

**VICTORIAN
CODE OF PRACTICE
FOR THE
KEEPING & RACING OF PIGEONS**

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PREFACE

The Victorian Code of Practice for the Keeping and Racing of Pigeons “the Code” was produced by the Victorian Racing Pigeon Association (VHA, VRPU, WPF and GMPF) for the welfare of Victorian racing pigeons. Where an Association or Club adopts this Code as part of its rules or regulations all members and affiliates are bound by its requirements. It must be studied carefully and is to be read in conjunction with the Constitution and Rules of the Association or Club, hereinafter referred to as “the Association.”

The Code is based on the original Code developed by the Racing Pigeon Federations of Western Australia that was modified by the South Australian Homing Pigeon Association.

Pigeon owners, who are not members of the Association are not bound by this Code. The Association cannot be held responsible for any actions, or behavior, by non-members of the Association.

The principal effect of this Code is to ensure the welfare of the pigeons remains the prime consideration in all activities associated with the sport of racing pigeons.

The main issues the Code focuses on are:-

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

POLICY

Under the broad umbrella of pigeon welfare, the Association identifies certain aspects and practices which are inherent to the operation of this Code.

The Racing Pigeon is a domestic animal and occupies an appropriate place alongside other domesticated species, within the general Australian Community.

Notwithstanding the need for adequate exercise required to enhance the health and performance of the racing pigeon, as a domestic animal, the Racing Pigeon should be regulated sufficiently to ensure its place within the urban community environment. As a consequence:-

- a) The Racing Pigeon should be exercised daily, sufficient to ensure its fitness for the purpose intended.

With the exception of birds owned by fanciers living away from built up metropolitan housing Estates, or, for when pigeons are returning from racing and training, free flight exercise is to be on a planned basis. Duration typically from 30 - 90 minutes, and performed to a maximum of twice daily.

- b) Free non-flight time, at any time, is to be conducted under close supervision by the owner. Other than for planned free flight and non-flight times, all racing pigeons are to be confined within their home loft. Persistent fielding and/or roof sitting habits are prohibited.
- c) The Racing Pigeon should be housed within a loft, designed to provide shelter and comfortable accommodation for its inhabitants, 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 and so that it maintains the public dignity and image sought by the Pigeon racing fraternity.

1. DUTY OF CARE TO PIGEONS

People who own or are responsible for the care of racing pigeons have a fundamental duty to take all reasonable steps to ensure the welfare of those pigeons.

2. ILL TREATMENT OF PIGEONS

The Association defines ill treatment of pigeons as injuring, tormenting or torturing, causing unnecessary pain, stress, neglect or suffering whether through overcrowding, lack of food or water or otherwise. These acts are considered by the Association as unacceptable treatment to pigeons and a breach of the Code.

3. ACCEPTANCE AND INSPECTION OF PIGEONS FOR COMPETITION

- 3.1 The Association acknowledges the depth of member expertise in pigeon care from which suitably experienced personnel for the inspection of pigeons submitted for competition can be appointed.
- 3.2 The Association will appoint persons annually to act as Stewards for the inspection of any pigeons submitted for competition.
- 3.3 Pigeons must be referred to the Steward by handlers if they have any suspicion that the pigeon is not of sound health and physical well being to successfully participate in the race entered.
- 3.4 The Steward retains the right to refuse an entry, without challenge, on the grounds of poor health, physical impairment, or neglect, if he considers its opportunities to return safely are impaired or the pigeon is a health risk to other entries. Such refusals are to be documented by the Association for action as necessary.
- 3.5 Poor pigeon health can be described as a pigeon having symptoms such as a general lethargy, breathing difficulties, nasal and eye discharge, pigeon pox lesions and the like.
- 3.6 Neglect can be described as the pigeon being presented in a soiled and generally dishevelled condition and/or harbouring external parasites, or inadequately healed wounds.
- 3.7 Physical impairment is intended to cover any condition, which is likely to diminish the chances of a racing pigeon to successfully complete a race entered such as injuries, scaring, bruising or insufficient feathering.

4. TRANSPORT OF PIGEONS

- 4.1 The carriage of pigeons is to be made in baskets or units that allows for adequate air exchange and for the pigeons to view their outside surroundings.
- 4.2 The Association recognises private pigeon carry baskets, crates or units are constructed in many sizes to suit individual circumstances, such as vehicle configuration.
- 4.3 The minimum height for all containers for the carriage of pigeons, whether owned by the Association., or otherwise, is 21 cm (8") and is exclusive of all wire and plastic mesh bottom inserts.
- 4.4 The space allowance per pigeon will vary according to the time such confinement is in force, the distance of the race or toss and the need for feeding and watering of the pigeons *en route* and at the liberation site.
- 4.5 This space allowance relates to pigeons being taken used for private training, Association training and/or racing, or for the conveyance of pigeons to the clubrooms for entry into competition.
- 4.6 For daytime confinement of short duration of up to two hours generally accepted space allowances should be respected eg. 15 bird basket no more than 15 birds.
- 4.7 Overnight confinement of 19 hours or less duration, and/or the race journey is 350 kilometres or less - measured from the loft of the longest distance competitor, allow a minimum of 250 cm² per pigeon. For competition events, the confinement period commences at the club starting time for acceptance of pigeons for entry.
- 4.8 Confinement in excess of 19 hours or 350 kilometres, allow a minimum of 300 cm² per pigeon per basket, so as to ensure the pigeons can achieve the normal reclining position, typical for extended travel.
- 4.9 An example of permissible pigeons per tier measuring 1200cm x 900cm (4 feet x 3 feet) is as follows:-
 - Friday night basketing (one night confined in tier) – 40.
 - Thursday night basketing (two nights confined in tier) – 35.
 - Wednesday night basketing (three nights, or more, confined in tier) – 25.

5. FEED AND WATER PROVISIONS UNDER RACE CONDITIONS

- 5.1 The Association considers there exists a balance between the need to feed and water the pigeons *en route* and at the liberation site, to sustain reserves of energy to complete the journey, and the need to avoid the detrimental effect, of commencing a journey on a full crop. On this basis it is determined, that for up to 19 hours confinement, *en route*, involving an overnight journey, and the race is 350 kilometres or less, measured from the longest competitor, no feed provisions are mandatory. Provision must be made for the supply of water to pigeons competing in all races.
- 5.2 Where the confinement is expected to exceed 19 hours or the journey is in excess of 350 kilometres provision is to be made to feed and water the pigeons.
- 5.3 When feeding and watering of the pigeons is required, the Association shall arrange for entries to be accepted at such a time that will ensure that the Transporter will arrive at the liberation site by at least 1600 hours on the day before the event is to start. In these cases, feed and water procedures are to commence as soon as practicable after arrival. The feed is to remain in front of the pigeons for a minimum of one hour and not more than three hours, whereupon it shall be withdrawn. The water shall remain available for the pigeons continuously until at least one hour before liberation.
- 5.4 Feed and water *en route* is to be given by 1600 hours daily where the journey time to the liberation site exceeds the 1600-hour arrival time.

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

- 6.1 The Association will appoint annually Release Officers and Official Liberator/Conveyor who shall be responsible for liberations.
- 6.2 The Race Release/Liberation Officer(s) and the Liberator/Conveyor will have control over the welfare of the pigeons including their collection, transport and liberation.
- 6.3 The above-mentioned Officers are empowered to cancel or postpone the race or alter the race point if considered necessary for the welfare of the pigeons. They shall direct the Liberator/Conveyor to make whatever adjustments are necessary for the welfare of the pigeons and ensure members are notified.

6.4 The appointed Liberator/Conveyor has responsibility for the release of pigeons, at the liberation site, in such a manner as to avoid potential for injury. The authority to release pigeons, in all races, rests with the above-mentioned officers. The Liberator/Conveyor shall contact a pre-arranged and nominated officer at least one hour prior to the release, to obtain a report on route conditions and discuss local conditions and receive approval to liberate. After liberation, the Liberator/Conveyor will again contact the nominated officer to provide details of the liberation for announcement to competitors and will record and report details of conditions along the line of flight home.

6.5 Where the liberation is delayed because of adverse weather conditions, the liberation will be delayed until the conditions for release are appropriate provided that where this occurs too late in the day pigeons will be held for release the next day.

On the second day, the responsible Officer(s) can decide to:-

- a) Release the pigeons at the time scheduled for the previous day.
- b) Bring the pigeons back to an alternative liberation site and reconsider the situation at that site.
- c) Determine the possibility, or advisability, of holding birds at the release site for another day.
- d) Hold the pigeons at the site, until it becomes evident the race must be declared cancelled and the pigeons returned home for collection by their respective owners, or to a place near home determined for a safe release.

6.6 Rain, fog, adverse winds or excessive heat or cold at the liberation site or expected to be encountered along the line of flight back to the home loft interferes with the pigeons orientation and ability to home. Pigeons therefore are not to be liberated away from their home lofts, for training or racing, in such adverse conditions. Liberators or members are to wait until such conditions abate or abort the liberation and revert to the aforementioned procedures.

7. PERFORMANCE ENHANCING DRUGS: DRUG FREE RACING

- 7.1 Because of the significant time delay between the entry of pigeons for a race and actual time of liberation, many performance enhancing drugs illegally used in other contests are fortunately rendered in-effectual for pigeon racing. It is however, policy that pigeon racing remains free of any administered performance enhancing drugs and this has particular reference to the use of any of the corticosteroids. Any competitor found to have entered a pigeon administered with any performance enhancing drugs will be held responsible and be dealt with by the Association. Any pigeons found sick or dead within the baskets at liberation can be sent for analysis. Where any inappropriate performance enhancing substance is detected, the owner(s) will be held responsible and the matter dealt with by the Association.
- 7.2 The Association shall have the right to conduct random testing of droppings for the presence of cortisone. If a flyer refuses to produce a bird for testing the bird shall be deemed to have produced a positive test result.

8. THE PIGEON "LOFT"

- 8.1 The Association recognises pigeon lofts are constructed in many sizes to suit or fit individual circumstances, such as available space within a conventional residential block, and it is not intended to interfere with this freedom. Instead, the Association encourages members and affiliates to be aware that to participate in the sport of pigeon racing as a member of the Association is a privilege. This privilege may be revoked in the event a loft housing pigeons belonging to a member is not maintained and improved from time to time, in such a manner as to keep the public image of the sport intact, and the amenity of neighbours and indeed the health and welfare of the pigeons foremost.
- 8.2 The racing loft houses birds which are generally released for exercised once or twice daily. Such lofts need not conform to any specific size or design except to comply with health and amenity requirements and to local council laws.
- 8.3 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 lofts, are not able to be freed for exercise. These pigeons require more space than race pigeons for their good health and well being. The stock loft shall generally be of similar configuration as the racing loft, except, in the place of box perches, breeding compartments are provided. Typical dimensions for breeding compartments are 550 mm wide x 450 mm high x 500 mm deep (22" x 18" x 20").

Adequate space to maintain health and well being of pigeons within the breeding loft may be calculated by the following formula:

Loft dimensions 1800 mm wide x 2100 mm long x 1800 mm high (6' x 7' x 6') = 6804000 cm³ divided by (92000 cm³ x 2.5) = 30 pigeons, (or 15 mated pairs) for the space provided. For the same sized race loft no more than 40 race pigeons should be housed.

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

The loft needs to be dry and warm over the winter months. For the summer heat the loft needs to have ventilation such as flaps and ventilators that can be adjusted and closed off as the winter approaches. The loft needs to be designed 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.

- 8.5 Box perches are the standard method of providing perching facilities for racing pigeons. These must be of sufficient dimensions to allow the bird to comfortably rest. Alternate styles of perching may be suitable, particularly "V" perching. "Plank" or "dowel" perching as seen in small bird aviaries, is unsuitable for racing pigeons, and is to be avoided unless it forms part of an aviary attachment to the loft.

- 8.6 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 (4") along the full length of the loft, is to be provided. Alternatively, a 'witches hat' type chimney or similar ventilator or extractor should be placed centrally within the roof to effect the required air exchange and to promote good health and comfort for the pigeons.

- 8.7 It is recognised that in some municipalities regulations exist for pigeon lofts. Where these regulations are in conflict with the Code the Association will make appropriate representation to those authorities, seeking their cooperation and assistance in the interests of overall conformity.

- 8.8 All new lofts constructed off-ground, shall have a minimum height from the ground to floor level of 200 mm (8"). allowing for free flow of air under floor unless the floor construction is a concrete slab.
- 8.9 Floor Areas may be either:-
- (a) Trafficable mesh grating floor, allowing for droppings to pass through for collection from below floor level.
 - (b) Trafficable timber floor with suitable moisture absorptive qualities, and for regular ease of cleaning eg. chip board, plywood.
 - (c) Concrete slab floor (where concrete is utilised, a heavy-duty plastic must be laid underneath at pouring).
 - (d) For the health of the pigeons, external open aviaries and or sun yards are desirable.
- 8.10 For the welfare and comfort of pigeons, where external cladding of a loft consists of brick, metal, or cement sheeting, such lofts shall ideally be internally lined with plywood, chipboard, or other heat retaining materials. For prevention of condensation dampness, all metal roofs should be insulated.
- 8.11 Members should aim to be consistently improving their pigeon lofts.

9. LOFT CLEANING

- 9.1 Where above floor compartment droppings remain permanently dry and in a semi powdered form and are of 25 mm (1") thickness or less, these are not considered a health hazard to either pigeons or humans.
- 9.2 Deep litter, unless of a substance(s) approved by the Association, is not encouraged. Where however this method of loft floor dressing is utilised, the loft must be designed with sufficient weather protection to ensure the litter can remain permanently dry. This material must be regularly raked over to maintain both neat appearance and the biological activity with aerobic breakdown of organic matter.
- 9.3 Loft floors are to be cleaned and droppings removed or raked over as above on a minimum basis of once per week. Removed droppings are to be placed in a covered receptacle in a dry location protected from access to flies and vermin, prior to removal from the property site or appropriate garden use as fertiliser.

10. FEED AND WATER

10.1 The Association recognises 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 including peas, maize, sorghum, wheat, oats, rice, barley, pellet preparations and small grains. The normal feed regime for racing pigeons is twice daily given after exercise. Feed is to be kept dry and in vermin proof containers and not left in the lofts overnight.

10.2 Clean water in the home loft, available at all times, with or without medications, or vitamin and mineral additives, is essential. Water should be changed daily.

11. NEIGHBOURS

A member shall attempt to resolve any neighbours concerns or complaints in respect of the pigeons such as, time of exercise around the loft, and do all that is reasonably possible to avoid conflicts arising.

12. STRAY BIRD MANAGEMENT

The Association recognises appropriate management of lost or injured pigeons belonging to members is a critical part of our objectives to foster the welfare of our pigeons. Failure to report a stray pigeon or collect reported pigeons will be viewed very seriously will result in a fine, suspension or cancellation of membership.

13. LOCAL COUNCIL LAWS

Members shall make themselves aware of local council laws and planning laws related to keeping racing pigeons and ensure that their lofts, cleaning, food storage, exercise times and other council requirements are met at all times.

14. PENALTY FOR BREACH OF CODE

Where this Code is adopted by the Association as part of its rules or regulations a breach of the Code, depending on the severity of the breach, will result in either a fine, suspension or expulsion from membership.

