



REPORT ON THE NOVEMBER ABANDONMENTS AT AWAPUNI & RICCARTON

1. The NZTR Management and Board considered reports provided on the respective abandonments at Awapuni on Friday 11 November & Riccarton NZ Cup Meeting held Saturday 12 November.
2. Reports were received and reviewed from Club, RIB, NZSTI, Independent Track Manager and Irrigation specialists.
3. The respective Clubs, RACE & Canterbury JC were provided with the NZTR Board findings of these reports.

AWAPUNI – FRIDAY 11 NOVEMBER

1. The NZTR Management & Board found that this abandonment should have been reasonably avoided by the application of irrigation earlier in the lead up to race week given the early forecast for rain on raceday.
2. The NZTR Track Preparation Policy Notes - *“NZTR recognises the preparation of the racing surface is not always capable of precise control, particularly having regard to weather conditions leading up to and on the race day itself, taking into account the particular characteristics of the track e.g. soil type, soil moisture, grass cover and quality of the irrigation system.*

The purpose of this Policy is to set minimum expectations as to how a prudent racing club and track manager manages those issues.”

3. An NZSTI report commissioned by NZTR and presented to RACE in the wake of the Trentham Abandonment in December 2021 stated:

Can the risk be eliminated completely?

In our opinion the risk of this sort of thing happening cannot be eliminated completely if Good 3 / Dead 4 tracks are targeted because most of our tracks are soil (not sand) based. On race day, the soil has to be dry enough for the track to be a Good 3. Inevitably that moisture content is a lot drier (and hence the soil harder) than what the moisture content will be in the surface if a certain amount of rain occurs in the hours before racing. Laboratory analysis of the moisture content of soil cores taken from the Trentham track clearly illustrates this. On soil tracks, if such a moisture differential is present, it will always equate to a risk of slipperiness.

The problem does not occur on sand-based tracks because sands do not react in the same way as soils when these conditions occur. In the longer term, incorporating sand into the surface of our soil tracks can lower the risk of this occurring.

On soil tracks, one way to manage the problem is to not target Good 3 or Dead 4 tracks at times when rainfall is difficult to predict accurately.

4. A breakdown in communication between Track Management resulted in the track starting the week in the Good range with an indifferent weather forecast including drying conditions later in the week.
5. We have requested and been assured RACE have put in place further protocols to ensure this does not occur going forward.

6. The issue was exacerbated by the current Irrigation system at Awapuni which is currently undergoing testing to ensure it is evenly distributing irrigation and to what level to the entire track.

The following recommendations/ actions were identified by NZTR Management:

1. Confirmation requested from RACE as to their structure with regards Track management and who is accountable, as this still remains unclear and is currently being reviewed post abandonment.
2. RACE to provide clarity with regards the irrigation system and an understanding as to the level and consistency of the irrigation being applied, the reported amounts do not appear to be data based, testing is now being undertaken.
3. As agreed, and previously advised to mitigate issues the track needs to be managed "in" to the preferred going through the week, not "out" (starting with a good track) as this is fraught with issues especially when rain on day forecast, especially given the irrigation system they are currently using has its limitations.
4. Assurances that the communication issues experienced in the lead up to the abandonment have been remedied by RACE and the required structures and accountabilities are now in place.
5. As part of the review from NZSTI post Trentham December 2021 abandonment advises "On soil tracks, one way to manage the problem is to not target Good 3 or Dead 4 tracks at times when rainfall is difficult to predict accurately."

RICCARTON – SATURDAY 12 NOVEMBER

1. After considering reports from the CJC, RIB, NZSTI, Irrigation Consultants & Independent Track Manager the NZTR Board considered that the main contributing factor to the abandonment was the turf on the Riccarton Racecourse.
2. Combined with an inconsistent Irrigation system and compaction has created greasy areas.
3. An NZSTI report commissioned post-Raceday identified the following conclusions:

The key points noted from this investigation were:

- 3.1. *A significant moisture deficit had developed and was present in the region when this incident occurred.*
- 3.2. *This means that maintaining moisture in the track had been reliant mainly on irrigation for some time prior to Cup Day*
- 3.3. *It was evident from moisture meter data and the visual appearance of the grass on the track, that the irrigation system applications to the track have poor uniformity resulting in some areas that are significantly drier than others, despite regular irrigation applications.*
- 3.4. *The infiltration rate into the track was found to be variable and very low in some locations (these variations occur within short distances).*
- 3.5. *A lot of matted turf growth with long grass stems lying on the surface of the track was evident. Where it was very dense, this matted material would have slowed the rate of drying so that any excess of water present at the surface would not have dried as quickly as would normally be expected.*
- 3.6. *Given these various factors it is reasonable to conclude that the combination of dry patches, dense matted growth on the surface and localized low infiltration rates could produce slippery patches on the track in the event that a certain amount of rain or irrigation was applied to the track prior to the race day.*

- 3.7. *That combination would result in excess moisture in the surface layer creating a thin layer of soft, slippery soil above harder, drier soil beneath.*
- 3.8. *It is expected that the programme in Cup week complicates things because racing on Saturday, Wednesday and Saturday limits the windows when irrigation can be applied and most likely does not allow ideal amounts and timing of irrigation to be applied. It was identified that the turf was growing horizontally along the surface of the track with stem length of 300mm. In areas where this grass mat was very dense it created a slippery layer underneath.*
4. The track was noticeably inconsistent which was confirmed in all reports, both by the appearance of the turf and the hoof imprints.
5. Whilst a contributing factor to this issue would have been irrigating in less-than-ideal conditions to maintain the track through Cup week, the inconsistency also pointed to the fact that the irrigation was not uniform.
6. Testing by Wai Design revealed that pop ups were not operating consistently with a difference in performance of up to 40%. The CJC have undertaken a review of the irrigation system to improve the uniformity.
7. The lack of a suitably aggressive annual renovation program was identified as a contributing factor to the deterioration of the turf and track profile.
8. Riccarton is currently undergoing a full turf renovation with all grass being removed down to 30mm, scarifying, sub-soiling and verti-draining. The track is currently being cored, under sown and fertilised.
9. The Club have also been advised and have agreed that a more aggressive annual renovation program would help ensure the issue does not develop again in the future.
10. Further to this the CJC are reviewing their mowing schedule, turf grooming and equipment which may also have contributed to the turf issues.

NZTR Decision

1. Given the findings for both venues NZTR Management & Board concluded that both Club's should have reasonably avoided these issues.
2. A significant level of Funding has been withheld from both Clubs, whilst this does not make up for the cost to the industry it does signal to the Clubs that a greater level of professionalism is expected.

Moving Forward

1. As previously advised several protocols to have been put in place to further support Clubs to ensure safe racing surfaces are provided on race day, with a jockey feedback App now operational to earlier identify both positive and negative trends around tracks prior to these becoming issues, including identifying the optimum state when a track is performing at its best.
2. Increased communication with Clubs prior to race week and providing increased feedback post-Raceday.
3. These abandonments have also further clarified the need for urgent investment in Club Infrastructure.
4. The NZTR Board have identified areas to utilise the \$10m Infrastructure fund to ensure the tracks and irrigation systems at our venues are fit for purpose given the increasing demands on these systems to ensure race days can proceed in all weather conditions.

5. The importance of aggressive annual turf and de-compaction work has also been further communicated to the Track Managers and this will continue through the Regional Field days.
6. Increased educational material that will be supplied by NZSTI through Fact Sheets and online tutorials these will be continually refined to identify the most appropriate format to ensure the best results.

Darin Balcombe

Chief Operating Officer

New Zealand Thoroughbred Racing