioural disorders and gastric ulcers.

### **Training and competitions**

- *Training*

The Danish Animal Ethics Council recommends that everyone working with horse training and assessment knows the signs of a horse being physically or mentally overloaded, and that the horse is given sufficient time to get used to handling and training, as well as to the environments in which it should function. The Council emphasises that training must not cause the horse pain or other unnecessary discomfort, and that even though some degree of coercion may be necessary in handling horses, it must still be done with respect for the horse's responses. Further to this, the Council recommends always using the lightest possible signal to achieve the desired effect and not pushing the horse beyond its physical limits. If the horse does not respond as expected to training attempts, the cause should be identified so that necessary measures can be taken, if necessary by consulting people with specialised knowledge of horse training and welfare.

- *Equipment and tack*

Overall, the Danish Animal Ethics Council is concerned whether the practices observed in some cases when horses are under pressure during equestrian sports, meet the intentions of the legislation's requirements that horses must be protected as far as possible against pain, suffering, and severe distress, and that equipment and tack must not cause harm to the horse or be used as a means of coercion. The occurrence of lesions and injuries resulting from the use of equipment or otherwise is unacceptable in the Council's opinion. The Council recommends a fundamental rethinking of the use of equipment, where equipment and aids are reviewed based on contemporary norms and knowledge of animal welfare. The Council believes that there is a need to consider the purpose of the equipment and whether that purpose can be achieved in another way. If equipment is deemed necessary, the Council recommends that there should be greater emphasis on both clarifying how the equipment in question is used correctly and imposing sanctions (or imposing harsher sanctions) if the equipment is used incorrectly, both in training, competitions, and warm-up. In line with this, the Council recommends that the use of equipment adheres to, among other things, the following principles:

- Equipment must be used only to guide the horse to understand what it should do, not for coercion or punishment.
- Equipment must not alter the horse's natural movement patterns, hinder the horse's senses or physiology, or fix a body part or the horse's body position causing the horse to show signs of e.g. discomfort, pain or conflict behaviour, and equipment must not hinder the ability to read the horse's signals about this.

In the first instance, the Council recommends that horse sports organisations take responsibility for evaluating the use of certain kinds of equipment, and that the use will be discontinued, if the use in practice constitutes a form of coercion, or the equipment is used to force performance development. The Council believes that particular attention should be paid to the use of complex bits, tight nosebands, reins and auxiliary reins, and clear criteria for the use of whip and spurs. The Council emphasises once again that it is unacceptable for horses to be inflicted with pain, lesions, and other discomfort during sport activities. The Council believes that this must stop immediately and reminds of the current legislation.

- *Transport*

The Danish Animal Ethics Council notes that sport horses can be transported frequently and may become stressed both during transport and during housing and competition in new physical surroundings and social environments. The Council recommends that horses be habituated to transport and that the industry establishes an upper limit on how much a horse can be away from its familiar surroundings to participate in competitions or training camps.

- *Monitoring*

The Danish Animal Ethics Council finds that there is a need to focus on reducing the risk of injury to horses during training and competitions. The Council therefore recommends that all horses be inspected for lesions etc. both before and after competitions, and that follow-up be done if a horse shows signs of overload or has injuries or lesions, and that it is also checked whether the horse shows signs of previous overloading. The Council further recommends that injuries be recorded in central databases and that the development be monitored so that measures can be taken if necessary to reduce the incidence of injuries. The Council emphasises that monitoring and registration should be mandatory for all horses at all competitions, and that monitoring should be based on a solid and up to date scientific basis, regarding both the horse's physical and mental health. The Council therefore recommends that a sufficient number of people be trained in an independent setting to perform this inspection. The Council further recommends a general focus on promoting a greater degree of impartiality in monitoring and control. Finally, the Council recommends that warm-up areas always be monitored, and that individuals (with the above-mentioned training) be given responsibility for intervening at clearly defined criteria.

- *Doping and other performance-enhancing measures*

According to the Danish Animal Ethics Council, medication or other measures intended to mask pain and injuries, or otherwise enhance the horse's performance, should not be used, and indeed that is not allowed either. If a horse is injured, the Council believes it should be treated if necessary and given the rest and rehabilitation it needs before returning to competition. If a horse's behaviour needs to be calmed or stimulated, this should be done with appropriate habituation and training. The Council finds it difficult to assess the extent of doping use and therefore recommends that testing be significantly increased for a period of time so that results reflect the actual situation.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council further believes that there is a need to look more closely at the grey area in section 29 of the Horse Order. According to section 29, it is not allowed to use any form of medication or treatment aimed at hiding symptoms of illness so that the horse can train and compete. However, the text does not directly forbid that a horse treated for pain with pain relief in mind, for example, can subsequently participate in a competition. This means that when a horse has received an approved pain treatment it can still compete, where it might otherwise have had reduced performance due to pain or even been lame. Therefore, the Council recommends that the Order be directly clarified to state that if a horse has received a treatment that could affect its performance, it cannot participate in competitions until the effect of the treatment can be expected to have ceased, to ensure that any symptoms are not just suppressed by the medication but the horse has in fact recovered from its illness or injury. The Council thus further recommends that medication of sports horses should be recorded, and this information should be made available to those who will perform checks of the horses at competitions, and that horses still within the period of the treatment's effectiveness should be denied participation. Finally, the Council recommends that surgical procedures that affect a horse's performance, such as de-nerving, be noted in the horse's passport, and that this be checked prior to competitions to ensure that de-nerved horses do not participate.

#### **Disciplines other than dressage and show jumping**

During the initial work on this statement, the Danish Animal Ethics Council also gathered information on other horse sport disciplines. The Council would like to emphasise that the considerations and recommendations are also considered relevant for other forms of horse sports than the two disciplines included as examples in this statement. This applies in particular to the need to ensure sufficient knowledge, that signs of conflict behaviour etc. are included in the assessment at competitions, setting age limits, as well as rethinking and evaluating training methods and the use of equipment and tack. The Council believes that the use of tongue ties should be prohibited, as this is equipment that only serves as a coercive measure and is assumed to cause great discomfort to the horse. The Council therefore recommends that the other horse sports disciplines in Denmark also evaluate their practice of horse sports in light of this statement, and that, if necessary, other disciplines also be included in any new legislation on the use of horses for sport.



## Appendix: The Danish Animal Ethics Council's preparation of this statement

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The Danish Animal Ethics Council addressed the topic in the period November 2019 to December 2022.

When preparing the statement, the Council consisted of the following members:

- Bengt Holst (Chair) the statement)
- Jes Aagaard
- Lina Lind Christensen (from July 1, 2022)
- Paolo Drostby
- Pernille Hansen
- Per Jensen
- Pernille Fraas Johnsen (until June 30, 2022)
- Bjarne Klausen (from July 1, 2022, but abstained from participating in the finalisation of
- Sebastian Klein
- Yke W. Kloppenburg-Oosterwoud
- Peter Mollerup (until June 30, 2022)
- Lene Munksgaard
- Michael Nielsen
- Thomas Søbirk Petersen
- Lena Rohn (from July 1, 2022)

In connection with the preparation of this statement, the Danish Animal Ethics Council has met with Janne Winther Christensen, Aarhus University; Mette Uldahl, veterinary consultant for the Danish Equestrian Federation; Mogens Christophersen, Hestens Værn (a horse protection organisation); Julie Fjeldborg, Hestens Værn; Ulf Helgstrand, the Danish Equestrian Federation; Julie Taylor, Epona TV; Kirsten Alexa Hansen, horse trainer; Stine Weinreich, the Danish Icelandic Horse Association; Peter Knudsen, Horse Racing Denmark (Dansk Galop); Nick Elsass, Horse Racing Denmark; Klaus Storm, the Danish Trotting Association (Dansk Travsports Centralforbund); and Jørgen Kold, SEGES (an agricultural organisation). The Council has also received assistance with factual information from Angelique Kaaterud, Agria Animal Insurance. The Council thanks everyone for their help in uncovering the topic. The Council would also like to thank Janne Winther Christensen, Mette Uldahl, Mogens Christophersen, Julie Fjeldborg, Ulf Helgstrand, Julie Taylor, and Kirsten Alexa Hansen for comments on previous drafts of the factual parts of the statement, as well as for help clarifying questions during the preparation of the statement. Finally, the Danish Animal Ethics Council would like to thank Janne Winther Christensen and Mette Uldahl for assistance with professional evaluation in the selection of photos. The photo on page 33 of an oral ulcer was kindly provided by Mette Uldahl. The remaining photos are from Colourbox.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council is aware that the decision to choose photos from Colourbox means that the photos may not necessarily have been taken in Denmark and therefore, in addition to the intended point, may illustrate conditions that are not applicable in Denmark or meet Danish requirements. The Council has prioritised using photos that do not expose identifiable Danish persons or horses, as the Council wants to keep the focus on the described conditions and problem areas. Additionally, the Council notes that the horses in many of the photos, besides the intended illustration according to the photo caption, exhibit signs of possible pain, discomfort, and/or conflict behaviour (as shown and described in the photos with a focus on this). This should not be taken as an indication that such signs necessarily occur in the specific situations, but the Council wants to use the illustrations to increase awareness of these signs and that they may be present.

Regarding the English version of this statement, the Council would like to thank Julie Taylor and Mette Uldahl for help with the translation.

## Literature

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The Danish Animal Ethics Council has consulted a number of relevant scientific articles and other materials in the preparation of the statement. The most recent and for the Council most essential part of the literature is listed below. See also reference notes in the text (in the electronic version of the statement, the notes contain links to the cited sources).

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