

BACKGROUND PAPER: WHY ANIMAL LIBERATION QLD (ALQ) AND RSPCA QLD ARE CALLING FOR THE RODEO EVENT OF CALF ROPING TO BE BANNED IN QUEENSLAND

1. WHAT IS CALF ROPING?

Calf roping (known as 'rope and tie') is a timed event held at many Queensland rodeos. In this event, a calf is released from a chute into the arena. Calves are trained to participate and typically start to flee immediately. The animal is chased by a contestant on horseback and roped around its neck. Even though it is recommended that specialised equipment be used to minimise the effect of roping, calves are still often jerked violently to stop. The contestant then dismounts and runs to the calf. It is caught and picked up, thrown down onto its side and three of its legs are tied together. The calf is then released to trot away. An experienced cowboy can carry out the rope and tie quickly and efficiently (7 – 10 seconds), however not all contestants are as experienced and may take much longer.

2. WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS ABOUT CALF ROPING?

- a) **SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE SHOWS CALF ROPING CAUSES STRESS:** A recently published (April 2016) University of Queensland scientific study ⁽¹⁾ has shown calf roping causes stress to the calves. Researchers found increased concentrations of stress hormones in calves' blood after roping, as well as behavioural evidence, and concluded that the roping event is stressful for both experienced and naïve calves, which has implications for animal welfare. The scientists stated that the results of this study suggest that the experience is an aversive one for the calves.
- b) **OBSERVATION STRONGLY INDICATES CALF ROPING CAUSES STRESS:**
- I. Upon release from the chute, calves immediately run away across the arena suggesting they are fleeing from what they perceive to be an unpleasant and fearful situation
 - II. Calves frequently vocalise loudly during the process of being caught and picked up, prior to being dropped or slammed down on their sides
 - III. The calves frequently struggle to extricate themselves from the ropes after being tied up
 - IV. Upon being untied, the calves immediately get up and run towards the exit gate, definitely indicative of a wish to escape from the activity as soon as possible
- c) **THERE IS LIKELIHOOD OF PAIN, INJURY AND DEATH**
- I. **INJURIES AND DEATH: (A)** In dismissing an appeal against a successful 1982 RSPCA cruelty prosecution in relation to calf roping at a Melbourne rodeo (one calf had to be euthanased due to its injuries), Judge Nixon said: 'In my view there is ample evidence of cruelty. Dr Meischke said that the calves were ... light-weight, under age, prone to damage and could suffer strangulation around the neck and major blood vessels; they were under stress, breathing was at a higher rate, the tissues in a fall when seized would cause sudden bruising and sustain whiplash akin to a motor car accident, and bruising would continue ten (10) to fourteen (14) days and pain two (2) to five (5) days. Muscular injury to each of these animals that were roped was significant and at a speed of 30 k.p.h. in unusual circumstances, and brought to a sudden jerk.'
(B) In Australia, rodeo is a totally self-regulated industry. Various rodeo associations operate their own rodeo programs around the country, but there is currently no national database of injuries. Whilst the industry states that rodeo injury rates are low, it is not currently possible to accurately verify these claims. Furthermore, some of the injuries caused by calf roping may not be evident immediately but may instead show up

after a few days and not be recorded as rodeo-related or even not be apparent until later in life.

- II. **PAIN:** In his testimony before the Board of Supervisors in San Francisco, USA on Nov 4, 1999, John Gromley, Stock Contractor of the Year (2000) in California stated ⁽²⁾, “When a calf is running and he’s running full bore, and the rope stops him really fast...if you put that around my neck, it would hurt me, so I know it hurts the calves. We need to do things to clean it up...” San Antonio Livestock Exposition Executive Director Keith Martin, in an interview in the San Antonio Express on Feb 6, 2000, agrees that calf roping is inhumane. Says Martin, “Do I think it hurts the calf? Sure I do. I’m not stupid.”

d) THE INEQUALITY AND BULLYING OF THE ‘CONTEST’ NO LONGER MEETS SOCIETY’S STANDARDS

- I. The animals used in calf roping are very young, often only two to three months old. The community generally expects that baby animals will be treated especially kindly, but the treatment of calves in this event is instead quite brutal. If kittens and puppies were afforded similar treatment, there would be outrage and possibly prosecution. Calf roping has many parallels to bullying situations: a much more powerful individual exerting power over another and causing fear. Given that calf roping is a mere entertainment, this violent event should no longer be tolerated by a community wanting a high standard of animal welfare.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- Calf roping is already banned in Victoria and South Australia. All rodeo events are banned in the Australian Capital Territory.
- In 2012, the then-President of the Australian Professional Rodeo Association (APRA), Steve Hilton, admitted in an interview ⁽³⁾ that it was just a matter of time before calf roping as an event slips off the cards at APRA-regulated rodeos in Queensland and Victoria, because of animal welfare concerns.

A QUEENSLAND BAN ON CALF ROPING IS REQUIRED FOR ANIMAL WELFARE REASONS:

Queensland holds a great many rodeos. It is even more imperative therefore that a high level of welfare be afforded the animal participants at our rodeos. The event of calf roping is inherently cruel. A statewide ban on this rodeo event is the best solution to save many Queensland calves from future distress, pain, injuries, and possibly even death. These animals deserve this consideration.

References:

¹ Behavioral and Physiological Responses of Calves to Marshalling and Roping in a Simulated Rodeo Event *Animals* 2016, 6, 30; doi:10.3390/ani6050030

² Extract from letter by veterinarian Dr. Peggy W Larson published in the Journal of American Veterinary Medical Association JAVMA, Vol 220, No. 2, January 15, 2002

³ *Rodeo City* by Kimberley Sakjewski in QWeekend magazine, Courier Mail, 2012
