



AMENDMENTS TO AUSTRALIAN RULES OF RACING

AR 2, AR 88E

Bloodletting

Summary

The International Agreement on Breeding, Racing and Wagering is a voluntary agreement designed for the guidance of recognised Racing and Breeding authorities. The Agreement is reviewed once a year by the IFHA Annual Conference.

Article 6 C (RACING) PROHIBITED PRACTICES deals with practices that jeopardize the health and welfare of the horse, the welfare of the rider, and other participants as well as the integrity of horseracing are inappropriate and prohibited.

In 2021 a number of additional items were added to Article 6C including.

2) SPECIFIED PROHIBITED PRACTICES

Prohibited practices include but are not limited to:

(D) The withdrawal of blood from a horse for any purpose other than for diagnostic/laboratory testing procedures or as permitted by 2(e) below.

(E) The withdrawal, manipulation and reinfusion of homologous, heterologous, or autologous, blood products or blood cells into the circulatory system with the exception of those procedures performed for lifesaving purposes or in the use of veterinary regenerative therapies for the treatment of musculoskeletal injury or disease.

“Bloodletting” in humans and other animal species has been practised for millennia in the original belief that it expelled illness through the elimination of impure fluids. Bloodletting has been practised in horses since the mid-16th century with reports of its extensive use in the 18th century to treat a multitude of diseases and injuries. However, as poor outcomes were beginning to be raised with its use in humans in the 19th century its popularity gradually declined, although it is still considered a valid therapy in humans in certain conditions characterised by polycythaemia (an increase in concentration of all blood cell types) or erythrocytosis (an increase in red cell parameters).

In horses, bloodletting involves the removal of a significant proportion of the animal’s blood volume (up to 10 or more litres in a racehorse) via a large bore catheter or needle, or by incision (phlebotomy) of the jugular vein. This results in immediate physiological and behavioural changes, including a sudden reduction in blood pressure and the potential to stagger and collapse.

The procedure has been advocated to “freshen up” a horse that is performing poorly due to overtraining, a situation that might be attributable to polycythaemia, or to reduce the tendency for exercise-induced pulmonary haemorrhage (EIPH). However, there is no sound scientific

basis to attribute any beneficial effect due to bloodletting in healthy horses, and bloodletting is difficult to detect using routine haematological tests, although there may be visual evidence of jugular vein cannulation or phlebotomy.

There is also the matter of the impact of bloodletting conducted on horses that remain in training and race, given the physiological effects and possible effects on performance.

It should be noted that any prohibition of bloodletting would not extend to the withdrawal of small volumes of blood for diagnostic or testing procedures, or for use in those procedures performed for lifesaving purposes or in the use of veterinary regenerative therapies for the treatment of musculoskeletal injury or disease. Such procedures should be performed by a veterinarian and recorded in the trainer's treatment schedule.

In evaluating whether bloodletting should be considered a prohibited practice, the following could be noted:

- Bloodletting has the potential to cause unnecessary discomfort.
- Any benefit to the health and welfare of horse could not justify the discomfort caused by the procedure.
- There was a variety of more modern therapies and management interventions available to treat conditions that might be the subject of bloodletting.
- Bloodletting is still used in modern human medical practice to treat certain medical conditions such as haemochromatosis.
- Bloodletting is still mentioned in modern veterinary medical and veterinary textbooks as one means of managing polycythaemia in Standardbred trotters, a condition that is rare in thoroughbreds.
- Bloodletting of healthy racehorses would be perceived adversely by the general community.

Period of Ineligibility

It has been suggested and supported by VAAG and COSC that the minimum period of ineligibility should be for a period of 12 months, and that this provision should apply to this practice.

COSC unanimously agreed to support this definition of Bloodletting for inclusion in AR 2 and a new rule (AR 88E) to formalise a period of ineligibility of 12 months to participate in any race, trial, jump out or track work.

Racing Australia has after consultation determined to introduced the definition to AR 2 and the add new rule AR 88E to give effect to adoption of Bloodletting as a Prohibited Practice.

1. Add to AR 2 as follows:

AR 2 Definitions

Bloodletting means the withdrawal of blood from a horse for any purpose, including the withdrawal, manipulation and reinfusion of homologous, heterologous, or autologous, blood products or blood cells into the circulatory system other than for;

- (i) diagnostic/laboratory testing procedures; or
- (ii) use by a veterinary surgeon in any procedure/s performed for lifesaving purposes; or
- (iii) in the use of veterinary regenerative therapies for the treatment of musculoskeletal injury or disease.

as the case may be.

2. Add new AR 88E as follows:

AR 88E Horses that have had a bloodletting procedure

- (1) If a horse has been subjected to a bloodletting procedure in Australia:
 - (a) the horse is ineligible for a minimum period of 12 months; and
 - (b) a person must not enter or start the horse in, any race, official trial, jump-out or track work.
- (2) If a horse is subject to a bloodletting procedure, the owner of the horse or that owner's authorised agent must provide written notification of that to the Stewards as soon as practicable. The Stewards will then seek to ensure that:
 - (a) details of the procedure and the horse's ineligibility to race are recorded in Racing Australia's national online database; and
 - (b) if applicable, the Thoroughbred Identification Card of the horse is endorsed with details of the procedure and the horse's ineligibility to race.

Date of effect: 1 May 2024