

Equine Veterinary Clearance Certificate Guidance

QRIC acknowledges and is grateful for the ongoing support of the veterinary profession, whose expertise, care and clinical oversight are central to safeguarding horse welfare and maintaining the safety and reputation of racing. We also recognise that providing certification can, at times, be challenging and may require veterinarians to navigate complex professional and commercial expectations. QRIC is committed to supporting veterinarians in these circumstances.

Except where specific requirements are prescribed under the Racing Australia Codes of Practice, the following information is provided as guidance and is not intended to replace clinical reasoning or dictate decision-making. QRIC fully supports veterinarians in exercising sound, independent clinical judgement, and acknowledges that each clinical opinion must be based on the individual circumstances of the horse being assessed.

1. Purpose and Context

- 1.1 A veterinary clearance certificate records the examining veterinarian's clinical findings and professional opinion on the horse's condition, recovery where relevant and suitability to recommence training or return to trialling or racing, following clinical examination and any relevant diagnostic investigation. Certification may also be requested under the Thoroughbred Rules of Racing for horses that have not raced for 12 months or more, those aged 12 years or above, or those requesting reinstatement after retirement, to help ensure, as far as is reasonably possible, that their welfare is protected. Certification provides clinical information and professional opinion to assist QRIC veterinarians and Stewards in making an informed decision about the horse's suitability to resume the relevant activity, including whether any applicable veterinary embargo may be lifted.
- 1.2 The overarching purpose of veterinary certification is to minimise the likelihood that horses return to competition when they are at increased risk of welfare compromise, clinical deterioration or injury, or where participation may present an unacceptable risk to the horse, rider or driver, other participants, racing integrity, or public confidence in the sport, including concerns relating to performance capability.
- 1.3 Although certification is generally provided by the horse's usual veterinarian, ideally with knowledge of its training history and previous condition(s), the certificate *must* reflect an objective, impartial, clinically justified and defensible professional opinion.

2. Role and Limits of Certification

- 2.1 Certification is a clinical snapshot, recognising that certain conditions may vary or progress over short periods. Accordingly, it is always preferable that the certifying veterinarian has an informed understanding of the horse's veterinary, treatment and training history to ensure the assessment is as reliable and contextually informed as possible.
- 2.2 Certification should provide reasonable assurance that the horse has received appropriate rest, rehabilitation and treatment, and that the assessment has been based on a sufficiently thorough clinical examination supported by diagnostic testing where indicated.
- 2.3 The examining veterinarian is responsible for the clinical findings and professional opinion expressed in the certificate, including any relevant concerns or limitations. The decision to lift any applicable veterinary embargo remains with QRIC.

3. Location and Timing of Examination

- 3.1 Examinations should preferably be performed in the horse's usual training or stable environment, where it is more likely to remain calm, settled and free from situational excitement or arousal that could alter gait, demeanour or pain expression and affect the accuracy of clinical assessment.
- 3.2 Examinations should *not* normally be undertaken on course immediately prior to barrier trials unless discussed with, and explicitly approved by, Stewards following consultation with QRIC veterinarians.
- 3.3 Examinations should *not* occur:
 - Immediately following intense exercise (as a guide, allow at least 30 minutes), noting that where cardiac assessment is required, auscultation must be performed within 15 minutes of completion of exercise, consistent with the Racing Australia Code of Practice (below).
 - Following cryotherapy or ice-boot application (as a guide, allow at least one hour and confirm limbs are not cold to the touch).
 - Within at least 24 hours of administration of analgesic or anti-inflammatory medication. Where a horse has received one or more doses of analgesic or anti-inflammatory medication in the days preceding examination, the certifying veterinarian should carefully consider whether such treatment may affect the accuracy and validity of the clinical assessment, including by masking pain, inflammation or lameness.

4. Professional Standards and Accountability

- 4.1 Veterinary certification is a professional declaration that carries ethical and legal accountability. Certification must *not* be provided to satisfy external expectations or pressure from any party. It must be based solely on the veterinarian's clinical assessment and professional judgement, consistent with accepted professional and ethical standards, and prioritising welfare and safety.
- 4.2 Veterinarians providing certification should have knowledge, skills and relevant experience in equine clinical practice appropriate to the nature and complexity of the assessment. Where the assessment falls outside their competence or experience, they should seek advice or assistance from a veterinarian with relevant expertise, or refer the horse for assessment before supporting its return to the proposed activity. This is particularly important where the condition may have serious implications for horse welfare or participant safety.
- 4.3 Veterinarians should:
 - Base certification on their own clinical findings and verified information, supported where appropriate by relevant history.
 - Document examination findings and any limitations.
 - Seek confidential advice from QRIC if they consider that external pressures may compromise their professional judgement.
 - Be alert to pressure to provide a favourable opinion or to proceed without appropriate examination, investigation or advice, and decline to provide an opinion they cannot clinically justify.
- 4.4 Where questions arise regarding clinical reasoning, documentation or interpretation, QRIC may request further detailed information.
- 4.5 To avoid any circumstance in which impartiality, professional judgement or integrity may be questioned, QRIC will not accept veterinary clearance certifications where a real or perceived conflict of interest exists. Veterinarians must declare that no such conflict exists which could influence, or be perceived to influence, their ability to examine the horse

and issue certification objectively. For the purposes of this guidance, a conflict of interest includes any personal or financial interest, ownership by a relative, or association with the trainer, owner, or others connected with the horse that may affect impartiality. Being the horse's usual veterinarian is not, in itself, a conflict of interest. Where a conflict exists, certification must be completed by an independent veterinarian.

- 4.6 False or misleading certification may be referred to the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Queensland for their consideration.

5. Findings Generally Incompatible with a Return to Trialling or Racing

- 5.1 Although each case must be assessed individually, identification of any of the following would generally be expected to render a horse unsuitable to return to barrier trials or racing:
- Consistent lameness at trot in a straight line, including bilateral or multi-limb lameness.
 - Joint inflammation associated with pain on flexion or palpation, with or without lameness.
 - Pain on palpation or inflammation involving a tendon or ligament, especially the digital flexor tendons, suspensory ligament or its branches.
 - Unstable or clinically active hoof cracks, particularly with coronary band involvement.
 - Ocular conditions associated with pain, moderate to severe irritation or impaired vision (including active corneal ulceration, uveitis, blepharospasm or excessive tearing).
 - Skin conditions likely to cause discomfort, be infectious or be exacerbated by equipment.
 - Wounds that are unhealed, recently sutured and not yet sufficiently healed, unstable, painful, exudative, at risk of breakdown under race or trial conditions, or likely to raise legitimate public concern.
 - History, clinical suspicion or diagnostic findings consistent with a stress fracture.

6. Minimum Examination Expectations

- 6.1 While a certificate may be sought for a specific condition or for an issue affecting a particular body system or anatomical region, certification ordinarily informs assessment of a horse's suitability to resume high-intensity exercise, racing or trialling. A sufficiently thorough examination is therefore required to ensure that any other factors relevant to the horse's capacity to safely undertake these activities are not overlooked. For example, it would be inappropriate to express a favourable opinion on a horse's suitability to return to racing after a corneal ulcer if an unrelated lameness was evident. Accordingly, QRIC expects the following as the minimum standard for all such examinations:
- Review of the relevant clinical and treatment history, and the reason for certification.
 - Enquiry with the person presenting the horse and review of treatment and medication records, to confirm that no treatment or procedure likely to impact the validity of veterinary assessment and certification has occurred.
 - Observation of the horse's general condition and demeanour and, where appropriate, assessment of vital parameters.
 - Removal of rugs, bandages, poultices and coverings.
 - Cardiac auscultation.
 - Trot-up in hand on a firm, level surface approximately 20 metres away and back.
- 6.2 For the reasons outlined above, veterinary certification for the purposes of clearance to resume high-intensity exercise, racing or trialling *must* be based on a direct, in-person clinical examination of the horse. Certification provided via teleconsultation or remote assessment does not meet this standard and will *not* be accepted.

7. Racing Australia Codes of Practice

- 7.1 The following reflect the **Racing Australia Codes of Practice (1 June 2023)** for Thoroughbred racing and are intended only as a high-level summary. Veterinarians and trainers are responsible for referring to, and complying with, the Codes of Practice, which contain detailed and condition-specific requirements and procedural steps. This guidance does not replace the need to follow the full, prescribed processes outlined in the Codes.

RA Code of Practice	Summary of Requirements
Horses not started for 12+ months	• Clinical examination and certification confirming suitability to barrier trial, with further diagnostic assessment guided by history and examination findings. • Post-trial veterinary examination and certification to ensure suitability to continue training and return to racing.
12 Years or Over	• Thorough clinical evaluation, including trot-up in hand, palpation of lower limb musculoskeletal structures, cardiac and pulmonary auscultation, and assessment of demeanour and body condition.
Cardiac Arrhythmia	First instance • Resting ECG of more than 60 seconds demonstrating normal rhythm and cardiac auscultation performed by the same veterinarian within 15 minutes of the horse completing a satisfactory gallop of at least 1000 m. Second instance • Specialist veterinary certification confirming satisfactory echocardiography and resting and exercising ECG. Exercising ECG must include ≥60 sec continuous recording at >200 bpm and continue until HR <80 bpm. • With Stewards' written approval, the horse must then complete a ≥1000 m official trial/jump-out, with cardiac auscultation within 15 minutes post-trial/jump-out (which may be performed by the on course veterinarian).
Major Fractures and Orthopaedic Surgery	Step 1: Pre-Training / Pre-Gallop Certification • Clinical examination of injured structures and clearance to undertake supervised 1000 m gallop — informed by appropriate diagnostic imaging (and views), which includes the affected and contralateral limb or for long-bone or pelvic stress fractures returning to galloping in <4 months, nuclear scintigraphy. Step 2: Post-Gallop Certification (after supervised 1000 m gallop) • Clinical re-examination with certification regarding suitability to compete in a supervised 1000 m official trial. Step 3: Post-Official 1000 m Trial Certification • Follow-up clinical exam and certification of suitability to race. • Further diagnostics required if any doubt remains.

RA Code of Practice	Summary of Requirements
Reinstatement of Retired Horse	- Clinical examination and certification of suitability to resume training must occur before or immediately after stable entry, with any known reasons for retirement documented. - Following Stewards' approval, the horse must complete an official trial or jump-out and post-trial/-jump-out examination and certification.

Note: Veterinarians are encouraged to apply similar principles to Standardbred horses.

8. Condition-Specific Clinical Examination and Diagnostic Guidance

Condition	Summary of Suggested Examination Requirements
Lameness	Trot-up in hand on a firm, level surface; cardiac auscultation; palpation of lower limb musculoskeletal structures; flexion tests as required to inform the veterinarian's opinion on the horse's suitability to resume work, trialling or racing; other diagnostics guided by clinical findings and history.
Tendon or ligament injury	As above, plus ultrasound if there is reactivity on palpation or concern about structural integrity or adequate healing, or if the horse is returning within six months of injury.
Fever, pyrexia or inappetence	Clinical examination including cardiac and pulmonary auscultation and confirmation of normal temperature. Where certification is requested within 7 days of fever, haematology (including fibrinogen and/or SAA) and biochemistry should be considered to assess recovery and exclude ongoing inflammation or infection.
Post-race distress or Exertional Heat Illness	Clinical examination including cardiac and pulmonary auscultation; haematology and biochemistry should be considered if certification is requested within 7 days in order to evaluate muscle enzymes and inflammatory markers.
Respiratory condition — infection / surgery	Clinical examination including cardiac and pulmonary auscultation, with consideration of endoscopy to assess airway healing and function and, where indicated, to permit sampling (e.g. TA/BAL) for assessment of inflammation, infection or pathogen involvement.
Ocular conditions	Ophthalmic examination, including assessment of ocular appearance, healing, comfort and integrity, and evidence of pain or inflammation. Behavioural and functional indicators of vision should be evaluated, with ophthalmoscopic examination or further diagnostic testing as clinically indicated. Where concerns remain, including residual corneal opacity, uveitis, synechiae or ongoing discomfort, further functional assessment and specialist referral or advice should be sought prior to certification. Note: Under the Thoroughbred Rules, horses that are totally blind in one eye are not permitted to race, trial, jump-out or undertake trackwork, and partial visual impairment requires specialist assessment and Stewards' approval. Under the Standardbred (Harness) Rules, any blindness or visual impairment requires formal application to the Stewards, who may approve participation with or without conditions.

Condition	Summary of Suggested Examination Requirements
Uncompetitive or below-expectation performance	Consider musculoskeletal, cardiac, respiratory or systemic causes; examination to include cardiac and respiratory auscultation. May require endoscopy (including overground) and airway sampling (e.g. TA/BAL) to assess inflammation, infection or pathogen involvement, and resting and/or exercise ECG, haematology and biochemistry as guided by findings/professional veterinary opinion.
Skin Lesions	Dermatological examination with removal of all rugs and coverings to allow complete inspection of the skin; assessment of lesion distribution, morphology and activity, and consideration of differential diagnoses. Where lesions are consistent with or suspicious for fungal infection, certification should be supported either by appropriate diagnostic testing (e.g. hair sample or skin scrapings for microscopy, culture or PCR) or by evidence of completion of an appropriate antifungal treatment course with resolution of active lesions. An opinion supporting a return to trialling or racing should only be provided where the veterinarian is satisfied the horse is not contagious.

9. Consultation to Support Informed Decision-Making

- 9.1 Where a horse has a characteristic or longstanding gait abnormality or condition that, in the opinion of the certifying veterinarian, does not compromise safety or welfare or preclude a favourable clinical opinion on the horse's suitability to resume training, trialling or racing, the veterinarian must be able to demonstrate that the condition has been adequately monitored/ investigated, is well-understood, and is appropriately documented.
- 9.2 In such cases, veterinarians are expected to liaise with QRIC's Stewarding and Veterinary department in advance of racing/trialling so that relevant clinical information is available, considered and aligns with QRIC's welfare and safety expectations, thereby avoiding circumstances where an officiating veterinarian may reasonably decline participation due to insufficient history or supporting evidence. Supporting material may include evidence of lameness investigations, diagnostic imaging where appropriate, documented clinical examinations, or objective gait assessment.

10. QRIC Discretion Regarding Acceptance of Certification

- 10.1 QRIC reserves the right to decline acceptance of a veterinary clearance certificate, or restrict a horse's participation, where it considers that continued training, trialling or racing would compromise the safety or welfare of the horse, pose unacceptable risk to participants, or have the potential to undermine integrity or public confidence in the racing industry.

11. Mandatory Use of QRIC Veterinary Certificate Pro forma

- 11.1 To ensure consistency in reporting and accurate documentation of information for clear interpretation, all veterinary clearance certification for both **Thoroughbred** and **Harness** racing must be submitted using the approved QRIC Veterinary Certificate pro forma.

12. Further Information or Advice

- 12.1 Veterinarians seeking further information or guidance are encouraged to contact the QRIC Veterinary Department on **1300 087 021** or via email at **vets@qric.qld.gov.au**.