



**CLYDESDALE HORSE SOCIETY
OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc.)**

Welfare Guidelines Framework



Vision and Purpose

Our Vision

"Every Clydesdale should experience a good life, with care and conditions that allow them to thrive and express their natural abilities throughout all stages of their life, from responsible breeding to beyond retirement."

Purpose

These guidelines provide recommendations for Clydesdales under the care of Society members to receive welfare that:

- Meets the minimum legal requirements under applicable animal welfare legislation, including but not limited to:
 - The Animal Welfare Act 1999, Animal Welfare (Care and Procedure) Regulations 2018, and Code of Welfare: Horse and Donkeys are complied with.
- Reflect the breed's specific needs as large draught horses
 - To provide a standard of care in addition to the Animal Welfare Act 1999, Animal Welfare (Care and Procedure) Regulations 2018, and Code of Welfare: Horse and Donkeys.
- Supports their roles in agriculture, leisure, showing, and urban management
- Provide clear benchmarks for assessment and continuous improvement

This document is intended to improve the welfare outcomes of Clydesdale horses in New Zealand, as a guidance document. It is not intended to replace, and should be read in conjunction with, the Code of Welfare regulations set out by Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), the Animal Welfare Act and other relevant publications. For a full list of the regulations visit: [Ministry for Primary Industries | NZ Government](#)

Core Welfare Philosophy

The Five Domains Model

The Society adopts the guiding principles which inform the World Organisation for Animal Health's (WOAH) work on the welfare of *terrestrial animals* particularly the internationally recognised 'Five Freedoms' Model as the foundation for Clydesdale welfare assessment where every animal has should experience the freedom described below in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Five Freedoms (WOAH, 2026).
Infographic created using ChatGPT (May 11 version)

Guiding Principles

- The welfare of the Clydesdale must always be paramount and never subordinate to competitive, commercial, or convenience factors
- Each horse is an individual with specific needs that may vary based on age, health, work demands, and temperament
- Continuous improvement in welfare standards through education, research, and best practice sharing
- Recognition of the Clydesdale's role as a production, work and companion horse

1. Key Welfare Standards for All Clydesdales

These standards are additional considerations to those detailed in the Code of Welfare, where minimum standards and recommended best practice guidelines are presented.

1.1 Freedom from Hunger & Thirst

Nutrition:

Specific details of minimum standards can be found in the Code of Welfare: Minimum Standard 3 - Feed and Water.

Clydesdale-specific needs:

- Require larger volumes of forage (2-3% bodyweight daily) due to size (700-1000 kg).
- High-quality forage hay or pasture must form the basis of the diet.
- Monitor for metabolic issues (EMS, insulin resistance) common in heavy breeds.
- Provide 40-60 L/day of clean water; more in hot weather or during work.
- Feed, water and nutritional supplementation adjusted for work demands, body condition, and physiological state

Examples

- **Heavy haulage, ploughing:** requires a higher energy content feed, regular feed and water breaks throughout the work period
- **In foal mares, young growing horses:** constant access to forage and water, require additional nutritional supplementation to support optimal growth and development in early life.

Body Condition Scoring:

Body condition score maintained between 2.5-3.5 on a 0-5 scale as demonstrated in figure 2.

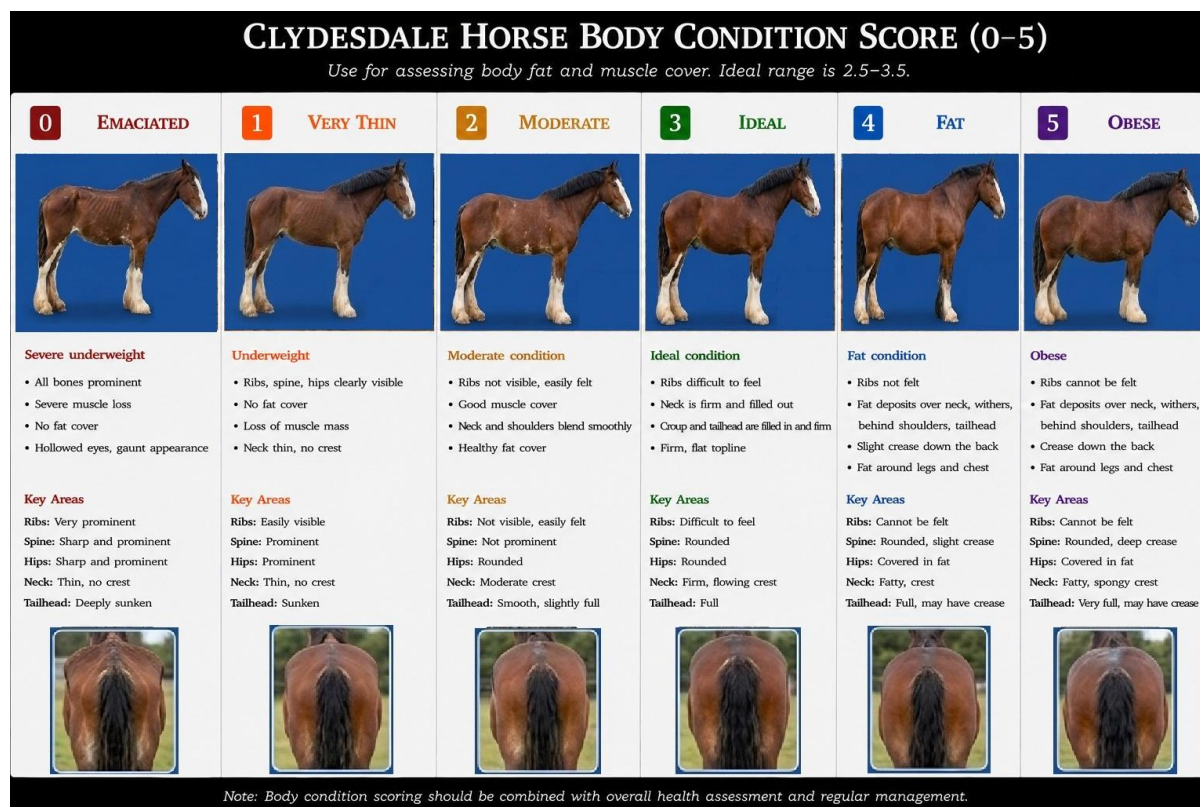


Figure 2: Clydesdale Horse Body Condition Scoring
Infographic created using ChatGPT (May 12 version)

This BCS chart has been developed for use in Clydesdale horses, where the body type differs to that of riding hack, pony, or donkey.

Consideration needs to be given to the appropriate muscling of horses in heavy work, the effects of changing body shape due to feeding and conditioning requiring harness fitting to be undertaken regularly.

1.2 Freedom from Discomfort

Environment and Housing

Specific details of minimum standards can be found in the Code of Welfare: Minimum Standard 4 - Shelter and Housing.

Clydesdale-specific needs:

- Require larger shelter spaces: minimum stable size 4 × 4 m, headroom ≥ 3.5 m.
- Safe fencing and gates designed to contain large, strong horses
- Clean, dry bedding in stabled areas with excellent drainage
- Provide shade and wind protection; avoid prolonged exposure to harsh weather.
- Access to pasture for grazing and natural behaviours

- Companionship with other horses or suitable companion animals

Examples:

- Feathered legs need protection from mud, wet conditions, and skin irritation.
- Consideration is given to suitable covers due to larger size and naturally heavier coats

Major Environmental Events

It is important to establish a plan in preparation for major weather events i.e. flooding, cyclones. Consideration needs to be given to:

- Emergency food and water supply
- Moving horses to safer environments
- Having an emergency kit prepared including spare halters, name tags, medical supplies

Temporary Pens

At events, follow the rules set out by the event organisers in regard to temporary pens that meet the safety requirements. Suggestions include:

- Minimum 1.2m high, tall pegs, with at least two wires,
- Secured to a solid side i.e. float, permanent fence
- Power on
- May require supervision
- Sufficient size for the horse/s to move around

1.3 Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease

Specific details of minimum standards can be found in the Code of Welfare: Minimum Standard 5 - Health Management, the Animal Welfare (Care and Procedures) Regulations 2018: Surgical or painful procedures.

Clydesdale-specific needs:

- Monitoring for conditions present in draft breeds (Shivers, Stringhalt, Chronic Progressive Lymphedema, Degenerative Suspensory Ligament Disease)
- Recognition that Clydesdales may hide pain well due to their stoic nature
- Appropriate exercise regimens considering their size and traditional working roles
- Regular (min every 8 weeks) farrier care is essential; heavy horses are prone to hoof cracks, thrush, and strain injuries.
- Preventative measures undertaken for parasite management i.e. worms, ticks, mites.
- Maintain regular dental care (every 6-12 months).
- Ensure appropriate fitness and conditioning for workload to avoid joint and muscular strain.

Legal requirements:

- Tail docking is prohibited.
- Castration must be performed by a veterinarian with appropriate anaesthesia and pain relief.
- Hot branding is prohibited; freeze branding requires experience, training and competence

Refer specifically to Section 51A (Docking Equids tails), 54 (Castration), 55K (Freeze branding cattle beasts or equids), and 55L (Prohibition of Hot branding)

Examples:

- Special attention to feathered leg health and cleanliness to prevent establishment of chronic infections or leg mites (More details in Appendix B)
- Protection from damage due to the sun's effect i.e. solar dermatitis, in the form of shade in paddocks, shade nose covers, sunblock or similar preventative measures

1.4 Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour

Specific details of minimum standards can be found in the Code of Welfare: Recommended Best Practice 6 - Behaviour and Social Needs.

Clydesdale-specific needs:

- Daily turnout is essential; heavy horses benefit from movement to maintain circulation and joint health.
- Social contact with other horses reduces stress and supports mental wellbeing.
- Provide opportunities for grazing, roaming, and gentle interaction.
- Opportunities to express natural behaviours (grazing, mutual grooming, play)
- Adequate rest periods (4-6 hours lying down per 24-hour period)
- Consideration of their working heritage in exercise and enrichment programs

1.5 Freedom from Fear and Distress

Specific details of minimum standards can be found in the Code of Welfare: Minimum Standard 7 - Handling and Training.

- Use positive reinforcement and calm handling
- Gradual introduction to new experiences and environments,
- Handling that does not cause fear, pain, or distress

Clydesdale-specific needs:

- Recognition of the Clydesdale's typically calm, willing temperament but can be stoic
- Appropriate training methods that utilise their intelligence and eagerness to please

- Calm, predictable handling suits their temperament.
- Avoid rough restraint or loud, chaotic environments.
- Build trust through consistent routines and gentle training.

2. Life Stage-Specific Guidelines

2.1 Breeding and Young Stock (0-3 years)

Breeding Stock Management

- Breeding stallions and mares should be in optimal health and body condition between 3 and 3.5 at mating and foaling
- Pregnant mares require increased nutritional support, especially in final trimester
- Foaling facilities should be safe, clean, and appropriate for large horses
- Recommended minimum age for breeding is 3 years of age at mating

Post-foaling monitoring of mare and foal health

- Clydesdale mares must expel placenta within 1 to 3 hours of birth
- Colostrum intake monitoring in first 24 hours
- Gradual introduction to handling and human contact
- Appropriate nutrition for growth (but not excessive to prevent developmental issues)
- Regular monitoring for developmental abnormalities
- Age-appropriate exercise and socialisation
- Education and habituation to basic handling procedures
- Weaning of foals – low stress gradual weaning, in safe facilities

Example:

Clydesdales are genetically predisposed to a higher incidence of retained placenta and subsequent toxic complications, passing of the placenta within 1 to 3 hours is critical, preventive treatment includes administration of oxytocin at the time of foaling and seeking veterinary care early post foaling as required. Clydesdale mares are prone to acute metritis and endotoxemia which may lead to severe laminitis as the result of systemic infection.

2.2 Working Clydesdales

Training and Conditioning

- Recommended age to start training:
 - Foal handling
 - Bits for colts
 - Stallion roller – 3yrs
 - Longing, long reining, mouthing – 2.5 – 3 yrs
 - Ridden under saddle – 3 yrs
 - Beginning to pull/light harness work – 3yrs
 - Heavy work - over 4 years
- ***Gradual and progressive*** training programs appropriate to the intended work
- Proper fitting and maintenance of harness and equipment
- Regular breaks during work sessions
- Work intensity appropriate to fitness level and environmental conditions
- Recognition of signs of fatigue or distress

Equipment Standards

- Well-fitted harness that does not cause rubbing or pressure points
- Regular inspection and maintenance of all equipment
- Appropriate protective equipment for feet in challenging conditions
- Safety equipment for handlers and drivers

2.3 Show and Competition Horses

Preparation and Presentation

- Training methods that prioritise welfare over appearance
- Appropriate grooming practices that don't compromise comfort
- Transportation standards for show attendance
- Competition scheduling that allows adequate rest
- Recognition that welfare takes precedence over competitive success – performance expectations that reflect level of training

2.4 Rehoming, Retired and Elderly Clydesdales

Retirement Planning

- Proactive planning for post-work life
- Assessment of ongoing care needs and capabilities
- Suitable retirement environment with appropriate care.
- The society will assist in the rehoming of horses where necessary to ensure the ongoing provision of care.
- Regular monitoring of age-related health issues
- Quality of life assessments

End-of-Life Care

All horse owners should recognise when quality of life is compromised, with common clinical indicators being uncontrollable pain (colic, Laminitis, fractures), inability to rise or remain standing, inability to eat, drink or swallow, severe neurological dysfunction, or a terminal/untreatable disease.

Humane euthanasia should be selected, when necessary, with a preference of making the decision early rather than too late.

Cost of treatment, prognosis for return to use, and owner capacity are legitimate and recognised factors in the decision. Support is available for owners making difficult decisions.

It is recommended that the appropriate disposal methods are used in accordance with local council regulations.

3. Welfare Assessment and Monitoring

3.1 Regular Assessment Protocols

- Horse owners, breeders and teamsters should undertake regular i.e. daily, weekly, monthly welfare checks to ensure the needs of Clydesdale horses in their care are being provided
- Quarterly, half yearling and annual comprehensive health checks may include veterinary examining, dental examination and treatment, review of nutrition and adjusting training and workload accordingly.

3.2 Warning Signs and Interventions

Immediate Intervention Required

- Severe injury or illness
- Signs of acute pain or distress
- Dangerous environmental conditions
- Equipment failure causing injury risk

- Body condition score below 2.5 or above 4.0

Monitoring and Improvement Plans

- Minor health issues
- Gradual body condition changes
- Behavioural changes suggesting welfare compromise
- Equipment wear requiring attention
- Environmental improvements needed

4. Responsibilities and Accountability

4.1 Owner/Keeper Responsibilities

- Ensure daily care meets or exceeds these guidelines
- Maintain competency in Clydesdale care through education
- Provide appropriate resources for the horse's needs
- Seek professional advice when uncertain
- Report concerns about other horses to appropriate authorities

4.2 Society Responsibilities

- Provide education and resources to members including welfare workshops, judges and steward training, information sharing, regular update with latest information, practical skill sessions, expert presentations.
- Promote best practice through guidelines and support
- Investigate welfare concerns brought to attention
- Refer welfare concerns to the appropriate services i.e. SPCA or MPI

4.3 Professional Support Network

- Veterinarians with significant horse experience
- Farriers/hoof care professionals familiar with draft horses
- Equine nutritionists
- Behavioural specialists
- Transport providers
- Industry bodies

4.4 Raising a concern or a complaint:

While the CHS operates under administrative rulebooks that prioritise breed integrity, and pedigree preservation, there is an obligation to respond to concerns or complaints raised by its members.

	Concerns	Complaints
Definition	"I want you to be aware of this." Used when it needs attention, but not formal action	"This needs to be investigated and addressed." Used when a rule, welfare expectation, or Code of Conduct has been breached.
Outcome	Advice or education being provided, awareness raised at council level.	Begins a formal investigation process

The most direct welfare rules apply to events, particularly A&P shows and Clydesdale events.

At Events/Competition

At Royal Agricultural Society (RAS) events:

At a Royal Agricultural Society Event, a complaint or concern can be raised with the steward and Judge in charge of the ring.

The RAS rulebook has rules pertaining Abuse of an exhibit which includes:

- **General Rule (GR5)** – Saddlery and Accessories: exhibits showing welts from whip abuse will be immediately dismissed from the ring and disqualified without further recourse for the remaining events at that Show/Event
- **GR 6** – abuse of Exhibits includes a definition of abuse

Any complaints of exhibit abuse, will be dealt through the ***RAS In-Line Resolution Process / Yellow/Red Card*** – view on www.ras.org.nz

Clydesdale Horse Society Sanctioned Events:

Concerns/complaints should be discussed with the person in charge/person responsible for the event or the welfare officer for that event.

Event organisers can make use of the **Equine Event Welfare Guidelines** developed by the Equine Ethics and Welfare committee of NZ Equine Health Association, available here:

[Welfare — New Zealand Equine Health Association](#)

Formal Investigation Process

For complaints presented directly to the CHSNZ, about welfare concerns or neglect occurring on private properties, the society requires a formal complaint from the witness including evidence which may include:

- Photographs (timestamped)
- Video footage
- Official veterinary reports

The complaint is escalated to the President and council.

The CHSNZ may approach the member in question to gather more information. The member accused is given a set period of 14 days to respond.

If deemed necessary, the case can be referred to Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) (if over 10 horses) or Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) (less than 10 horses).

Disciplinary Sanctions and Penalties

If a member is found guilty of violating the society's welfare rules or code of ethics, the board can issue severe industry-specific penalties including

- Suspension or Expulsion: The individual's society membership is revoked, banning them from competing, judging, or attending official events.
- Freezing the Studbook: The society will refuse to register future foals, record farm prefixes, or process ownership transfers for the offender. This strips the horses of their purebred status, severely devaluing the breeding herd.

Conclusion

These welfare guidelines represent the Clydesdale Horse Society's commitment to ensuring every horse in our care experiences the highest standards of welfare throughout their lives. By implementing these standards, we honour both the magnificent nature of the Clydesdale breed and our responsibility as their guardians.

The guidelines will be regularly updated to reflect advances in equine welfare science and evolving best practices. All members are encouraged to exceed these minimum standards and to actively participate in the continuous improvement of Clydesdale welfare.

Regular Review Process

- Annual review of guidelines based on:
 - Current scientific research
 - Member feedback and experiences
 - Changes in legislation or industry standards
 - Emerging welfare issues or concerns
 - International best practice developments

Resources:

Code of Welfare: Horse and Donkeys 2018:

[Code of Welfare: Horses and Donkeys | NZ Government](#)

Animal Welfare Act 1999:

[Animal Welfare Act 1999 | New Zealand Legislation](#)

Animal Welfare (Care and Procedure) Regulations 2018:

[Animal Welfare \(Care and Procedures\) Regulations 2018 | New Zealand Legislation](#)

NZ Equine Research Foundation:

<https://nzerf.org.nz/nzerf-booklets>

RAS Equestrian Rulebook:

[RAS-Equestrian-Rulebook-2025-Complete-A5.pdf](#)

World Organisation for Animal Health: Welfare

<https://www.woah.org/en/what-we-do/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-welfare/>

Animals in emergencies: checklists and resources

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/animals/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-emergency-management/preparing-animals-for-emergencies/animals-in-emergencies-checklists-and-resources>

New Zealand Horse Ambulance Trust

<https://www.horseambulance.co.nz/>

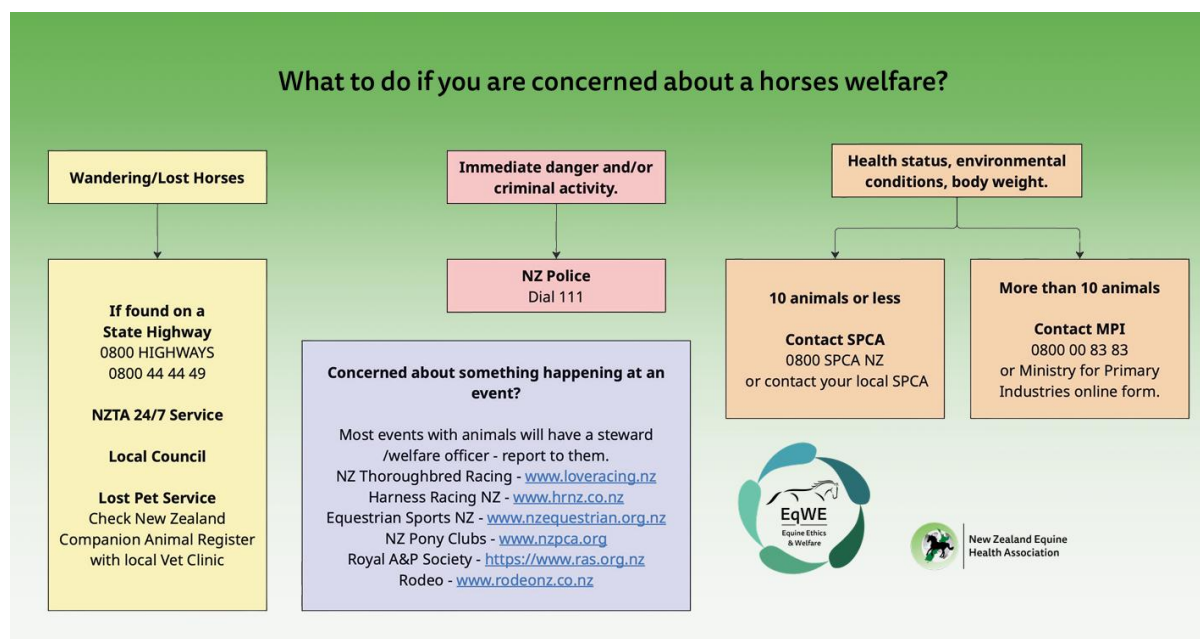
The Clydesdale Horse – A Resource Book

<https://aussieheavyhorses.com.au/product/the-clydesdale-horse-a-resource-book/>

Work Horse Handbook

<https://aussieheavyhorses.com.au/product/work-horse-handbook/>

Appendix A: Concerns about Horse welfare



Reference: Welfare — New Zealand Equine Health Association

Appendix B: Leg Mites

- <https://www.worldhorsewelfare.org/advice/mites-how-to-treat-them-in-horses>
- <https://darkmoor.com.au/resources/feather-mite/>

Appendix C: Prevention of Sunburn

- <https://www.horseandhound.co.uk/features/summer-problems-sunburn-65324>

Appendix C: Shoeing or Trimming Draft Horse Feet

- <https://nzfarriers.co.nz/faqs/>
- <https://www.merckvetmanual.com/management-and-nutrition/preventative-health-care-and-husbandry-of-horses/foot-care-of-horses>

Appendix D: End of Life Care

- https://issuu.com/nzfarmlifemedia/docs/245411_evp_dec_22_-_47_4_final/61?e=64&o=1

Milne, H.R.G. & Parsons, T. (2022). *Euthanasia in Horses: A bibliographic review*. The Equine Veterinary Practitioner, 47(4), 55–57.