

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN HOMING PIGEON
ASSOCIATION

INCORPORATED

CODE OF PRACTICE

FOR THE

KEEPING AND RACING OF

PIGEONS

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Prepared by:

The S.A.H.P.A. Inc.

Management Committee

And the Animal Welfare Unit, Department for Environment and Heritage

Preface

The principal purpose of this Code of Practice is to ensure the welfare of the pigeons is the prime consideration in all activities associated with their racing, breeding and management.

This Code provides the minimum acceptable standards of:

- Housing and environmental factors affecting health
- Racing and training practices; especially as they affect the chances of an individual pigeon returning safely to its loft.
- Transport of pigeons to races and training flights.
- Control measures to enhance the ability of a pigeon to return safely to its loft.

A breach of this Code will constitute an offence under the regulations pursuant to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1985.

- a) Racing pigeons must be exercised daily, sufficient to ensure its fitness for racing.
With the exception of birds housed in rural and semi-rural areas or, returning from racing and training, free flight exercise must be in accordance with a plan, and of at least 30 minutes duration per day and not exceeding 180 minutes per day.
- b) Free non-flight time, must be conducted under the direct supervision of the owner.
Other than for planned free flight and non-flight times, all racing pigeons must be confined within their home loft.
Persistent fielding and/or roof sitting are prohibited.
- c) Racing Pigeons must be housed within a loft, designed to provide adequate and appropriate shelter and accommodation for the birds, and built in such a manner as to ensure it does not negatively impact upon the amenity of the environment in which it is located.
- d) It is recognised that pigeon racing involves races and training exercises where significant proportions of birds do not return to their home loft. Many of these lost birds die through predation and other causes. The causes of the losses are poorly understood. The mere fact that any proportion of the birds released on a racing or training exercise do not return to the home loft is not evidence of any kind tending to prove cruelty or mistreatment of the pigeons involved.

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1. **DUTY OF CARE TO PIGEONS**

- 1.1 Any person who owns, races or is responsible for the care of pigeons has a fundamental duty to take all reasonable steps to ensure the welfare of those pigeons. For the purposes of this Code, the owner of a pigeon shall be taken to be the person(s) who has entered the bird in a competition or, in the event that that pigeon is not currently racing, the person who is primarily responsible for the day to day management of that bird.

2. **ILL TREATMENT OF PIGEONS**

- 2.1 For the purpose of this document ill treatment includes wounding, mutilating, abusing, tormenting and torturing, wanton or malicious beating and causing unnecessary pain, neglect or suffering. Ill treatment is defined by the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1985, as any action or inaction which results in unnecessary or unreasonable pain, suffering or distress. The owner of any animals is that person who has care and custody of the animal. The owner of a Pigeon has a responsibility to provide it with adequate and appropriate food, water, shelter and exercise.

3. **ACCEPTANCE AND INSPECTION OF PIGEONS FOR COMPETITION**

- 3.1 The SAHPA acknowledges the depth of expertise for pigeon care available within each member and affiliate club from which can be provided, suitably experienced personnel for the inspection of pigeons submitted for competition. (Club Committee)
- 3.2 Only pigeons of sound health and physical well being and likely to successfully complete the journey set for the event will be accepted by the Club Committee for entry.
- 3.3 **Poor Health.** Poor pigeon health can be characterised by general lassitude respiratory disease indicated by wheezing, sneezing, nasal and eye discharge (i.e. Chlamydia infection), Pigeon Pox lesions, and any other ailment to which pigeons are susceptible.
- 3.4 **Neglect.** Neglect includes the pigeon being presented in a soiled and generally dishevelled condition and/or harbouring external parasites.
- 3.5 **Physical Impairment.** Physical impairment includes any condition, likely to diminish the likelihood of a racing pigeon successfully completing a set journey.

4. **CARRIAGE AND CONVEYANCE OF PIGEONS**

4.1 **Container Specifications**

- 4.1.1 **Configuration.** A person responsible for the carriage of pigeons must ensure they are transported in a container, allowing adequate air exchange at the sides and top. This allowance pertains to pigeons being conveyed for private training, organised training and/or racing, or for the conveyance of pigeons for any other purpose.
- 4.1.2 **Height Allowance.** The minimum height of containers be 21 cm (210mm) and is exclusive of all wire and plastic mesh bottom inserts.
- 4.1.3 **Space per Pigeon.** The space allowance per pigeon will vary according to the duration of transport, the distance of the race and whether provision has to be made to feed and water the pigeons *en route* and at the release site.
- 4.1.4 **Scope of Allowance.** This allowance pertains to pigeons being conveyed in any basket used for training and/or racing, or for the conveyance of pigeons to place for entry into competition.

4.2 **Confinement Provisions.**

A person conveying a pigeon must ensure the cages meet the following standards. The allowance is made on the following basis:

- 4.2.1 For races of 500 kilometres or less from the Adelaide G.P.O. – minimum of 200 cm² per pigeon.
- 4.2.2 For races exceeding 500 kilometres, minimum of 250 cm² per pigeon.

5. **FEED AND WATER PROVISIONS UNDER RACE CONDITIONS**

5.1 **Short Journeys (Friday Hampering)**

Water is to be available from the start to the finish of loading of birds onto the race unit.

Birds are to be watered again as soon as practical after arrival at the release site.

5.2 **Longer Journeys (Thursday Hampering)**

Water is to be available from the start to the finish of loading of birds onto the race unit.

The Liberator must stop en route to the release site from approximately 7 am to 9 am on the Friday morning and water the birds.

The Transporter must arrive at the release site by 1600 hours on the day before the event at which time feed and water procedures are to commence. The feed must be accessible to the birds for a minimum of one (1) hour and no more than three (3) hours, whereupon it must be

withdrawn. The water shall be available continuously until one hour before release, whereupon it shall be withdrawn.

5.2.1 **Supplementary Feed and Water**

Supplementary feed and water *en-route* is to apply by at least 1600 hours daily in the manner prescribed, if the journey time to the release site exceeds the 1600 hour provision for arrival time.

6. **RACE AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES, COMPETITIONS, AND THE RELEASING OF PIGEONS FOR FLIGHT WHEN AWAY FROM THE HOME LOFTS.**

6.1 **Annual Programmed Fixtures.**

6.1.1 No race may commence until a Release Officer and Official Liberator are appointed.

6.1.2 **Responsibility.** The Race Release Officer and the Liberator are responsible for the welfare of the pigeons including their collection, transport and release for races. Where necessary, advice shall be sought from these Officers if consideration is given to varying a release point during mid season.

6.2 **Race Controls.**

6.2.1 **Racing Associations**

In general, pigeon races are conducted by Federations or Societies. Although the rules of these organisations are not binding in law, the cooperation of members with instructions and rules of the committees is generally in the best interest of the sport, the birds and other competitors. Committees of such organisations are empowered by their members to cancel, postpone, or alter the race venues and direct the person responsible for the pigeons to make whatever adjustments are necessary for the welfare of the pigeons.

6.2.2 **Releasing Birds**

The person who releases the pigeons must ensure the birds are released in such a manner as to avoid potential for injury. He/she/they must consider weather, local conditions and any other factors which may impinge upon the ability of birds to successfully complete the event. Pigeon Racing Organizations may require a Committee Member or the General Secretary to be contacted providing details of the release for announcement to competitors.

6.2.3 **Conveyors & Liberator.** The appointed Liberator has responsibility for performing the release of pigeons, in such a manner as to minimise the potential for injury. The authority to release pigeons, in all races, rests with the above-mentioned

group. The Liberator shall contact a pre-arranged and nominated Delegate of the Management Committee or the General Secretary, at least one hour prior to the release, to report on route conditions, discuss local conditions and receive approval to liberate. Having released the birds, the Liberator must again contact the nominated delegate to provide details of the release for announcement to competitors

6.3 **Race Delays and Holdovers.**

6.3.1 Where the release is delayed because of adverse weather conditions, such delay will remain in force until the Hold –over time is declared. When the hold-over time is declared the pigeons will be held for a planned release the next day.

6.3.2 **Second Day.** The Liberator must decide, either individually or in consultation with the Management Committee or the General Secretary, to:

- a) Release the pigeons at a pre-determined time or
- b) In the case of adverse weather conditions still prevailing, hold the birds at the original release site until holdover-time is again reached.

When the holdover-time is declared with no release, the following will apply:

The Liberator responsible in consultation with the Management Committee or the General Secretary must decide to

- a) Hold the birds at the original release site for a planned release on the third day or
- b) declare the race cancelled and the pigeons returned and released at a suitable location near Adelaide.

6.3.3 **Third Day**

- a) Hold the birds at the original site until it becomes evident the race must be declared cancelled and the pigeons returned and released at a suitable location near Adelaide.

6.4 **Rain or Fog or Heat.**

6.4.1 Pigeons must not be released away from the home loft³, for racing into rain or fog.

6.4.2 Heat. Where temperature conditions are expected to be above 30c at any location the pigeons will be passing through at the

³ Colloquial term. The name “Loft” (GB) is widely used in pigeon racing to describe or indicate the pigeon cage, house or coop (USA) and has its origin as the traditional hay loft used for keeping pigeons, or in many European areas in the attic of the house.

time of the day either en route to the race point release location, en route flying home, a hold over should be declared or the race cancelled as per the procedures noted above.

6.5 **Release Time.**

During the months of June to August pigeons are to be released as follows:

- Under clear sky conditions – release a minimum of 15 minutes after gazetted sunrise for the area.
- Under over-cast sky conditions – release a minimum of 30 minutes after gazetted sunrise for the area.

During the months of September and October pigeons are to be released as follows:

- Under clear sky conditions – release at the discretion of the person(s) responsible for releasing the birds.
- Under over-cast sky conditions – release a minimum of 30 minutes after gazetted sunrise for the area.

7. **PERFORMANCE ENHANCING DRUGS: DRUG FREE RACING.**

A person must not administer any performance enhancing drug to a racing pigeon including any of the anabolic steroids or corticosteroids. Any pigeons found sick or dead at the release site can, at the discretion of the Management Committee, be sent for analysis. Where any inappropriate performance enhancing substance is detected, the owner(s) will be held responsible.

7.1.1 Any person found guilty of administering performance enhancing drugs to their birds or being an accomplice to administering performance enhancing drugs to racing pigeons for the purpose of gaining an advantage over his/her/ their competitors, may be persecuted under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 2001.

8. **RETURN RATES**

8.1 If return rates are lower than 75% the Association will undertake an enquiry on the circumstances which led to the low return rate. If these circumstances either cannot be reasonably prevented, the release site will not be used for future races.

8.2 The President of an organization which conducts pigeon races must ensure that return rates of each site are recorded in the annual report of the organization.

9. THE PIGEON “LOFT”

9.1 Dimensions.

Pigeon lofts are constructed in many sizes to suit or fit individual circumstances, such as available space within a conventional residential block. However the owner of a pigeon must ensure the following minimum standards are met:

9.2 Living Quarters – Racing Loft

8.2.1 The minimum space available to each bird must be **0.092 m³** or **450 mm x 450 mm x 450 mm.** (the approximate size of an auction pen).

An example of maximum permissible pigeons and minimum box perches per occupied space in the living quarters is described as follows:

Loft dimension 1800mm (Width) x 2100mm (Length) x 1800mm(height) = 6.804m³ divided by 0.092m³ = maximum 74 pigeons and minimum 81 box perches.

9.3 The Stock Bird Loft.

The stock bird loft is used for housing the breeding pigeons of the loft and because of their value and likely background of racing from some other inter or intra state loft, are not able to be freed for exercise. These pigeons require extended space for their good health and well being.

9.3.1. Living Quarters. The stock loft shall generally be of similar configuration as the racing loft, except, in the place of box perches, breeding compartments are provided. Required minimum dimensions for breeding compartments are 550 mm wide x 450 mm high x 500 mm deep. Adequate space to maintain health and well being of pigeons, within the breeding loft, is calculated as two and one half (2.5) times the provision, as minimum space, per pigeon in living quarters.

The **Maximum allowable number** is calculated from the above example as follows:

Loft dimensions 1800 mm wide x 2100 mm long x 1800 mm high = 6.804 m³ (6804000 cm³) divided by (0.092m³ x 2.5) space allocated for racing birds = 30 pigeons, (or 15 mated pairs) for the space provided.

9.4 The Ideal Loft.

The following is provided only as a guide but reasonably reflects the hallmarks of a well-organised and well-constructed pigeon racing loft.

There are a number of essential elements, which make up the building of a loft. It needs to be dry and warm over the winter months and therefore needs to be built for that period of year in mind. For the summer heat it also needs to have ventilation modifications, such as flaps and ventilators that can be adjusted and closed off as the winter approaches. It needs to be configured for ease of cleaning and for the comfort of the pigeons and box type perches are most suitable for both. Where practical it needs to be sited on the lot so the front of the loft faces away from prevailing winter winds and rain, whilst making full advantage of the morning winter sun.

- 9.5 **Ventilation.** There needs to be adequate air exchange within a pigeon-racing loft without causing drafts. Under and over floor ventilation promotes essential dryness required for a healthy loft.

Gabled type roofs are encouraged to cater for adequate air displacement. Where a gabled roof is not provided, an opening at ceiling height at the rear to the outside, of no less than 100 mm along the full length of the loft, is to be provided. Alternatively, a 'witches hat' type chimney or similar ventilator should be placed centrally within the roof to affect the required air exchange and to promote good health and comfort for the pigeons.

- 9.6 **Preferred Construction. (Recommended)**

9.6.1 Lofts have been constructed to a number of standards and designs and it is not intended for these lofts to conform to the Code of Practice, whilst they continue to be utilised in their present configuration. New or upgraded lofts must be constructed in accordance with the following minimum standards and in accordance with Council requirements.

- 9.6.2 **Off-Ground.** All new lofts constructed off-ground shall have a minimum clearance height from ground to floor level of 200 mm, allowing for free flow of air under floor.

Floor areas may be either of two configurations:

- a) Trafficable mesh grating floor, allowing droppings to pass through for collection below floor level.
- b) Trafficable timber floor with moisture absorptive qualities and for regular ease of scrape cleaning e.g. chipboard or ply-wood.

- 9.6.3 **On-Ground**

Where possible all new lofts constructed on-ground must be of concrete slab floor construction and shall have a heavy duty plastic moisture barrier laid underneath at pouring. An adequate floor level ventilation facility must be provided.

9.6.4 Aviaries

For the health of the pigeons, external open aviaries and or sun yards which are exposed to the elements should ideally be constructed off ground, typically by using trafficable mesh floor for under floor cleaning, or other suitable floor materials.

9.6.5 Insulation.

For the welfare and comfort of pigeons, where external cladding of a loft consists of brick or metal such lofts shall be internally lined with plywood, or chipboard, or other heat retaining materials. For prevention of condensation dampness, all metal roofs must be insulated.

10. LOFT CLEANING

Loft floors are to be cleaned on a regular basis – where possible protective equipment should be utilized.

11. FEED AND WATER.

The owner of a pigeon must ensure the following standards are met:

11.1 Feed.

There are many successful methods for feeding of racing pigeons and it is not intended to regulate this activity other than to document normal feeds and feed practice.

Essentially, racing pigeons thrive quite effectively on most grains and legumes, with wheat being the base staple. It is usual to supplement a wheat based diet to varying percentages with field peas, maize, sorghum, oats, rice, barley, certain pellet preparations and other small grains. The normal feed regime, for racing pigeons, is to feed twice daily, and to be given after exercise. As a regulatory minimum, pigeons must be fed at least once daily.

11.2 Water.

Clean water in the home loft, available at all times. It is recommended that water should be changed twice daily and more frequently in summer months especially in the stock loft. As a minimum standard, fresh water must be provided daily.

12. STRAY BIRD MANAGEMENT.

The SAHPA Inc. and affiliates recognise appropriate management of lost, or injured, pigeons belonging to members is a critical part of our Charter. Fostering the welfare of our pigeons is a prime interest of our sport of racing them. Accordingly, non-adherence to our strict policies relating to lost bird

acknowledgment and collection will be viewed very seriously and may result in suspension or cancellation of membership.

13. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The South Australian Homing Pigeon Association Inc. greatly appreciate and express our gratitude to the Racing Pigeon Federations of Western Australia and the Central Cumberland Racing Pigeon Federation for allowing the SAHPA Inc. to use the main contents and/or concepts of their Codes of Practice.

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