



Established 1895  
Incorporated 1929

SAHPA GENERAL SECRETARY  
Graham Mitchell  
Mobile 0448 883 512  
[sahpa.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:sahpa.secretary@gmail.com)

[sahpa.treasurer2015@gmail.com](mailto:sahpa.treasurer2015@gmail.com)  
Tom Tirrell  
P.O. Box 755, Melrose Park  
South Australia, 5039, Australia

# **DRAFT SAHPA RULE No 4 - CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE KEEPING AND RACING OF PIGEONS**

Revised August 2022.

Prepared by: The SAHPA Inc. Management Committee and

## CONTENTS

- Preface
- Duty of Care to Pigeons
- Ill Treatment of Pigeons
- Acceptance and Inspection of Pigeons for Competition
- Carriage and Conveyance of Pigeons
- Protocols and Procedures
- Feed and Water Provisions under Racing Conditions
- Race and Training Programmes, Competitions and the Releasing of Pigeons for Flight when away from the Home Loft
- Performance Enhancing Drugs: Drug Free Racing
- Return Rates
- The Pigeon Loft
- Loft Cleaning
- Feed and Water
- Stray Pigeon Management
- Acknowledgment

## **Preface**

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

This Code provides the minimum acceptable standards for:

- Housing and environmental factors affecting health,
- Racing and training practices - especially as they affect the chances of an individual pigeon safely returning to its loft.
- Transport of pigeons to races and training flights.
- Protocols and procedures 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.

## **Basic Information – Pigeon Racing**

- Race pigeons must be exercised daily (either loft flying or race (toss) training), sufficient to ensure its fitness for racing:
  - Except for birds housed in rural and semi-rural areas or returning from racing and training, free flight exercise must be of at least 30 minutes duration per day.
  - Toss training (birds taken between 50kms and 200kms for race training purposes) is necessary for race fitness
  - Stock birds – those used for breeding – in which case suitable sized cages must be provided which may include ‘enclosed flyouts’).
- Loft flying must be conducted under the direct supervision of the owner.
- Other than for planned free flight all race pigeons must be confined within their home loft. Persistent fielding and/or roof sitting are prohibited.
- Race 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.
- It is recognised that pigeon racing involves races and training exercises (toss training) where some birds do not return to their home loft. Many of these lost birds die through predation. The causes of the losses are generally poorly understood except in relation to predation from falcons and hawks. The fact that birds released on a race or training exercise do not return to the home loft is not evidence of neglect or mistreatment of the pigeons involved.

## **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) primarily responsible for the day-to-day management of that bird.

## **2. ILL TREATMENT OF PIGEONS**

2.1. This document notes that ill treatment includes wounding, mutilating, abusing, tormenting, torturing, wanton, or malicious beating and causing unnecessary pain, neglect and/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 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 club and affiliate club - from which can be provided suitably experienced personnel for the inspection of pigeons submitted for competition. (ie club committee).

3.2. Only pigeons of sound health and physical wellbeing and likely to successfully complete the journey set for the event will be accepted by the club committee for entry.

3.3. Poor pigeon health and pigeon neglect can be characterised by general lassitude and extreme loss of body weight. This may be an indication of:

3.3.1. Respiratory disease - indicated by wheezing, sneezing, nasal and eye discharge (ie chlamydia infection)

3.3.2. Pigeon Pox lesions – indicated by pox lesions

3.3.3. Canker – indicated by cheesy lesions and or wet droppings

3.3.4. Any other ailment to which pigeons are susceptible – indicated by poor feather condition, loss of weight general lassitude

3.3.5. Neglect includes the pigeon being presented in a soiled and generally disheveled condition (dirty feathers and obvious ailment) and/or harbouring external parasites.

3.3.6. Physical Impairment. Physical impairment includes any condition, likely to diminish the likelihood of a racing pigeon successfully completing a set journey.

- in which case veterinary consultation is recommended.

#### **4. CARRIAGE AND CONVEYANCE OF PIGEONS**

##### **4.1. Container Specifications**

4.1.1. Configuration. A person, club, or association 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 is 21 cm (210mm) recommended 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 must be made to feed and water the pigeons en route and at the release site – see cl 4.2 below.

**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 where travel is overnight and the race release is next day, a minimum of 200 sq cm per pigeon.

4.2.2. For races where travel is extended and race release causes two or more nights in the race basket – a minimum of 250 sq cm per pigeon.

#### **5. PROTOCOLS & PROCEDURES**

##### **5.1. Release Panel.**

5.1.1. The COM shall appoint a three (3) person release panel from applicants experienced in pigeon management and racing.

5.1.2. The release panel shall consist of two (2) members from active racing membership or other suitably qualified persons.

5.1.3. The release panel shall include one (1) only member of the SAHPA COM.

5.1.4. The appointment shall be for the duration of the racing season – generally late May to early October.

- 5.1.5. In the event of a member of the release panel being unable to fulfil the duties the SAHPA COM shall appoint a replacement (either temporary or permanently).
- 5.1.6. The release panel is answerable to the SAHPA COM.
- 5.1.7. Release panel are appointments are unpaid.
- 5.1.8. The chairman of the release panel (in consultation with the convoyer) shall be responsible for the safe release of the convoy.
- 5.1.9. The release panel shall consider all events that could adversely affect the expected safe return of the convoy - this includes storms, tempest, fog, wind velocities, temperatures.
- 5.1.10. The release panel must always hold bird welfare as the prime requirement and all due diligence shall be undertaken so as to affect a reasonable and acceptable race result, in regard velocities and returns.
- 5.1.11. A reasonable race result is generally taken as a maximum velocity of 2100m/min or minimum velocity of 800m/min with a majority of participants able to return to the race loft.
- 5.1.12. The SAHPA COM shall provide all necessary suitable and acceptable means and technology to the release panel to fulfil their obligation of due diligence.
- 5.1.13. The release panel shall appoint a chairman. The chairman shall be the only communication with the convoyer and SAHPA COM.
- 5.1.14. The chairman shall not be a member of the SAHPA COM.
- 5.1.15. The chairman shall be responsible for all communications to the convoyer and general association regarding, release details, change of race day or any other matters in relation to the race release. The release panel (in consultation with the SAHPA COM) may change the race point whilst the convoy is traveling or when it has reached its destination and prior to release.
- 5.1.16. The release panel are to (where suitable race conditions apply) effect a release on the day of the scheduled race.
- 5.1.17. The release panel may (following consultation with the SAHPA COM) move a race date backwards or forwards from the scheduled race, or 'hold' the race over for a maximum of two (2) days - following all due diligence per 5.1.12.
- 5.1.18. Should race conditions be unsuitable, the release panel (following consultation with the SAHPA COM) shall cancel the race and birds returned to SAHPA HQ. Birds will be released when suitable weather conditions allow.

5.1.19. The release panel shall initiate conversation with suitably qualified persons in the execution of their duty but shall not discuss such actions and decisions with the general association membership (either before, during or after the race period).

## **5.2. Convoyer**

5.2.1. The SAHPA COM shall appoint the convoyer/s from applicants experienced in pigeon management and racing

5.2.2. The convoyer shall be appointed for the duration of the racing season.

5.2.3. The convoyer appointment is a remunerated position. The remuneration shall be set by the SAHPA COM at the beginning of each race season.

5.2.4. In the event of the convoyer being unable to fulfil the duties another convoyer shall be appointed as the need arises.

5.2.5. The convoyer shall have responsibility and control of the convoy following completion of hampering and handover from the SAHPA load dock and up to and including the time of release (as approved by the chairman of the release panel).

5.2.6. The convoyer shall consider the personal safety of the transport driver and any other member of the release team as priority.

5.2.7. The convoyer shall observe and apply current generally accepted occupational health and safety protocols and procedures.

5.2.8. The convoyer (in conjunction with the chairman of the release panel) shall be responsible for the safe release of the convoy – however the convoyer shall not release the convoy until authorisation is received from the chairman of the release panel.

5.2.9. The convoyer must ensure that adequate water and feed are available to the birds following arrival at the race point and prior to release – see Clause 6.

5.2.10. The convoyer (in agreement with the chairman of the release panel) must ensure the birds receive adequate rest prior to release.

5.2.11. The convoyer (after confirmation from the chairman of the release panel) shall release the convoy as close as practicable to the agreed release time.

## **5.3. Communication between SAHPA members and the Release Panel or Convoyer**

5.3.1. SAHPA members are not to communicate with members of the release panel or convoyer or driver in relation to race release information (weather at site, release timing etc).

5.3.1.1. The SAHPA membership shall include the member, life partners, partners, kindred, affiliates, or any other association.

5.3.1.2. The convoyer or any related party shall not receive or indulge in communication with the association membership in matters related to the release.

5.3.2. SAHPA members shall not influence, attempt to influence, offer assistance, threaten, cajole or in any way communicate with the members of the release panel or convoyer before or after the scheduled race. The convoyer shall have a mandatory reporting obligation to report any such incidences or attempted communications to the COM within 24 hours of such communication. They shall name and detail the exact nature of the communication. Failure to do so shall result in a one (1) week suspension from all association activities.

#### **5.4. Penalties for SAHPA members re unauthorized communication with the release panel or convoyer**

5.4.1. Any SAHPA member found to be guilty of a breach of clause 5.3.1 or clause 5.3.2 shall incur a mandatory three (3) week association membership suspension.

5.4.2. A second breach shall incur a further mandatory six (6) week association membership suspension.

5.4.3. A third breach shall incur the association membership to be suspended for the duration of the current racing season.

5.4.4. The member shall in all instances have the right of appeal.

5.4.5. Objections - All objections to the performance of the release panel and convoyer must be made in writing via the members' club executive (chairman secretary or treasurer) directly to the delegate of the club's electorate or to the SAHPA COM via the general secretary.

5.4.6. The delegate has the obligation to table said objection/s to the full committee at the soonest available opportunity.

### **6. FEED AND WATER PROVISIONS UNDER RACE CONDITIONS**

6.1. Short Journeys - race release the day after hampering. Water is to be available from the start to the finish of loading of birds onto the race unit.

6.2. Longer Journeys - race release the second or subsequent days after hampering.

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

6.2.2. If the race unit travels during the night of loading, the convoyer must stop enroute (to the race site) from approximately 7:00am to 9:00am (to water the birds) on the morning following hampering. The transporter should aim to arrive at the release site by 1600 hours on



the day before the race release, at which time feed and water procedures are to commence.

6.2.2.1. The feed must be accessible to the birds for a minimum of one (1) hour.

6.2.2.2. The water shall be available continuously until one hour before release.

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

### **7.1. Annual Programmed Race Fixtures.**

7.1.1. The SAHPA COM is required to provide a yearly race program for SAHPA members. Such races are to be conducted under the SAHPA Inc Constitution and Rules – which includes this code of practice.

### **7.2. Race Controls.**

7.2.1. Pigeon racing under the SAHPA Inc is to be planned, operated, and controlled by the SAHPA COM, the appointed personnel (release panel, convoyer, transporter driver, toss drivers/convoyers etc), and according to the SAHPA Inc Rules 1, 2, 3, 4 under the SAHPA Inc Constitution. Member clubs and SAHPA members are bound by these rules.

### **7.3. Rain, or Fog, or Heat and or High Winds**

7.3.1. Pigeons must not be released away from the home loft (toss training or race release) into rain or fog.

7.3.2. Heat - When temperature conditions are expected to be above 30C degrees at any location enroute to release point or flying home, a holdover shall be declared, or the race cancelled.

7.3.3. Release Time - During the months of May to August pigeons are to be released as follows:

7.3.3.1. Under clear sky conditions – release a minimum of 15 minutes after gazetted sunrise for the area.

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

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

7.3.4.1. Under clear sky conditions – release at the discretion of the release panel chairman and convoyer.

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

## **8. PERFORMANCE ENHANCING DRUGS: DRUG FREE RACING**

- 8.1. A person must not administer any performance enhancing drug to a racing pigeon. This includes (but not limited to) any of the anabolic steroids or corticosteroids or other 'stimulant drug'. Any pigeons found sick or dead at the release site can, at the discretion of the Management Committee, be sent for analysis. Where any performance enhancing substance is detected, the owner(s) will be held responsible – and be liable for all testing costs and SAHPA penalties (for bringing the sport into disrepute).
- 8.2. Any person found guilty of administering performance enhancing drugs to their birds or being an accomplice to administering performance enhancing drugs to race pigeons may be prosecuted under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 2001.
- 8.3. The SAHPA COM reserves the right to have member's birds tested for any performance drugs. As such
  - 8.3.1. Routine tests may be conducted at any time and any members refusing to have his/her birds tested will be in breach of this rule and will be automatically disqualified from racing until such time as his/her birds have been proven to be free of any performance enhancing substances.
  - 8.3.2. In the case of a clearly positive result all costs shall be borne by the offender. If the result is negative all charges in respect of the testing will be borne by the SAHPA.
  - 8.3.3. Medical treatment may not be used as justification should the result prove positive.
  - 8.3.4. Once the test has been finalized and the result established, a copy of the result shall be forwarded to the member/s in question and another copy to be placed in the hands of the SAHPA COM.
- 8.4. Procedure for Sample Preparation
  - 8.4.1. A sample shall be taken by a minimum of two SAHPA COM nominated persons in the presence of the owner and or his nominee.
  - 8.4.2. Only the authorized test kit supplied by an authorised testing laboratory shall be used.
  - 8.4.3. The procedure for sample collection shall as per the authorised laboratory instructions.
  - 8.4.4. Samples for testing are to be sent by first class post to the authorised testing laboratory.

## 9. THE PIGEON LOFT

- 9.1. **Dimensions** - Pigeon lofts are constructed in many shapes and sizes to suit or fit individual circumstances within a conventional residential block. However, the owner of a pigeon must ensure the following minimum standards are met:

9.1.1. **The Race Loft** - The minimum space required for each bird must be 0.092 m 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 3 1800mm(height) = 6.804m<sup>3</sup> divided by 0.092m<sup>3</sup> = maximum 74 pigeons and minimum 81 box perches.

9.2. **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 wellbeing – an attached flyout is recommended.

9.2.1. **Stock Loft Breed Boxes** - breeding compartments are to be provided. Required minimum dimensions (for individual pairs) for breeding compartments are 550 mm wide x 450 mm high x 500 mm deep. Adequate space to maintain health and wellbeing of pigeons within the breeding loft is calculated as two and one half (2.5) times the provision for race birds. The Maximum allowable number is calculated from the above example as follows:

9.2.1.1. Loft dimensions 1800 mm wide x 2100 mm long x 1800 mm high = 6.804m<sup>3</sup> divided by (0.092m<sup>3</sup> x 2.5) space allocated for racing birds = 30 pigeons, (or 15 mated pairs) for the space provided.

9.2.2. **The Ideal Loft** - The following is provided only as a guide but reflects the hallmarks of a well organised and well-constructed pigeon race loft. There are several 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 building lot so the front of the loft faces away from prevailing winter winds and rain, whilst making full advantage of access to winter sun.

9.2.3. **Ventilation** There needs to be adequate air exchange within a pigeon race 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 ‘witch 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.

### **9.3. Preferred Construction (Recommended)**

9.3.1. Lofts constructed prior to this Code of Practice being enacted (but approved as ‘suitable for use’ by an experienced SAHPA member) may not conform to this Code of Practice. New or upgraded lofts should be constructed in accordance with the following minimum standards and in accordance with local council government requirements.

9.3.2. **Off Ground Lofts.** All new lofts constructed off ground shall have a minimum clearance height from ground to floor level of 200mm, allowing for free flow of air under floor. Floor areas may be either of two configurations:

9.3.2.1. Trafficable mesh grating floor, allowing droppings to pass through for collection below floor level.

9.3.2.2. Trafficable timber floor with moisture absorptive qualities and for regular ease of scrape cleaning eg chip board, or ply wood.

9.3.3. **On Ground Lofts** - Where possible all new lofts constructed on-ground should 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.

9.3.4. **Flyout 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.

9.3.5. **Insulation** - where external cladding of a loft consists of brick or metal such lofts may be internally lined with plywood, or chipboard, or other heat retaining materials. For prevention of condensation and general dampness, all metal roofs should be insulated.

10. **LOFT CLEANING** - Loft floors are to be cleaned on a regular basis – protective equipment (PPE) should be utilised by the person cleaning the loft – face mask and dust coat. This includes lofts with ‘deep litter’ – these lofts **must be kept dry** and raked regularly to ensure cleanliness.

11. **FEED AND WATER** -The owner of race pigeons 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 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 always. 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 key section of our code of practice.

12.1. The SAHPA has a website facility and a ring secretary to report lost, strayed, or injured race pigeons.

12.2. The SAHPA ring secretary shall monitor the reporting facilities, collect the race bird details and location and advise the relevant SAHPA owner within 24hrs

12.3. The contacted SAHPA member is required to contact the person reporting the race pigeon location and arrange for collection within 24hrs.

12.4. The contacted SAHPA member shall confirm with the ring secretary that collection or transfer has been completed.

12.5. Non-adherence to these procedures relating to lost bird acknowledgment and collection will be viewed very seriously and may result in suspension or cancellation of membership.

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

## 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.