

Why bull riding is no longer acceptable in South Australia

The rodeo event of bull riding poses many animal welfare risks. Community expectations about the treatment of animals have moved on, with the broader public now understanding that deliberately stressing animals to make them perform is no longer acceptable.

RSPCA South Australia is strongly opposed to any form of entertainment, like bull riding, that deliberately stresses animals and puts them at risk of physical injury and death. Our concerns are outlined below.

Bulls in bull riding events buck as an instinctive response to fear, discomfort and pain.

Riders in bull riding events use steel spurs to provoke extreme bucking. This practise is encouraged by the point scoring system because the goal is to make the bulls buck as wildly as possible, for the entertainment of the crowd.

The Professional Bull Riders (PBR) Australia website states: “Extra points may be awarded for style, such as spurring (the rider lifts his leg away from the bull and returns it) which demonstrates complete control.”



ABOVE: An example of bull riding spurs.

In addition to spurs, flank straps tightened around the very sensitive underbelly of rodeo horses and cattle to provoke bucking as an instinctive fear response.

Horses and cattle are prey animals and their reaction to being ridden in this aggressive way is the same as their reaction to being attacked by a predator, a situation where they are subject to increased stress, anxiety and panic.

It is not uncommon to see horses and bulls hurl themselves at solid objects in order to rid themselves of the rider. Only when the rider has been thrown or dismounts and the flank straps loosened do they quieten down. Some rodeo animals are so distressed that they then charge the rider on the ground, further demonstrating that a very strong 'fight' stress response has been activated.

Bull riding contradicts best practise stock handling expertise.

No agricultural purpose is served or “bushmanship” showcased by tightening a flank strap around a bull’s flanks, then straddling and spurring it so that it “performs” for a crowd. This treatment of bulls completely contradicts the age-old principles of bovine husbandry, which is always to minimise stress and reduce the risk of injury to these valuable animals.

The [Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Cattle](#) state: “Cattle should be handled quietly and calmly, taking into account their flight zone and natural herding instinct to minimise stress during handling.”

There is nothing quiet or calm about rodeos.

Laws do not adequately protect animals used in rodeos.

Sadly, rodeos are currently permitted under South Australian laws. Due to the nature of rodeo events, they will always cause animal suffering, particularly mental stress. Therefore, the only way to protect animals is for people to reject rodeos by not attending or through a legal prohibition.

The Australian Capital Territory banned rodeos in 1992 and animal welfare concerns also prompted bans in the United Kingdom and in some parts of Europe and in some jurisdictions in the United States.

Bull riding is not an Australian tradition.

Bull riding is part of American culture. However, even if bull riding were an Australian tradition, this should never serve as an excuse for cruelty.

Bull riding is out of date.

Longevity does not exempt anything from moral scrutiny. Many activities once regarded as legitimate forms of entertainment (for example: dog fighting, cock fighting and bear baiting) are now illegal because changing societal values deemed such cruelty unacceptable.

High-level care outside the arena does not excuse cruelty inside the arena.

The care these bulls receive outside the arena is not in question. It's what happens to them inside the arena that is inhumane.

These bulls are not athletes.

Referring to the bulls as "athletes" does not recognise that they are unable to choose to participate in these events, unlike the riders who can decide to compete.

Seriously injured bulls do not receive the same consideration as human athletes. A human athlete, for example, is never forced to walk unaided from the sports field with a broken leg.

The fact that the riders are hurt more often than the bulls is irrelevant.

Humans choose to participate in sport and accept the risks. Physical injury is not the only way that animals are hurt – mental trauma is just as important. These animals have no control over their environment or capacity to protect themselves from injury.

Provoking animals' fear responses is not an acceptable way to raise funds.

Most people would agree that causing any animal, including farm animals, to suffer just for the sake of entertainment and profit is morally wrong. Humane ways do exist to involve animals in entertainment, while showcasing genuine, empathetic animal handling skills.

We recognise the community fundraising aspect to rodeos, but this is no justification for an activity like bull riding that deliberately (and with the aid of spurs and flank straps*) provoke animals' fear responses to force them to perform. Many communities raise funds without using animals or by only using animals humanely.

(*Professional Bull Riders Australia says it does not use electric prods to provoke animals at its events, however there is no doubt that they have been used on occasion at some rodeos in Australia to provoke animals just prior to their release from the chute. Riders often spur animals while still in the chute. They do this to provoke the animals to buck aggressively on release.)

No one is entitled to profit from the inhumane treatment of animals.

The organisers of rodeo events, including bull riding, profit from provoking the fear response of animals, forcing them to "perform" for a crowd. This 'fight' stress response is increased further by the routine use of spurs and flank straps.

As progressive companies continue to seek 'ethical' sponsorship opportunities, events such as rodeos are not considered to align with brand strategies or with reputation aimed to meet community expectations regarding the treatment of animals.

Rodeos do not engender empathy and compassion towards animals.

As we try to educate our children to show respect and kindness to animals, rodeos completely erode this concept by permitting animals to be treated inhumanely for the sake of entertainment.

The way animals are used in rodeos demonstrates a complete disregard for their safety and welfare, which can have a profound impact on how children may interact with animals in other situations. We should make every effort to nurture children's innate affinity with animals by showing kindness to all animals in all situations.

Last updated: January 3, 2018