



**A Review of New Zealand Thoroughbred Racing
Handicapping Policy and Procedures**

Mark Webbey, May 2011

Background

New Zealand Thoroughbred Racing introduced a ratings based handicapping system in August 2004. In the subsequent 6 ½ years several policy adjustments have been implemented and adopted by the Board, these changes have produced increased transparency and efficiency within the handicapping process.

Introduction

The following report has been commissioned with the view of evaluating current handicapping practice inclusive of policy and race programming issues. My thoughts are entirely independent of the processes currently in place, with my opinion formed following consultation with industry officials and participants as well as my knowledge of race programming and handicapping practices both domestically and internationally.

Is Handicapping an Art or a Science?

“A bit of both – It can never be an exact science because OPINION as well as FACT is involved.” Phil Bull – Founder of Timeform.

The subtleties of handicapping comprise an art rather than an exact science and the subjective opinion and impartiality of the handicapper is paramount.

By definition a handicap race is one in which the weights to be carried by the horses entered are adjusted for the purpose of equalizing their chances of winning and administered according to the judgment of the person appointed to frame such weights, upon the merits of the horses nominated and within the prescribed conditions and race regulations listed for the conduct of such contests.

As racing grew in popularity as a betting medium there became a necessity to provide more competitive races, and a practice of allocating weight penalties for the better performed horses was developed. The practice eventually led to the development of the current handicapping system which seeks to measure the merit of each horse’s racetrack performance in terms of a performance rating.

The merit of each race performance is analysed and a rating is then allocated to each horse, the ratings are calculated in the imperial measure of pounds. These ratings are based on key factors which decide the outcome of a race mainly weight carried, age and sex, margins separating runners, race distance, time and any incidents which may have impeded or exaggerated the performance. The ratings are based on the concept that all horses can be assessed on a numerical scale that enables them to be compared according to their ability.

The basis of establishing what rating a horse deserves is by quantifying his actual race performances against other horses. The ratings are therefore a combination of mathematical fact (measurable) and human interpretation (non measurable).

It is accepted that any horse that wins a handicap race can show itself to be better than its current handicap mark and may expect a rise in their rating. Some placed horses may also find their official marks rise, while those further down the field will be compensated by a poor run by dropping a point or two in the ratings, or on occasions more if they have not displayed previous consistent form for some time.

The key component to any successful handicapper is the ability to use discretion when assessing the relative merits of raceform. Handicapping is not solely about mathematics – it is about accurate interpretation and application of basic principles.

The implementation of Ratings Based Handicapping (RBH) was introduced into New Zealand at a similar time to many of the states of Australia. Over the ensuing years since the inception of RBH there has been a definite modification from the traditional and accepted handicapping practices and procedures that have stood the racing world in great faith over a long period.

To my disappointment it is apparent that over the past 6 or 7 years the role of the Handicapper in Australia and New Zealand has become that of a ratings adjuster with little similarity to the handicappers of past eras, where there was far more subjectivity and opinion evoked, this traditional style of handicapping remains the standard in Europe and Asia today.

The increased transparency of rating assessments and adoption of ratings templates has seen a reduction in the degree of reassessment both in the raising and lowering of post race ratings, an increased compression of the weight spread in races has become accepted practice which in turn can be argued has led to a decrease in competitiveness in races across the board in both countries.

NEW ZEALAND REVIEW

New Zealand as a thoroughbred nation is unique within the world industry, a strong breeding ground where progeny is sought out and purchased to contest races within many of the worlds leading racing nations.

This industry, while similar in many ways to others I have worked within or studied, is different in many other facets. New Zealand has become a selling nation relying heavily on the lucrative Australian and Asian markets. A majority of male horses are sold and exported from NZ, from yearling sales, Ready to Run Sales, organised Barrier Trials and as tried horses from the racetrack, thereby diminishing the overall population within the new season 2 year old crop and to some extent the 3 year old crop.

This development has seen the nation become diverse where there are at least three now distinctly different racing districts that vary in depth of competitor and ability.

The fact that the Board of NZ Thoroughbred Racing undertook the decision to adopt Ratings Based Handicapping as the nations Handicapping platform in good faith has seen similarly to Australia the perceived ability of the horse population lowered with the apparent over compression of the ratings. There are several reasons for this phenomenon, including the restrictions applied to the handicapper in his evaluation of raceform, non acceptance or understanding of the true effects of weight on the racehorse over varying distances, the increase in the minimum weight and an incorrect programming platform.

The benefits of a ratings based platform revolve around the increasing and lowering the ratings throughout the system via the way of an aggressive handicapping platform that permits horses to remain competitive throughout their racing careers. Unfortunately to attain such results the handicapper must be afforded absolute discretion in his role with the key component being a minimal number of set weight races programmed.

Throughout the period of this review a consistent pattern has emerged in regard to the concerns expressed, these include:

1. Minimum Weight
2. 5kg spread to narrow
3. Bottleneck between 75 and 65 ratings
4. Restrictions within the current platform - re taking horses out of current grade for placed performances
5. Mares allowance
6. Mares not progressing through grades
7. Rating 70 races
8. 2 year olds
9. 3 year old level of opportunities during the early season (spring) period
10. Options for the staying breed at the lower levels
11. Options for the one win horse

As well as a myriad of other concerns specific to the individual regions, I will address all the relevant issues throughout the context of the paper.

1. Minimum Weight

The decision to conduct a review of the minimum weight in October 2010 was met with apparent total support from the various industry related groups that were consulted with the increase being initiated on February 1 this year.

From feedback provided over the period of this review there have been considerable concern expressed at the adoption of the policy. New Zealand along with Tasmania are the only two precincts that are now conducting races off a minimum weight of 54 kg within all regions.

It is the opinion of the author that an 8 stone 7 pound minimum was in fact a little premature in its adoption. I would have proposed that a thorough study into the nutrition and overall fitness levels of riders be undertaken, it appears difficult to justify that whilst Australia continues to race off a 53.0kg minimum with little intention of increasing that level whereas New Zealand being the closest major racing precinct undertakes a decision to increase the overall level.

In hindsight it may have been desirable to increase the minimum solely during the winter months where there is a distinct drop off in quality of animal and numbers.

To address the concerns expressed by participants I am of the opinion that there should be a little give and not all take from the jockeys.

I would propose that consideration be given to the inclusion of the safety vest into the actual handicap weight as is the case in Hong Kong, Singapore and Europe as a trade back for the raising of the minimum weight. Adoption of such would ensure the industry is fully aware of the weight to be carried in all races, whereas currently there could be a discrepancy of up to 1.4kg of overweight carried by any horse in a race.

2. The Spread Of Weights

It is apparent that there remains some concerns within the industry with the adoption of a 59.0kg minimum top weight following the decision undertaken of the raising of the minimum weight to 54.0kg.

Personally I believe the 5.0 kg spread of weights (11 pounds) both in New Zealand and Australia is not sufficient and I would prefer a minimum of 7.0 kg (16 pounds). It should be

remembered that the principle racing bodies within the neighboring regions of Hong Kong which races off a 9.5 kg spread (21 pounds) with Singapore off a 9.0 kg range (20 pounds). Both Europe and the UAE conduct their racing off similar weight spreads.

Contained within the recent paper relevant to the raising of the minimum weight was the quote “it is drawing a long bow to suggest that an increase of 1 kg would have any great effect on a 500 kg animal”. Obviously this comment pertains at the minimal level of the weight scale, however if we are to utilise the same philosophy to effect the top end of the weights would such a quote be viable in the opinion of the industry participants.

There remains a perception within the industry that 59kg (9 stone 4 pound) is a significant amount of weight, not to mention the regularly mentioned concern of the weight of the rider’s safety vest which in fact increases the weight to be carried by between 400 and 600 grams however the allowance permitted for such is a further kilogram.

Whilst I would prefer an increase in the overall spread within the rating bands to increase competition and opportunity, as would the majority of people consulted during this review. It is difficult to attain the same support when the mention of 60 or 61kg is raised as a minimum level for top weighted horses at weight declaration.

Whilst I have come to accept that the 5.0 kg spread can work effectively within the restricted platform if the programming equivalent is accurate and affords opportunity of competition, I can not agree that open handicaps should be conducted off a similar spread, the ratings of the open pool are unrestricted and henceforth can not and should not be compressed into a 5.0 kg spread unless warranted by the ratings.

I would propose that as with the Listed and Group 3 Handicaps where there is minimal differential in the level of entry that the minimum weight be reduced to a 53.0kg minimum to increase competition and better reflect the overall ability within. I would also encourage the Handicapper when warranted to increase the spreads within the open handicap level to further differentiate from the stakes races.

3. Rating 70 Set Weights and Penalties review

A 12 month review was undertaken of all the Rating 70 races conducted under set weight and penalty conditions was undertaken, the review period being April 1 2010 to March 31 2011, the following tables identify Number of races conducted, winners by eligibility under the set weight conditions and winners by age and sex.

Class	Number Races Run
Open R70	561
R70 F&M	24
R70 C,G&E	5
R70 3 YO	13

S/W Eligibility	Number of Wins	Percentage
Winners of 1 race	427	70.32%
Winners of 2 races	133	22.05%
Winners of 3 races	27	4.48%
Winners of 4 races	11	1.82%
Winners of 5+ races	5	0.83%

Age and Sex	Winners at Open R70	Percentage
3 Year Old Male	46	8.20%
4 Year Old Male	116	20.66%
5 Year Old Male	74	13.18%
6 Year Old Male	32	5.69%
7 Year Old Male	19	3.54%
8 Year Old Male	6	1.05%
9 Year Old Male	1	0.17%
3 Year Old Filly	55	9.80%
4 Year Old Mare	114	20.30%
5 Year Old Mare	67	11.92%
6 Year Old Mare	29	5.15%
7 Year Old Mare	2	0.34%

When observing the tables and percentage breakdowns several relevant factors become apparent:

1. Males are winning 52.49% of the available races
2. Winners of a Maiden Handicap are successful in 70.32% of this race type
3. Horses that are coming back in grade are basically not competitive under the set weight conditions winning at only a percentage of 0.83%, the 4 win performer is only marginally better at a 1.82% success rate.
4. Over the survey period 15 horses had repeated their victory at Rating 70 Set Weight and Penalty level.

As were my original thoughts the over simplicity of the set weight and penalty race conditions have rendered these races basically uncompetitive for the all but the 1 and 2 win performers. The initiation of these events whilst affording yet another set weight event to the programming platform defeats the entire purpose of a handicap ratings platform, where the pool should be encouraged to continue to race even though their form may be on the decline.

It is quite apparent that the 4 and 5 win horses whilst retaining their set weight despite continually dropping in the ratings render this race type flawed when programming for competitive racing and attempting to encourage numbers within the overall horse pool to ensure horse numbers to cover “product”.

Once again these figures bely the commonly expressed belief that the fillies and mares continue to dominate in the lower levels, remembering this is at a level of race where they actually have the 1.5kg allowance deducted under the race conditions. Current figures have displayed that the fillies and mares have significantly increased their winning percentage solely in this grade of race with a displayed allowance factored in.

The concept within this race type is unique within the racing world and defeats any logic within the universal handicapping platform. I cannot comprehend how horses are reducing in rating for uncompetitive performance, yet are not reducing in weight to be carried. To further complicate the issue there then remains no other options for horses rated at 70 and below within the current platform.

4. Bottleneck occurring between the Ratings of 75 and 65

Significant concern has been expressed at all levels of discussion with the bottleneck occurring within the 75 to 65 rating bands. This level of competition encompasses the maiden winners in addition to the 2 win performer as well as horses that have either reached their level of competition or those out of form and are lowering in the ratings.

On first thoughts the placement of the maiden winners at the 69 and 68 mark appears to stagnate those horses progression unless they are of superior quality and as expected will continue to move through grades at the lower levels. However, there are a significant amount of the 1 win performers who have reached the level of their ability and simply are uncompetitive off this mark.

The introduction of the Rating 70 set weight and penalty events has to my way of thinking further exacerbated the problem, although a fillies and mares and age allowance has been written into the conditions, it does little to make this race type competitive or viable for a majority of the eligible participants.

I agree that these races are popular, however in all reality it is the only level of racing available to each and every horse that has a rating of 70 and below. I read with interest and dismay an earlier paper that stated “it should be noted from the outset that there is an inherent difference between a set weights race and a handicap race. At set weights the intention of those charged with framing the scale of weights to be adopted is to ensure that the best horse wins.” I question the relativity of such a statement when it is in relation to the second lowest tier of racing in New Zealand, surely a certain level of competition and level playing field for industry participants should be the paramount objective at the lower levels.

Horses of superior ability will always progress through the lower grades at an increased rate than the average performed horse, specifically when under handicap level the weights are framed within a 5.0kg spread.

It truly makes little sense to the author that the Rating 70 races are conducted solely at set weight and penalty level. The not insignificant fact that horses at this level are continually having their ratings lowered for average performance, yet their level of handicap weight is maintained for the rest of their careers with no other race option (save for a limited number of 0-1 win races within the South Island that don't even encompass the entire spectrum of this rating band), surely there remains little incentive for the owner or trainer to continue racing this animal despite the fact that he or she may be entirely sound.

A major concern has been the standard placement of the maiden winners at either 68 or 69 rating level, with many of the thought that there should be an opportunity to record a second win prior to be taken out of the rating 70 level. It has been mentioned by numerous attendees at the meetings that the initial level of the maiden winner be realigned to the mark of 64 or 65 with winners then being taken to the higher end of the band. I am of two minds with his request, on discussion with the handicapper it has always been the mark that the maiden winner has been taken to, therefore rather than face the task of re rating the entire pool at the lower end I am inclined to propose that the Rating 70 races be deleted in favour of a Rating 75 equivalent run under handicap conditions, which would ensure the maiden winner would race off the mark of 56.0kg or 55.5kg and then be raised or lowered from this mark relevant to performance.

An adoption of such would ensure there is no need for the age or sex allowance to be deducted from the weight, but would encourage that the handicapper once a horse has attained a rating of 70 and above be transparent in the re ratings and display the relevant mares allowance component when realigning the figures once this level of competition is attained.

A move to adopt this approach would then see the placed horse being able to be taken above the mark of 70 if the performance warranted such movement, the current rule of not taking the placed horse out of its class has done little but further restrict the movement of horses through the system and again "ties the hands of the handicapper".

There will be some concern expressed that this class will contain an overall higher level of competitor and prove difficult for the maiden winner to be competitive, however this move must see the winners of races pushed through the grades to decrease the current bottlenecks and increase the pool at the top end. Similarly to New South Wales, New Zealand ratings are artificially compressed, with the majority of the horse pool contained between 75 and 60.

Alternately consideration could be given to as previously referred, to lower the level of entry to the maiden winner to a rating of 63 - 65. The platform could then incorporate a rating band of 65 which would afford the winners of their second race the opportunity to race in the mid regions of the Rating 75 band. This move would appear a sensible option given the fact that this would afford this class of horse the opportunity to attain a further win prior to racing the 3 and 4 win animal as is the case within the current Rating 80 band. A move as such would in my opinion permit horses the opportunity to increase competition levels and allow for an increase in movement within the lower levels of competition.

With adoption of a Rating 65 Band there should also be a realignment of the other bands to 95 (in time), 85 and 75.

A further area of consideration should be the adoption an increased penalty and relief platform to assist in the movement of horses between the grades. It was interesting when Greg Carpenter first started at Racing Victoria that in the opinion of some, over inflated the ratings relevant to the other states, however that move proved positive and has led to the consistency that is paramount within the Victorian Handicapping platform today.

5. Fillies and Mares

A further significant case put forward was the current situation of the fillies and mares. Extremely insightful meetings with representatives of the Thoroughbred Breeders Association and New Zealand Bloodstock were part of the overall review and I thank these organisations for their input. A high percentage of the trainers interviewed also expressed concern over the current sex allowance afforded to the fillies and mares.

To identify and confirm the opinions expressed a review of statistics published in the New Zealand Fact Book places the concerns in perspective. The statistics identify:

1. Declining foal crop
2. Declining Broodmare Numbers

While it may be perceived that these issues are not relevant to a review of handicapping and race programming, I remain of a differing opinion and am fearful unless these concerns are addressed there will be a continued decline in the racing pool.

It has become apparent that there is a lack of demand for fillies in the sale ring, with emphasis from the lucrative Asian market on the colts and geldings. That being the case if fillies are not being sold on and are being returned to or remaining in paddocks, why then is there a decline in the numbers of fillies and mares in training?

It must then be perceived that a probable lack of incentives and opportunities for this sex remains an issue. It is apparent there are limited inducements for owners and breeders to race their fillies and mares. Therefore the industry is seeing a decline of this sex in training

with the opinion that there remain limited opportunities for the fillies and mares to win sufficient races to retire as a successful broodmare to the breeding barn.

There must be recognition of the importance of fillies within the New Zealand racing industry with increased opportunities and levels of consistency in allowances received against the male population to provide longevity to our breeding stock.

A consistent sex and age allowance remains paramount in the overall handicapping platform to ensure a level of competition and equality between the various age groups and both sexes.

The Weight For Age Scale was developed by Admiral Rous in 1855, a table that measures the progress of maturity in a racehorse. It expresses, in terms of weight, what horses of differing ages, over a given distance, at differing times of the year, should carry to equalise any difference in maturity. The scale has stood the test of time in all regions of the world, in some areas the mares allowance within has been adjusted to adapt to the various levels of competition prevalent to each nation. In 2006 New Zealand aligned its scale to that of Australia inclusive of the gender allowance for the fillies and mares of 2.0kg to become an Australasian Scale.

Whilst the 2.0kg allowance has been totally adapted within Australia in all classes of competition, New Zealand has adopted a 1.5 kg allowance for the mares in all races excluding Weight For Age and Group and Listed Set Weight and Penalty events. This anomaly remains unique to New Zealand for reasons I have not been able to comprehend.

There has been some discussion in Australia in reference to a review of the mares allowance, there has been a push from some states to adopt a 1.5kg allowance. However the Australian Racing Board has expressed reluctance to differentiate the allowance from that of the weight for age scale.

Fillies & Mares performance by season by class								
2006-09								
Class	Races Run	F&M Strs	CG&E Strs	All Strs	F&M Wnrs	F&M as % of Strs	F&M % of Races Won	Variance
Open Hcp	632	1739	4599	6338	162	27.44	25.63	-1.80
Rating 90	662	1938	4129	6067	217	31.94	32.78	0.84
Rating 80	799	3058	5243	8301	308	36.84	38.55	1.71
Rating 70	1703	9231	11304	20535	678	44.95	39.81	-5.14
Maiden	2176	12017	13865	25882	965	46.43	44.35	-2.08

2009-10								
Class	Races Run	F&M Strs	CG&E Strs	All Strs	F&M Wnrs	F&M as % of Strs	F&M % of Races Won	Variance
Open Hcp	254	637	1825	2462	63	25.87	24.80	-1.07
Rating 90	238	663	1516	2179	89	30.43	37.39	6.97
Rating 80	403	1700	2533	4233	163	40.16	40.45	0.29
Rating 70	675	3508	4428	7936	311	44.20	46.07	1.87
Maiden	851	4548	5403	9951	368	45.70	43.24	-2.46
Maiden 3YO	109	605	523	1128	56	53.63	51.38	-2.26

2010-11 period August 1 to March 31 inclusive

Class	Races Run	F&M Strs	CG&E Strs	All Strs	F&M Wnrs	F&M as % of Strs	F&M % of Races Won	Variance
Open Hcp	173	499	1186	1685	48	29.61	27.75	-1.87
Rating 90	173	527	991	1518	55	34.72	31.79	-2.92
Rating 80	279	1166	1673	2839	114	41.07	40.86	-0.21
Rating 70	430	2385	2609	4994	220	47.76	51.16	3.41
Maiden	590	2959	3721	6680	248	44.30	42.03	-2.26
Maiden 3YO	80	410	414	824	43	49.76	53.75	3.99

**Fillies and Mares performance by class by year
(2010 - 2011 season for the period August 1 to March 31)**

Open Handicap

Year	Races Run	F&M Strs	CG&E Strs	All Strs	F&M Wnrs	F&M as % of Strs	F&M % of Races Won	Variance	Year to Year variance
2006-2009	632	1739	4599	6338	162	27.44	25.63	-1.80	N/A
2009-2010	254	637	1825	2462	63	25.87	24.80	-1.07	0.73
2010-2011	173	499	1186	1685	48	29.61	27.75	-1.87	-0.80

Rating 90									
Year	Races Run	F&M Strs	CG&E Strs	All Strs	F&M Wnrs	F&M as % of Strs	F&M % of Races Won	Variance	Year to Year variance
2006-2009	662	1938	4129	6067	217	31.94	32.78	0.84	N/A
2009-2010	238	663	1516	2179	89	30.43	37.39	6.97	8.33
2010-2011	173	527	991	1518	55	34.72	31.79	-2.92	-0.42

Rating 80									
Year	Races Run	F&M Strs	CG&E Strs	All Strs	F&M Wnrs	F&M as % of Strs	F&M % of Races Won	Variance	Year to Year variance
2006-2009	799	3058	5243	8301	308	36.84	38.55	1.71	N/A
2009-2010	403	1700	2533	4233	163	40.16	40.45	0.29	0.17
2010-2011	279	1166	1673	2839	114	41.07	40.86	-0.21	-0.74

Rating 70									
Year	Races Run	F&M Strs	CG&E Strs	All Strs	F&M Wnrs	F&M as % of Strs	F&M % of Races Won	Variance	Year to Year variance
2006-2009	1703	9231	11304	20535	678	44.95	39.81	-5.14	N/A
2009-2010	675	3508	4428	7936	311	44.20	46.07	1.87	7.01
2010-2011	430	2385	2609	4994	220	47.76	51.16	3.41	1.54

Maiden									
Year	Races Run	F&M Strs	CG&E Strs	All Strs	F&M Wnrs	F&M as % of Strs	F&M % of Races Won	Variance	Year to Year variance
2006-2009	2176	12017	13865	25882	965	46.43	44.35	-2.08	N/A
2009-2010	851	4548	5403	9951	368	45.70	43.24	-2.46	-1.72
2010-2011	590	2959	3721	6680	248	44.30	42.03	-2.26	-2.26

From the statistical information included it is difficult to justify the decision to have a reduced fillies and mares allowance in the handicap events. The figures suggest that the female sex are not dominating any class of race save for the recently introduced Rating 70 set weight events where the age and sex allowance is incorporated within the actual race condition weight.

An interesting fact contained within the statistics is the anomaly in the ratio between the male and female sexes as the quality of races increase. If there are a significant number of colts being sold on and thus reducing the overall pool of that sex, then why are the females not dominating the horse pool number wise at all levels of competition? This can only suggest that the fillies and mares are not competitive under the current structure or there are lack of programming options that ensure connections can see reason for keeping there fillies and mares in training.

It is apparent that the mares unlike other regions are unable to collate a significant number of wins in New Zealand, whilst competitive at the one and two win level, unless stakes performed, opportunity soon decreases and as the quality of competition increases to success rate of the mares decline.

On reviewing the differentials between the mare pools within Australia and New Zealand it is noticeable that the better performed fillies and mares in Australia win significantly more races. This fact cannot be denied, to assist the breeding platform an increase in opportunity for this sex must be considered.

It is unfortunate that both in Australia and New Zealand have in some ways neglected the fillies and mares within their programming platform, Victoria solely has developed a sound level of programming opportunities for the fillies and mares.

I see no justifiable reason as to why the fillies and mares allowance should not be equitable across all levels of racing nationally and would suggest an allowance of 2.0kg be implemented to adapt to the Australasian practice.

There has been comment expressed that the fillies dominate the 2 and 3 year old Pattern, however the included results chart for stakes races conducted over the past 4 years does not present that conclusion.

New Zealand Pattern Races results – colts vs fillies

2007 - 2008						
2 Year Olds						
Group 1	Auckland RC	Ford Diamond Stakes	1200m	Fully Fledged	Colt	10 starters - 4 fillies
	Manawatu RC	Sires Produce Stakes	1400m	Il Quello Veloce	Filly	16 starters - 5 fillies
Group 2	Wellington RC	Wakefield Challenge	1200m	Captain Fantastic	Colt	16 starters - 9 fillies
Group 3	Auckland RC	Eclipse Stakes	1200m	Lady Alberton	Filly	11 starters - 5 fillies
	Taranaki RC	Ford 2YO Classic	1200m	Ransom Express	Colt	11 starters - 3 fillies
Listed	Wellington RC	Wellesley Stakes	1000m	Vincent Mangano	Colt	9 starters - 3 fillies
	Canterbury RC	Ford Welcome Stakes	1000m	San Bernardino	Colt	12 starters - 6 fillies
	Counties RC	Murdoch Newell Stakes	1100m	Vincent Mangano	Colt	7 starters - 5 fillies
	Waikato RC	Fairview Ford Stakes	1100m	San Bernardino	Colt	9 starters - 4 fillies
	Auckland RC	Karaka Million	1200m	Vincent Mangano	Colt	14 starters - 5 fillies
	Auckland RC	Champagne Stakes	1600m	Sufficient	Colt	6 starters - 2 fillies
	Canterbury RC	Champagne Stakes	1200m	All In Brawl	Colt	12 starters - 3 fillies
	Auckland RC	Great Nthn Foal Stakes	1400m	St Culpe	Colt	10 starters - 2 fillies
	Foxton RC	Castletown Stakes	1200m	Altered Image	Colt	14 starters - 4 fillies
				Fillies represented 38.20% of starters		14.29% of wins

3 Year Olds						
Group 1	Canterbury RC	NZ 2000 Guineas	1600m	The Pooka	Colt	9 starters - 0 fillies
	Levin RC	Levin Classic	1600m	Keepa Cruisin	Filly	14 starters - 5 fillies
	Auckland RC	Mercedes NZ Derby	2400m	C'est La Guerre	Colt	18 starters - 1 filly
Group 2	Hawkes Bay RC	Hawkes Bay Guineas	1400m	Alamosa	Colt	14 starters - 1 filly
	Wellington RC	Wellington Guineas	1500m	Rios	Colt	13 starters - 3 fillies
	Avondale JC	Avondale Guineas	1600m	Alamosa	Colt	10 starters - 1 filly
	Auckland RC	Great Northern Guineas	2100m	Prince Kaapstaad	Colt	13 starters - 0 fillies
	Auckland RC	Lexus Championship S	2100m	Red Ruler	Colt	15 starters - 0 fillies
Group 3	Wellington RC	Wellington Stakes	1600m	Alamosa	Colt	9 starters - 0 fillies
	Waikato RC	Waikato Guineas	2000m	Nom De Jeu	Colt	15 starters - 0 fillies
	Manawatu RC	Manawatu Classic	2000m	Valpolicella	Filly	16 starters - 6 fillies
	Cambridge JC	Breeders Stakes	1200m	Martini Red	Filly	14 starters - 8 fillies
Listed	Wanganui JC	Wanganui Guineas	1320m	Fritzzy Boy	Colt	10 starters - 2 fillies
	Ashburton RC	Ray Coupland Stakes	1400m	Hold It Harvey	Colt	11 starters - 4 fillies
	Auckland RC	Bonecrusher Stakes	1400m	Rios	Colt	11 starters - 4 fillies
	Canterbury RC	Canterbury Stakes	1600m	Hold It Harvey	Colt	9 starters - 1 filly
	Waikato RC	Memorial Stakes	1400m	Lovetrista	Filly	13 starters - 7 fillies
	Auckland RC	Great Nthn Gns Prelude	2100m	Sircross	Colt	13 starters - 4 fillies
	Gore RC	Gore Guineas	1355m	Fritzzy Boy	Colt	12 starters - 5 fillies
	Otago RC	Dunedin Guineas	1400m	Fritzzy Boy	Colt	12 starters - 5 fillies
	Southland RC	Southland Guineas	1600m	Fritzzy Boy	Colt	8 starters - 3 fillies
				Fillies represented 23.17% of starters		19.0% of winners

2008/2009						
2 Year Olds						
Group 1	Auckland RC	Ford Diamond Stakes	1200m	Kaaptan	Colt	14 starters - 8 fillies
	Manawatu RC	Sires Produce Stakes	1400m	The Heckler	Colt	16 starters - 7 fillies
Group 2	Wellington RC	Wakefield Challenge	1200m	King's Ransom	Colt	13 starters - 6 fillies
Group 3	Auckland RC	Eclipse Stakes	1200m	Katie Lee	Filly	12 starters - 5 fillies
	Taranaki RC	Ford 2YO Classic	1200m	Seven Schillings	Filly	11 starters - 4 fillies
Listed	Wellington RC	Wellesley Stakes	1000m	Hollows	Colt	8 starters - 7 fillies
	Canterbury RC	Ford Welcome Stakes	1000m	Lesley Brook	Filly	8 starters - 3 fillies
	Counties RC	Murdoch Newell Stakes	1100m	The Lady	Filly	12 starters - 9 fillies
	Waikato RC	Fairview Ford Stakes	1100m	The Lady	Filly	9 starters - 6 fillies
	Auckland RC	Karaka Million	1200m	The Heckler	Colt	14 starters - 7 fillies
	Auckland RC	Champagne Stakes	1600m	Joey Massimo	Colt	10 starters - 5 fillies
	Canterbury RC	Champagne Stakes	1200m	Not Now Norman	Colt	12 starters - 3 fillies
	Auckland RC	Great Nthn Foal Stakes	1400m	Flying Fulton	Colt	7 starters - 2 fillies
	Foxton RC	Castletown Stakes	1200m	Rio Fortune	Colt	8 starters - 5 fillies
				Fillies represented 46.95% of starters		35.71% of winners

3 Year Olds						
Group 1	Canterbury RC	NZ 2000 Guineas	1600m	Tell A Tale	Colt	14 starters - 2 fillies
	Levin RC	Levin Classic	1600m	Altered Image	Colt	15 starters - 1 filly
	Auckland RC	Mercedes NZ Derby	2400m	Coniston Bluebird	Colt	18 starters - 2 fillies
Group 2	Hawkes Bay RC	Hawkes Bay Guineas	1400m	Tell A Tale	Colt	14 starters - 0 fillies
	Wellington RC	Wellington Guineas	1500m	Skirmish	Filly	14 starters - 2 fillies
	Avondale JC	Avondale Guineas	1600m	Tell A Tale	Colt	13 starters - 1 filly
	Auckland RC	Great Northern Guineas	2100m	Le Baron	Colt	11 starters - 0 fillies
	Auckland RC	Championship Stakes	2100m	Down The Road	Colt	14 starters - 1 filly
Group 3	Wellington RC	Wellington Stakes	1600m	Shanzero	Filly	18 starters - 3 fillies
	Waikato RC	Waikato Guineas	2000m	Easy Rider	Colt	16 starters - 0 fillies
	Manawatu RC	Manawatu Classic	2000m	Izonit	Colt	14 starters - 5 fillies
	Cambridge JC	Breeders Stakes	1200m	Geeza	Colt	14 starters - 8 fillies
Listed	Wanganui JC	Wanganui Guineas	1320m	Takeanotherchance	Colt	15 starters - 0 fillies
	Ashburton RC	Ray Coupland Stakes	1400m	Moveover	Colt	12 starters - 6 fillies
	Auckland RC	Bonecrusher Stakes	1400m	Kildonan	Colt	12 starters - 0 fillies
	Canterbury RC	Canterbury Stakes	1600m	Tell A Tale	Colt	10 starters - 5 fillies
	Waikato RC	Memorial Stakes	1400m	Fully Fledged	Colt	14 starters - 5 fillies
	Auckland RC	Great Nthn Gns Prelude	2100m	Le Baron	Colt	13 starters - 2 fillies
	Gore RC	Gore Guineas	1355m	Coup Align	Colt	10 starters - 4 fillies
	Otago RC	Dunedin Guineas	1400m	Miss Millbrook	Filly	15 starters - 8 fillies
	Southland RC	Southland Guineas	1600m	Alegrio	Colt	12 starters - 6 fillies
				Fillies represented 21.18% of starters		14.28% of winners
2009/2010						
2 Year Olds						
Group 1	Auckland RC	Ford Diamond Stakes	1200m	Banchee	Filly	13 starters - 5 fillies
	Manawatu RC	Sires Produce Stakes	1400m	Nacho Man	Colt	12 starters - 4 fillies
Group 2	Wellington RC	Wakefield Challenge	1200m	Jimmy Choux	Colt	13 starters - 7 fillies
Group 3	Auckland RC	Eclipse Stakes	1200m	Cellarmaster	Colt	9 starters - 4 fillies
	Taranaki RC	Ford 2YO Classic	1200m	Icepipin	Colt	10 starters - 3 fillies
Listed	Wellington RC	Wellesley Stakes	1000m	Big River	Colt	8 starters - 4 fillies
	Canterbury RC	Ford Welcome Stakes	1000m	Encosta Diablo	Colt	8 starters - 4 fillies
	Counties RC	Murdoch Newell Stakes	1100m	Lion Tamer	Colt	10 starters - 3 fillies
	Waikato RC	Wentwood Grange Stks	1100m	Cellarmaster	Colt	8 starters - 3 fillies
	Auckland RC	Karaka Million	1200m	Sister Havana	Filly	14 starters - 6 fillies
	Auckland RC	Champagne Stakes	1600m	Lion Tamer	Colt	13 starters - 3 fillies
	Canterbury RC	Champagne Stakes	1200m	Twilight Savings	Filly	9 starters - 5 fillies
	Auckland RC	Great Nthn Foal Stks	1400m	Smoulder	Filly	14 starters - 8 fillies
	Foxton RC	Castletown Stakes	1200m	Extra Explosive	Filly	9 starters - 5 fillies
				Fillies represented 42.66% of starters		35.71% of winners

3 Year Olds						
Group 1	Canterbury RC	NZ 2000 Guineas	1600m	Katie Lee	Filly	15 starters - 3 fillies
	Levin RC	Levin Classic	1600m	Eileen Dubh	Filly	15 starters - 5 fillies
	Auckland RC	Mercedes NZ Derby	2400m	Military Move	Colt	15 starters - 3 fillies
Group 2	Hawkes Bay RC	Hawkes Bay Guineas	1400m	Keyora	Colt	16 starters - 4 fillies
	Wellington RC	Wellington Guineas	1500m	Keyora	Colt	8 starters - 1 filly
	Avondale JC	Avondale Guineas	1600m	Joey Massino	Colt	11 starters - 4 fillies
	Auckland RC	Great Northern Guineas	2100m	Zarzuela	Filly	12 starters - 1 filly
	Auckland RC	Championship Stks	2100m	Zarzuela	Filly	15 starters - 3 fillies
Group 3	Wellington RC	Wellington Stakes	1600m	Joey Massino	Colt	11 starters - 3 fillies
	Waikato RC	Waikato Guineas	2000m	Zarzuela	Filly	13 starters - 2 fillies
	Manawatu RC	Manawatu Classic	2000m	Time Keeper	Colt	14 starters - 5 fillies
	Cambridge JC	Breeders Stakes	1200m	Riomoral	Colt	14 starters - 9 fillies
Listed	Wanganui JC	Wanganui Guineas	1320m	Warrentherooster	Colt	14 starters - 3 fillies
	Ashburton RC	Ray Coupland Stakes	1400m	Comme Tu Veux	Filly	13 starters - 8 fillies
	Auckland RC	Bonecrusher Stakes	1400m	Jungle Juice	Filly	11 starters - 2 fillies
	Canterbury RC	Canterbury Stakes	1600m	King's Ransom	Colt	16 starters - 4 fillies
	Waikato RC	Memorial Stakes	1400m	Katie Lee	Filly	15 starters - 5 fillies
	Auckland RC	Great Nthn Gns Prelude	2100m	Sophia Babe	Filly	12 starters - 7 fillies
	Gore RC	Gore Guineas	1355m	Chaparella	Filly	14 starters - 7 fillies
	Otago RC	Dunedin Guineas	1400m	Champagne Ransom	Colt	14 starters - 6 fillies
	Southland RC	Southland Guineas	1600m	The Beekeeper	Filly	12 starters - 3 fillies
				Fillies represented 26.07% of starters		52.38% of winners
2010 - 2011						
2 Year Olds						
Group 1	Auckland RC	Ford Diamond Stakes	1200m	Anabandana	Filly	12 starters - 2 fillies
	Manawatu RC	Sires Produce Stakes	1400m	Anabandana	Filly	13 starters - 5 fillies
Group 2	Wellington RC	Wakefield Challenge	1200m	Shuka	Colt	13 starters - 6 fillies
Group 3	Auckland RC	Eclipse Stakes	1200m	Anabandana	Filly	11 starters - 4 fillies
	Taranaki RC	Ford 2YO Classic	1200m	Antonio Lombardo	Colt	8 startes - 2 fillies
Listed	Wellington RC	Wellesley Stakes	1000m	Antonio Lombardo	Colt	11 starters - 5 fillies
	Canterbury RC	Ford Welcome Stakes	1000m	Bespoke	Colt	7 starters - 2 fillies
	Counties RC	Murdoch Newell Stakes	1100m	Miss Upstart	Filly	11 starters - 6 fillies
	Waikato RC	Wentwood Grange Stks	1100m	Estrato	Colt	8 starters - 5 fillies
	Auckland RC	Karaka Million	1200m	Fort Lincoln	Colt	14 starters - 5 fillies
	Auckland RC	Champagne Stakes	1600m	Dowager Queen	Filly	9 starters - 3 fillies
	Canterbury RC	Champagne Stakes	1200m	Kasumi	Filly	10 starters - 5 fillies
	Auckland RC	Great Nthrn Foal Stakes	1400m			
	Foxton RC	Castletown Stakes	1200m			
				Fillies represented 36.23% of starters		50.0% of winners

3 Year Olds						
Group 1	Canterbury RC	NZ 2000 Guineas	1600m	Jimmy Choux	Colt	17 starters - 2 fillies
	Levin RC	Levin Classic	1600m	We Can Say It Now	Filly	15 starters - 6 fillies
	Auckland RC	Mercedes NZ Derby	2400m	Jimmy Choux	Colt	16 starters - 0 fillies
Group 2	Hawkes Bay RC	Hawkes Bay Guineas	1400m	Jimmy Choux	Colt	13 starters - 2 fillies
	Wellington RC	Wellington Guineas	1500m	Barside	Colt	11 starters - 1 filly
	Avondale JC	Avondale Guineas	1600m	Icepun	Colt	15 starters - 2 fillies
	Auckland RC	Great Northern Guineas	2100m	Jimmy Choux	Colt	10 starters - 1 filly
	Auckland RC	Championship Stks	2100m	Hidden Asset	Colt	12 starters - 3 fillies
Group 3	Wellington RC	Wellington Stakes	1600m	Jimmy Choux	Colt	12 starters - 1 filly
	Waikato RC	Waikato Guineas	2000m	Jimmy Choux	Colt	11 starters - 2 fillies
	Manawatu RC	Manawatu Classic	2000m	Starcheeka	Colt	13 starters - 7 fillies
	Cambridge JC	Breeders Stakes	1200m	Hammer Down	Colt	14 starters - 7 fillies
Listed	Wanganui JC	Wanganui Guineas	1320m	Fiddler	Colt	11 starters - 1 filly
	Ashburton RC	Ray Coupland Stakes	1400m	King's Rose	Filly	11 starters - 5 fillies
	Auckland RC	Bonecrusher Stakes	1400m	Hoofit	Colt	12 starters - 5 fillies
	Canterbury RC	Canterbury Stakes	1600m	Undisclosed	Colt	12 starters - 6 fillies
	Waikato RC	Memorial Stakes	1400m	We Can Say It Now	Filly	14 strs - 11 fillies
	Auckland RC	Great Nthn Gns Prelude	2100m	Yourein	Colt	13 starters - 3 fillies
	Gore RC	Gore Guineas	1355m	Milo	Colt	12 starters - 7 fillies
	Otago RC	Dunedin Guineas	1400m	Milo	Colt	16 starters - 8 fillies
	Southland RC	Southland Guineas	1600m	Champagne Needed	Colt	13 starters - 5 fillies
				Fillies represented 31.13% of starters		14.28% of winners

There remains an opportunity to increase the competitiveness of the female sex by adopting the increased allowance. Incentives should also be developed to encourage owners to continue to race their mares, at minimum within the lower levels of competition, races solely for the Fillies and Mares should be incorporated within the programming platform.

I remain of the belief that some components of the Victorian model could be adopted effectively into New Zealand.

With funding currently a significant concern the possibility of the introduction of a Fillies and Mares Incentive scheme would be unlikely, however increased programming options should be considered and adopted.

The second tier fillies should also be afforded increased opportunity, currently there are little or no incentives to place these horses in work, opportunity to recoup service fees and sale preparation costs would see an increase to the available horse pool.

6. Handicap Weight “Pure” Ratings v Performance Ratings

The policy of incorporating the age and sex allowance into the rating has been in place in New Zealand for a long period of time and is consistent with the practices in Europe and Western Australia. This application (Pure rating) has seen the actual rating figure equate to an equivalent weight, relative to the nomination within, and has been accepted within the nation with little or no concern expressed.

Whereas in most states of Australia age and sex allowances are provided independently of a horse's rating, so that when the mare and older male horse have the same rating figure, the mare is entitled to a deduction of 2.0kg relevant to the sex allowance if the two met in a handicap race.

An age allowance is also taken into account if a two and three year old is entered for the contest. The Australian jurisdictions that utilise this methodology apply a fixed sex allowance across all race types, but the age allowance is applied in restricted handicap races only, with allowances at open handicap level applied at the discretion of the handicapper.

The key factor with the Australian system is that assists in the balloting process with entry in races dictated by the actual rating figure, whilst in New Zealand the Handicapper may adjust the ballot order in handicap race for any two or three year olds entered if in his opinion their form is superior to that of an older lesser performed horse.

I have no concern with the current practice of incorporating the age and sex allowance within the rating, it has generally been accepted by the local industry. Greg Carpenter has suggested that he is considering adopting a similar practice in Victoria.

The concern expressed by the industry has been the lack of displayed transparency when incorporating the mares and age allowance within, connections are not entirely convinced that the mares are receiving their full entitlement in the way of allowance relevant to the male horses once they have attained a level of 70 and above.

The expected transparency within the handicapping platform have become an accepted component of the process over the past 5 years. To instill confidence within the industry and fulfill the expected levels of transparency adoption of the Australian system is recommended. An example would be an entire rated at a mark of 75 and a mare rated at a similar level, the mare currently would not receive a sex allowance, however if adoption of the Performance rating (Australian) system would see the mare currently in New Zealand receive a 1.5kg allowance.

If adopted all fillies and mares would see the rating figures increase by 3 points to align their weight to current levels, similarly 2 and 3 year olds would see their current ratings increase relevant to the agreed allowance on place at that point of time.

A further benefit would be the process of balloting at all levels of competition, industry participants would know at close of entries the exact order of ballot in all races inclusive of Group 1 Handicaps.

7. Two Year Olds

The two year old crop appears to be sufficiently catered for throughout the season, the availability of 18 stakes races for 2 year olds represent 8% of the pattern.

Licenseses have expressed concern with the raising of the minimum topweight at handicap level of 58.0 kg at weight declaration, post the raising of the minimum weight in February. There are several lines of thought here the relevance of the lightly raced immature 2 year old being asked to carry 9 stone 2 pound (58.0kg) throughout the initial stages of their careers was thought to be an arduous task specifically on winter tracks. The other line of thinking was that that the increased weight permits a senior rider in a more suitable saddle to ride, thus increasing the education process as well as improving the stability of the horses tack.

Discussion developed to consider the possibility of conducting 2 year old races under set weight and penalties conditions, at a level of 56.0 kg for the colts and geldings and 54.5kg for the fillies. Penalties would be cumulative at 1.5kg increments per win with a stakes winner to carry a 3.0kg penalty, stakes 2nd placegetters would carry a 1.0kg penalty.

I have no firm opinion on these races but I can see a great deal more merit in the programming of this type of race for the juveniles rather than the multitude of races currently conducted under set weight level for other age groups.

I see little reason for the programming of the current 2 and 3 year old maidens under the current conditions. The 2.0 kg allowance afforded the 2 year olds renders that age group uncompetitive against the three year olds relevant to the true allowance of the weight for age scale when they are to receive 10kg in January reducing to 7.0 kg at seasons end. In a further anomaly the open maidens that are eligible to 2 year olds to contest under the current set weights do not even afford the fillies the luxury of their full compressed allowance. It appears that the conditions of these races have been given little or no thought and have been initiated as program fillers that appear to cater for the age group without any thought of ensuring a competitive contest.

8. Three Year Olds

An interesting fact has emerged when reviewing the number of races programmed for the 3 year olds solely throughout the season. During the 2009 / 2010 season a total of 8.87% of the programming were eligible to three year olds solely, the current season to date this

percentage has increased to 10.91% of races. However the percentage of 3 year old races raises to 26.03% of the New Zealand Pattern.

If it is the intention to force the 3 year olds to race the older horses all season, I would advocate a review of the early season 3 year old allowance. The current level of 1.5kg between August and October is in place, whereas in Australia the allowance in the majority of states is 2.5kg. Whilst no way similar to the weight for age allowance of 7.0kg in August, reducing to 5.5kg in November, an additional kilogram early in the season may entice competitiveness in the spring races.

Preferably an increase in the 3 year old races early season should be considered. The realignment of the 3 year old Pattern has seen traditional dates change, there is an opportunity to program and develop new races as lead in races to traditional Black Type events with the view of taking them forward to Listed status in time.

The current allowances afforded the 3 year olds in the Group and Listed Set Weight and Penalty allowance events appear to be equitable relevant to the WFA scale. With the increase of the Set Weight and Penalty Stakes races ideally the allowance at the elite level should be in monthly increments. However due to the compressed nature of the penalty conditions this probably cannot be achieved without lifting the top weights significantly.

9. Benchmark Racing

The adoption of Benchmark racing in New South Wales has seen a marginal increase in field size, whilst there has not been a significant increase in weight spreads the process does afford increased opportunity and available race options for connections across all levels of handicap competition.

I believe that Benchmark racing should continue to be developed within New Zealand, an agreed increased information output relevant to available horse pools within the regions should permit the various race clubs and programming committees to draft programs relevant to the ratings.

The increased adoption of the Benchmark system can assist in encapsulating the entire available horse pool relevant to the region and could be utilized at all levels of handicap racing.

10. Horse Pool

The following table displays the level of ratings within the bands by Region as at March 31, 2011.

Region	Maidens	60-69	70-79	80-89	90 and over	Totals:
Northern	1,004	610	334	93	84	2,125
Central	551	443	196	63	55	1,308
Southern	383	360	155	56	25	979
Totals:	1,938	1,413	685	212	164	4,412
<i>As % Horse pool</i>	43.9%	32%	15.5%	4.8%	3.7%	

At this point in time less than 4% of the total horse pool carried a rating of 90 and above, a total of 213 horses currently make up the open pool of horses nationwide. A further survey for horses rated between 80 and 89 counted for less than 5% of the pool, the final survey was for horses rated between 70 and 79 which counted for slightly more than 15% of the total starters for the past season.

Therefore we find that approximately 23.5% of the horse pool is eligible for Rating 70 and above, a total of 1366 horses of a total of 5794 individual starters for last season. Similar to the situation in New South Wales there appears to be an over compression of ratings at the bottom end.

Personally I do not believe that the quality of racing in New Zealand is at such a low overall level. It is apparent that the movement of horses through the grades has become stagnated, for whatever reason there needs to be a concerted effort to progress horses through their grades and increase competitiveness and opportunity.

Inhibiting factors such as a plethora of set weight races, compressed weight spreads, not permitting horses to be taken out of grades for performance and a general restraint on the handicappers ability to perform his work has led to the current situation.

I find it difficult to comprehend that if Maiden winners are assigned a rating between 68 and 70 that these horses do not appear to progress consistently to the next level.

It appears there must be a flaw in the current programming platform that is not permitting these horses to progress. In an interesting statistic from the Rating 70 SWP races that there was 589 individual winners over the 12 month period of the survey that would have had their rating lifted above the 70 mark this equates to 43% of the number rated above 70 currently.

Are these wins simply one off performances, is the entry level for the maiden winners too high or are the conditions for the Rating 70 favourable to the younger horse.

All these factors need to be further investigated and a review of the programming platform undertaken.

11. Open Handicaps

As identified previously there are currently only a small percentage of the overall horse pool that have attained a rating of 90 and above. This fact does not permit a strong open handicap platform let alone the 80 Group and Listed races (54% of the total) available to this level of competitor.

Rating	Total Number horses	Total as %
114 - 110	3	.014%
109 - 105	14	6.57%
104 - 100	41	19.2%
99 - 95	68	31.9%
94 - 90	87	40.8%
Total	213	

The 24 point range within this level of competition makes it difficult to frame a competitive handicap working within the minimal 5.0kg weight spread.

As previously mentioned I would be supportive of reducing the minimum weight to 53.0 kg as is the case at Listed level to at least increase the overall spread to 6.0kg or alternately raising the minimum topweight to 60.0kg at open handicap level.

With such a diverse rating band within this level of competition, complete discretion at Stakes level should be afforded to the handicapper.

With the increase in the minimum weight I feel the conducting of the Restricted Open Handicaps are superfluous to the current needs of the programming platform.

12. Increased Transparency:

The key component within the ratings based platform is complete transparency within the handicapping component. Whilst ratings are currently displayed on the NZTR website only the current rating is displayed. Within the IRIS system in Australia the last three performances with attached ratings are displayed, whereas within Europe, Hong Kong and Singapore all historical ratings are attached to the performance history of each horse.

Furthermore rather than the post performance being attached singularly to the horse on the website as is the current case in NZ, within the other regions a full list of rating

adjustments for each meeting are published for each horse that contested a race on the day.

These actions increase the transparency of the workings of the handicapper and instill further confidence within the industry.

Another action that should be adopted is the printing of rating figures in racebooks and on the attached race performances within. This again will offer the interested participant an insight to the thinking of the handicapper and the assessment of past performance.

The role of the Handicapper is one of complete integrity and openness, the platform that has been created by the Handicappers within England, Ireland and Hong Kong as well as Jim Bowler, Greg Carpenter and myself of total communication with the industry has had a positive effect on the perceived role of the Handicapper. Such open communication and availability to discuss and promote handicapping policy as well as reasoning and logic behind rating adjustments has been seen as a positive in the increased understanding of the role.

13. Barrier Trials

New Zealand remains unique within the racing world with Barrier Trials being a predominant factor within the industry.

Barrier trials within the country specifically those conducted at Cambridge are considered as sales opportunities rather than the education and fitness outings that are normal in Australia and Asia. A review of last seasons statistics shows that 49.94% of the racing pool were stabled in the Cambridge area yet only 43.55% of this number accounted for the national racing pool.

Within New Zealand horses only have to attain a barrier certificate prior to racing, unlike New South Wales where all horses must trial prior to contesting a race. The decision by the Board to afford untried horses preference within the ballot has seen a marginal decrease in the number of horses barrier trialing prior to racing

Between the 2008 and 2009 seasons there was a decrease of 2% relative to race starters.

Season	Horses	1 Trial	2 Trials	3 Trials	4 Trials	5 and Up
2008	2,021	512	652	442	237	178
2009	1,895	507	615	392	218	163
2010 until March 31	1,271	351	408	267	146	99

The above table is interesting in the number of horses that trial annually and the number of trials they have, whilst the amount appears substantial it would compare in perspective to the number of trials horses would expect to have in Sydney.

The trial platform within New Zealand consists firstly of a selling opportunity to the Asian and Australian markets then as a pre training component prior to a race start.

In Australia all barrier trials are conducted at catch weights however in Singapore all horses are weighted to carry the equivalent of weight for age, or a set weight for the younger stock with the fillies receiving a 2.0kg allowance. New Zealand trials are conducted at catch weights which is quite surprising considering they are seen as sales opportunities.

I have no concern with the structure of the barrier trial platform apart from the fact that in most instances the young horses are “wound up” and if successful or placed in a trial should be placed high within the ballot for maiden races, exposed form will always generate interest and turnover rather than the unknown.

Season	Meeting Type	Count Horse	Starts	Average Number Starts
2009/10	Race	5,794	33,446	5.77
	Trial	5,067	8,878	1.75
2010/11 part until March 31	Race	4,790	22,061	4.60
	Trial	3,752	5,844	1.56

The above table displays the number of individual starters in races and trials over the 2009-2010 season and the first 8 months of the current season inclusive of March 31.

14. Terms Races

Ideally within a functional ratings handicapping platform there should be a minimal need to conduct terms races. The current placement of maiden winners at the top end of the 60 band and the perceived difficulty in horses winning at Rating 70 level has seen the necessity to conduct 0-1 win races within the South Island.

I have no concern with the running of this race type however with the re alignment of the rating bands (if agreed) there would be significant opportunity for this level of competitor in Ratings 65 and 50 level under true handicap conditions.

There have been requests to consider programming Class races, whilst I can sympathise with participants, I am of the opinion if increased opportunity is afforded at the lower level of competition at handicap level, and there would not be a need to further increase the programming platform.

15. North Island v South Island differences

There is a diverse level in competition between North and South Island, however I would also include a differential between the Central and Northern regions of the North Island.

A review of the horse population by region displays that 52.75% of horses in training are stabled in the Northern region, whereas there are 23.48% within the Central Regions and 23.77% in the South Island.

As would be expected the Northern region conducts 43.55% of races and 42.86% of the Pattern. Therefore with these key factors in place there in the opinion of the industry be a rather significant differential in class of racehorse competing nationally.

A rather simplistic differential of 2.0kg is afforded to horses trained in the South Island at Open Handicap level, nevertheless this allowance is not provided at levels of competition within the lower rating bands.

Similarly to Australia there are significant anomalies within the handicapping platform when attempting to align a country's level of competition off a single number line within a template.

The 2.0kg allowance at all distances and ages is rather naive and leads to significant inconsistency within the handicapping platform.

As previously discussed the differential off the Victorian and Western Australian templates at Open Handicap level is 5 points, however the handicappers in both states have the ability to realign these figures to a level where they consider the overall performance fits within the relative horse population.

Queensland is an interesting example at Open Handicap level within the 5 sectors, a differential of 4.5kg between Metropolitan and Provincial 1 level, 2.5kg between Provincial 1 and Provincial 2, 4.0kg between Provincial 2 and Country 1 and a further 2.0kg to Country 2 level, overall they consider there is a 13.0kg differential between the top and bottom sectors at Open Handicap level within the vast state.

When faced with cross border racing in Hong Kong/Macau and Singapore/Malaysia the handicapper will utilise his discretion to re evaluate the form and rating to a level where horses in his opinion will be competitive.

When faced with movement between regions I remain of the opinion that any decision is left to the expertise of the handicapper and documented so that consistency is paramount.

I remain cautious with the ever increasing cost of traveling horses between regions, unless raceform is accurately assessed at the discretion of the handicapper there will be a decline in the levels of competition between the regions.

16. Balloting

The current balloting conditions outside of Maiden Flat races appear to work effectively and are easily understood, however adoption of the Australian conditions would increase transparency and simplify the process.

Within the Maiden ballot there are eight differing levels of withdrawal, whilst satisfactory in effect they are somewhat convoluted. Following discussion with industry participants I am of the opinion that at this level, recognition of trial performance should be incorporated within the conditions. It is apparent the move to offer incentive to untried horses with entry into fields has not had any significant effect on the number of horses contesting barrier trials.

A return to the points system for performance at trial level previously in place and successful in practice should be considered. With turnover paramount to the industry a level of exposed trial form would enhance confidence for the punter rather than that of an untried performer. It would be desirable for this type of "qualifying trial" to be conducted at a level of set weight relevant to the agreed handicapping platform with the fillies and mares and younger bloodstock attaining a suitable allowance.

The ratings system for maiden races is transparent and whilst uncomplicated does achieve the desired result.

The order of entry in major Group 1 Handicaps does produce problems when a mixture of age groups and sexes are contained within. The true rating figure that incorporates weight and sex allowance in this instance does complicate the ballot. Unlike the Australian ratings where all horses are rated as mature males, there is a need in NZ handicaps to attach a weight and sex allowance to the allotted weight to address the order of entry.

At weight declaration any appended allowance must be published and if in excess of the weight for age allowance a comment from the handicapper should be attached to afford transparency and justification.

A further area of concern is the late entry of horses after weight declaration, I queried the former QTC for years over their policy of allowing horses into the Stradbroke Handicap up

until the Tuesday prior to the race, when weights had been released a month prior. The Telegraph Handicap has a similar condition, which as was the case this renewal where Swift Alliance became a late entry. I see little merit in allowing horses to enter after weight declaration, in these times of pre post betting on feature events there could be justification for connections to appeal such a decision.

17. Perceived concerns within the current Rating Bands

The following list of concerns can be addressed with the proposals made within the paper

1. Maiden winners initial placement
2. Moving horses out of 70 band
3. 2 wins under 70

These points can all be addressed by the adoption of Rating 65 and 75 races, the maiden winners would be afforded the chance to compete at a level below the 80 Band. If not competitive after their maiden win they are able to “drop back” into a competitive level of contest rather than solely being restricted to Rating 70 SWP events.

a. 4 and above win horse capped at 75

An effective ratings platform permits horses to progress and if not performing to a previous level reduce in rating. Therefore with increased opportunity in races conducted at handicap level the placement of horses at all level of competition can be accomplished.

b. 75 raters have trouble winning

It was apparent that the two win horse was having difficulty in competing at the Rating 80 level, the initiation of Ratings 75 races should alleviate these concerns.

c. Capping of mid range ratings in the 80 and 90 bracket

I see there is a need to promote our horses through the grades, an effective rating system should ensure each horse is competitive if the ratings are accurate and consistent.

d. Industry v Premier meeting penalties

In most instances prizemoney will attract quality, in all probability there should be a differential in penalties cumulated within the regions. However at all times the merit of performance should always be left to the discretion of the handicapper, if a dominate performance is recorded at an Industry meeting level the accomplishment should be identified and reassessed accordingly.

I am unaware of any practical way to create a consistent differential between the levels of racing that make up the New Zealand industry. The capping or standardisation of reassessments within regions create a false platform, the handicapper must be permitted to adjust assessments of horses if in his opinion they have accumulated rating points for defeating horses from within a region that is considered inferior to the upcoming place of nomination.

e. Programming

Throughout the various meetings conducted a common thread of discussion was that programs were collated too far in advance, however the majority found the programming booklet a necessity in planning race programs.

Programming booklets were discontinued in Sydney probably 15 years ago, the cost factor becoming a major issue. I am not sure of the costing but I have found the booklets a convenient tool especially since they are regionalised, they appear to be well accepted by the industry.

The Thoroughbred Racing Monthly contains programmes for a 2 month period when published.

I have no concern with programs being set at quarterly periods, however the information stream available to regional meetings must be timely and accurate so that levels of available horse pools can be identified and opportunity afforded. Flexibility and proactivity within programs are paramount and the adoption of Benchmark races to fully encapsulate pools specifically in the upcoming winter period where the horse pool decreases.

I am confident that a Rating 50 race can be developed successfully, these races should be open to maiden horses that have raced at least on 3 occasions in Set Weight Maidens, in reviewing the list of ratings of the horse pool there is a "big tail" at the bottom end of the ratings.

Terms of Reference for the NZTR Handicapping Review:

1. Review existing NZTR handicapping procedures and policies to identify any omissions or inconsistencies.

The current handicapping policy has like the Australian equivalent been developed to promote transparency and simplicity, to this end the current policy explains the in place procedures in layman's terms and adequately defines the parameters in place.

However if changes are to be adopted following this review a full and extensive document will need to be drafted in conjunction with extensive education of the industry participants.

2. Review existing structure of the Handicapping Department within NZTR and make recommendations as to the ideal future structure - including resources (staffing and technology), location, reporting lines and future planning requirements.

Whilst the Senior Handicapper is quite capable of fulfilling his role unassisted, specifically with the current number of set weight races programmed, there is a definite need for an additional experienced handicapper and possibly a cadet. The two domestic handicappers would handicap via region to spread the workload, this would ensure a defined succession plan.

Ideally one handicapper should be based at NZTR which would permit liaison with Racing Department and Bureau staff, and checking and auditing procedures could be shared between handicappers.

I would be wary of offering such a role to a person with little experience in the art of handicapping, whilst the process has simplified some what over recent times it would still take a minimum training period of 12 months prior to handicapping meetings without assistance.

Identifying the ideal person will be difficult, handicappers should be beyond reproach and passionate about the role, display confidence and have the courage of their convictions. The last thing that NZ needs is a handicapper who will not show total commitment to the role, it should be seen as a long term role not simply a stepping stone, therefore the right person should be compensated accordingly.

The NZTR Information Technology system is comparable to others I have worked with, each are a little different in what they can and cannot produce, overall the system is quite adequate and easy to navigate around. Enhancements can always be adopted, automated entry of weight and comment can be expanded as is the case with the IRIS system in

Australia. In time I would like to see an appropriate component within where performance rating figures can be stored.

The development of the handicapping component within Singapore was an interesting exercise. Results are downloaded from the judge directly after the race, line horses are identified by the handicapper and automated ratings are calculated according to weight carried and beaten margins. From that point I would review the race and manually make final adjustments prior to releasing the re ratings the next day. Performance figures were stored within the system and easily accessible, though not available to the public.

3. Review existing internal checking and communication policies - particularly in respect of field selection for all races with regard to standard balloting & exemption conditions, weights and re-handicaps; order of entry for Maiden races; raising weights at acceptance time.

The initial thoughts on this point is one of dismay that an experienced handicapper would need to have any checking mechanism in place prior to the declaration of his weights. I feel it is a blight on his experience and integrity that there remains a need to deploy the various checks and measures that are currently in place.

Having spoken at length with the Handicapper he is of a similar opinion and feels somewhat deflated that such measures are deemed necessary. I am unaware of any other handicapping panel worldwide that places such emphasis on cross checking, specifically by non handicapping staff. The framing and release of all handicap ratings and declarations of weights remains solely the responsibility of the Handicapper.

Having expressed my opinion on the issue of checking the current measures appear to cover all facets within. The employment of an additional handicapper would see the cross checking of weights, penalties etc shared between both handicappers. Re handicaps are identified through the IT Platform and an email is generated, this development has added a further level of advancement to the system.

Standard balloting and exemption conditions and order of entry guidelines for the Maidens are in place and have little to do with Handicappers discretion in the selection of balloting orders. I feel that the Maiden balloting conditions should be revised to incorporate trial performance as a component.

The conditions for the raising of weights at acceptance time is contained within the current regulations, it appears to work effectively with the handicapper supervising the raising of weights. Personally I would prefer to see a minimum 5.0kg spread retained at all levels of handicap racing even if weights are raised at acceptance. The idea of framing a "long handicap" always appealed to me when I was handicapping in Singapore, this ensured that consistent weight spreads were maintained and competitiveness enhanced.

At weight declaration time the rating for horses below the minimum weight is already known, therefore it is possible that an indicative weight for those horses below the minimum be published, and if weights need to be raised at acceptance time they are done so individually to achieve the minimum weight.

4. Consider how communication & transparency with participants can be further enhanced.

The handicapper should not be “faceless” as is the case in some precincts currently, where Handicappers are discouraged from attending meetings. It is my belief that the Handicapper should attend as many meetings as practicable, an identifiable face instills confidence within the industry.

The platform set in Europe and Asia and adopted in Australia by Jim Bowler and myself has seen the role of the Handicapper become a great deal more open than had previously been the case, I am pleased that Greg Carpenter has continued this practice.

The Handicapper must be open to question and be confident with justification for decisions undertaken, respect for participants and media is paramount. Regular media appearance and discussion can only assist in the understanding of the role and increase transparency.

In 1998 I started compiling a media release to accompany the release of the Autumn and Spring feature weights in Sydney, this report entailed historical factors, reasoning and logic for the allocation of weights. I found that these reports, although long were extremely well accepted and assisted in understanding my line of thinking when framing the feature weights. I am pleased that since that time several other handicappers have adopted the practice.

Instilling confidence within the industry is best achieved by presence and communication, in most instances once explained and justified participants can accept the reasoning behind the issue of a specific weight or rating.

5. Determine whether an independent review mechanism needs to be implemented for specific objections to the handicappers' assessments.

In this instance I concur with the previous review conducted by Greg Carpenter in 2005, I too am unaware of any mechanism in any jurisdiction which allows a weight allocated in a handicap race assigned by the Handicapper, to be reviewed on the basis of an objection by persons connected with the horse.

In all precincts throughout the world, the opinion of the handicapper may be questioned; however following consultation between both parties where explanation has been sought

and offered, the matter is then deemed to be resolved. Obviously in some instances disagreement will remain however with Handicapping being subjective there at times a difference of opinion will remain. Unfortunately there is no objective way to quantify the exact merit of racehorse performance.

In New Zealand the Handicapper is freely available to the industry to answer any concerns that may arise he also regularly attends race meetings. The fact that the Handicappers home and mobile numbers are printed in NZTR on a monthly basis is generous to the industry to say the least, this situation exposes him to all types of queries at any given time of the day. Within most other racing jurisdictions throughout the world the handicapper would have a support system in place to monitor his calls and attend to his availability, I could imagine there are numerous times when in the middle of framing weights a call concerning a minor issue would be forthcoming.

Racing NSW has gone to the trouble of employing a Racing Liaison Officer, this a little extreme however due to the significant staff cuts and overall lack of experienced staff currently in place within that organization it appears to be deemed necessary.

This review has shown that post race rating adjustments have displayed all assessments well within accepted world wide handicapping practice and if anything are deemed to be on the conservative side.

6. Rating of 3YO's and allocation of points to 3yo's to amend order of entry into Handicap, WFA and Set Weight Races.

It remains my belief that to accurately promote consistency within any handicapping platform 2 and 3 year olds must be rated as fully matured horses, the age and sex allowances are then deducted from the rating relevant to the weight for age scale (or agreed levels of maturity relief) to calculate a weight to be carried.

This practice affords full transparency in the re rating and balloting of races.

Unfortunately adoption of such a policy would require a great percentage of the horse pool to be re rated, which in some instances take horses out of their current level of participation.

If not to be further investigated, the handicapper as in the current balloting regulation can attach an age based rating allowance to the rating, this can become a little complicated for the industry to understand, however if this allowance is attached to the weights on release and the ballot order issued it will suffice. Ideally a paragraph on the website or in the media when weights are released can address any concerns that may arise.

7. Identify potential synergies with appropriate overseas handicapping jurisdictions.

New Zealand's major trading partner remains Australia, both nations having developed their racing from a similar platform. Although there remains a uniqueness in New Zealand similarities do exist and should be identified, for one I would encourage adoption of the Australian mares and 3 year old allowances, as previously discussed within this paper.

I have covered other overseas jurisdictions previously, it is nonsensical to align New Zealand with other nations such as Hong Kong and Singapore due to the factors previously identified.

8. Investigate differentials between regions with New Zealand eg. North Island vs South Island and seasonal timings eg. through the Winter and early Spring racing period.

I have discussed this issue previously, whilst there is a difference in the strength and quality between the Northern Region and South Island, there also is a difference between the Central and Northern Regions of the North Island.

The adoption of a revised programming platform which incorporates Ratings 50, 65 and 75 as well as Benchmark and Terms racing can and will address any periods when there is a "drop off" in quality. A national handicapping platform is paramount to ensure confidence and the free movement of the horse pool within.

I would encourage the assistance of the Racing Department to ensure that Regions and Clubs have full access to the relevant available horse pools, so that accurate race programs can be drafted.

9. Look at any opportunities to enhance Race programming and avoid congestion in some rating bands.

This issue has previously been discussed within the paper, I would encourage a revision of the current programming platform to incorporate the following levels of rating races.

- Rating - 95 (in time this mark should be achievable)
- Rating - 85
- Rating - 75
- Rating - 65
- Rating - 50

Benchmark racing

Obviously at the higher end of the ratings Benchmark races will need to be programmed until such time as the ratings are “pushed out” to reflect performance and a Rating 95 race can be consistently attained within the programming platform. I see no reason that a full benchmark platform should not be initiated within all levels of handicap racing within the nation.

10. Review the appropriateness of the domestic ratings based handicapping system in New Zealand including the:

- **Application of age and sex allowances in Handicap races.**

I do support the adoption of an age and sex allowance that is incorporated into the ratings, similar to the Australian and Asian system.

This would mean a significant change, however would address the concerns expressed from within the industry and increase transparency within the handicapping process.

- **Spread of weights in Handicap races following the decision to raise the minimum weight in Handicap races by 1kg from 1 February 2011.**

For the rating system to work effectively and to ensure that horses progress a minimum 5.0kg spread in all handicap races outside of 2 year old races must be attained.

- **The application of Set Weights and Set Weight & Penalty races including age group races.**

In all reality the country does conduct far too much set weight racing, I would like to see a significant reduction in numbers, specifically the Rating 70 SWP events. However the decision on numbers eventually lies with the Board of NZTR and the Clubs.

- **F&M Allowance under the WFA Scale - comparisons with Australia, together with the application of 1.5kg F&M allowance in 2yo and 3yo Black Type races eg. is the 56.0kg - 54.5kg set weight scale appropriate?**

The current Fillies and Mares allowance of 2.0kg under the weight for age scale should be consistent across all levels of competition. This would ensure uniformity with Australia. I see little concern with a rise to 56.5kg for the colts at set weight level.

- **Ratings based handicapping template - review how it is being used.**

I am not a supporter of handicapping templates as previously commented on.

The New Zealand template does not cover all levels of competition and is simplistic in its workings. As it is only utilised as a guide it probably does little harm, however unless the template is “stuck rigidly to” during the handicapping process there seems little need for its existence.

Apart from the minor dual banding within it is not difficult for the industry to calculate handicap figures within rating bands. The template is irrelevant if weights are raised when there are no horses nominated that are rated at the top of the band.

- **Application of a re-rating and the movement of horses between rating bands.**

To attain total flexibility within the decision of movement of horses outside of rating bands should be left to the opinion of the handicapper. In the majority of cases penalties for placed performances will not see horses significantly penalised outside of their grade.

The re alignment of the rating bands will address the concerns of Maiden winners being taken outside of the 70 band for placed performance and afford increased flexibility to the handicapper with movement up and down the scale if a Rating 65 race is initiated.

Open Benchmark races negate this concern.

- **Selection of fields for Black Type races.**

Selection criteria must be published within the conditions of the race similar to the feature handicaps conducted within Australia.

This would ensure transparency in the order of entry, which must be published as soon as practicable after the issue of weights.

- **Introduction of Benchmark races in South Island and the appropriateness or otherwise of an extension of Benchmark racing across New Zealand.**

Any measure that can increase the weight spread in races must be considered, to this end I support the concept of Benchmark racing. However, I would not deviate from the proposed realignment of the rating bands to maintain consistency within the programming platform.

Conclusion:

New Zealand is such a diverse and unique racing nation with little similarity outside of Australia to other countries contained within Part 1 of the International Cataloguing Standards Book.

I have had difficulty at times in evaluating the true differentials between the regions, to attempt to create a level playing field for all participants within is not a simple task.

The diversity in quality of participant within the regions is substantial and to create a single accurate ratings template to cover all parameters is not possible.

Obviously each region has its own concerns with the workings of the current handicapping and programming platform. In all reality the system works to a satisfactory level apart from the significant bottlenecks that are currently within and the lack of perceived progression.

Unfortunately Australia faces a similar situation with the bulk of performers rated between 75 and 60. A major concern within New Zealand remains the significant amount of set weight racing within the nations programming platform, in my opinion this fact is inhibiting the progression of horses in the ratings. There remains lack of option for the lesser performed horse within the current platform, and obviously races must be put in place to cater for these horses.

I have concerns with the placement within the system of the maiden winners since the inception of the Rating 70 band, it appears that the winners are continually facing difficulty in being taken directly to the 80 rating band level after only recording two wins. To address such issues a re alignment of the Rating bands is required, presently there are limited numbers above the Rating 90 mark, which I find a little of an anomaly, to suggest that there are not a significant number horses rated 20 points above a maiden winner within the country appears unrealistic.

The following recommendations are proposed:

1. The revised rating bands should be 95,95,75,65 and possibly 50.
2. Benchmarking should be utilised to cater for the pool of horses when necessary.
3. Mares allowance should be a consistent 2.0kg across the board relevant to the weight for age scale.

4. Restrictions within the current platform - re taking horses out of current grade for placed performances be removed.
5. 3 year old allowance to be reviewed in the early months of the season, (Spring)
6. Open Handicaps should revert to a 53.0kg minimum
7. A minimum 5.0kg spread of weights at all levels of handicap competition outside of 2 year olds.
8. Inclusion of the riders safety vest into the handicap weight.
9. Deletion of Rating 70 Set Weight and Penalty races, or a substantial reduction
10. Consideration to be given to re aligning ratings to rate all performers as a mature male horse with age and sex allowance to be deducted at weight declaration. A move as such would simplify the ballot.
11. Deletion of Restricted Open Handicaps
12. Current and past ratings to be displayed within form on website and racebooks.
13. Employment of a further handicapper and a cadet.
14. Increased transparency and profile of the handicapper.

New Zealand is fortunate to have a professional handicapper of the quality of Dean Nowell, who is respected by his peers both domestically and internationally. His years of accumulated knowledge and experience continue to serve the industry well.

I would like to thank all who have participated and contributed to the review, there input has been of great assistance in the collation of the paper.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Key Factors Considered when Handicapping Races

Use of a "line" horse

To consistently evaluate performance the handicapper will focus on a reliable or consistent horse and use this runner as a reference (or line horse) point against which to compare the performances of improving animals.

Class of race and Relative Strength

The grade of race and the quality of performance normally associated within is also taken into account when assessing form. Whilst ratings are based on analytical methods, they do also reflect the subjective opinion of the handicapper.

The strength of a race may be determined by:

- Number of in form horses (horses running to or near their current rating at recent starts)
- Horses with emerging collateral form
- Winners / placegetters in current or higher class
- Number of horses indicating likely improvement to run above their current ratings (most common with young horses).

Race Factors

The handicapper when reviewing races will disseminate all aspects within, seeking explanation and reasons for justifying decisions reached. When horses race below current marks all incidents in running will be analysed prior to re evaluation, these may include:

1. condition of the track
2. barrier draw
3. speed and tempo of race
4. position in running e.g racing wide
5. incidents in running - whether slowly away, checks, impeded runs, erratic running, faulty gear and injury.
6. A key component in most races is the pace and tempo of the event this can in fact affect the veracity of the result.

7. The going or state of the ground can also radically exaggerate beaten margins as well as the fact that over the final stages of a race only the principals are likely to expend full effort towards the finish

Future Racing Opportunities

The handicapper must be mindful of future programming opportunities prior to re evaluation...

Thus handicapping presents a minefield of dialectic alternatives of which the handicapper must be able to justify any decision undertaken when questioned.

Identify any potential synergies with appropriate overseas handicapping jurisdictions

The most common of handicapping methodology has been developed over centuries after originally emanating from The Jockey Club. The majority of racing nations today still utilize the basic principals of this platform within minimal adjustments developed to suit the varying individual parameters of each region. Countries that deploy this methodology include Great Britain and Europe, United Arab Republic, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and South Africa.

The major racing nations have developed their Handicapping Platforms around the British model, a central ratings system, where horse performance is evaluated based on measurable facts in conjunction with the interpretation of race results, programming models and horse pool relevant to the region. Ratings are displayed on the various websites and are readily available to industry participants and the public.

Australia and New Zealand have adopted post 2004 displayed ratings, however the discernible difference with the remainder of the world is that these regions do not have their ratings dictated by a displayed ratings template.

Handicapping in a World perspective has adopted more comparable practices than in the past, however differences may exist between countries and within countries as unique racing characteristics will always be prevalent.

Differing Domestic handicapping practices:

Differences between Northern Hemisphere and Southern Hemisphere

- Northern Hemisphere
 1. Ratings revised post race prior to nomination
 2. Adjustable performance figures – 'Ran to Ratings'
 3. Heavily margin based
 4. Significant weight spread
 5. No displayed rating template

- Southern Hemisphere (Australia and New Zealand)
 1. Ratings revised post race prior to nomination since inception of RBH (Previously handicaps issued at time of nomination).
 2. Based around an internal ratings and penalty system
 3. Less reliance on margin
 4. Minimal weight spread
 5. Displayed rating template

Prior to 2004 within Australia and New Zealand all handicapping was discretionary ratings based, pre that period and throughout my handicapping career handicappers in Australia kept their own personal ratings. Whilst each state had its own handicapping policy with guidelines outlining the base race and expected handicapping levels, the actual rating figure was not disclosed.

This practice added to the mystique of each handicap race where the handicapper could evaluate the true merit of the race nomination and assign weights accordingly. It is true that many times the original rating was amended to permit for direct comparison of past performances between nominations; but at all times the actual strength of race class was held within published parameters. All in all this practice was extremely successful and ensured the handicapper was accurate in all handicap ratings allocated.

With time comes change and innovation, with the globalization of racing coming to the forefront administrators within Australia and New Zealand could see the benefits of displayed ratings, this practice had been prevalent throughout all the major racing nations for a long period and there was desire for adaptation of the concept.

The main benefit was for connections to be able to observe the movement of horses subsequent to each performance. However a further step was undertaken with the development of a template listing the expected weight to be carried at all levels of competition equivalent to the actual rating figure.

Within Australia and New Zealand prior to RBH all horses went forward in classes whereas in most other regions horses are able to drop back through the grades, this factor ensures that horses can remain competitive throughout their entire career.

The Handicapper will interpret the merit of each racetrack performance, the measurable factors are the actual weight that the horse carries, the margin of victory or defeat and the drag effect of weight over differing racing distance as well as the age and sex of the horse. Whereas some non quantitative factors include the quality of the opposition, the speed and tempo within the race, the state of the going and in race incidents.

Within the Merit Handicapping System in place in most major nations, the handicapper when reviewing the result of a race will research the horses that have in his opinion run to their current rating mark. This horse or horses will invariably be within the placegetters or finished close up within the finish and have displayed consistent recent form. All performances are then rated relevant to these “line horses” and a performance rating calculated relevant to weight carried and the margin of victory or defeat.

Adapting Handicapping Practices to unique Racing environments Asian focus (Singapore/Malaysia, Hong Kong, Macau)

Singapore/Malaysia, Hong Kong and Macau all have similar racing environments and therefore similar ratings based handicapping systems

Fixed Horse Populations

A significant challenge faced by Handicappers in these regions is the fact that there is a fixed horse population with all racing stock being imported, unlike other countries where there is invariably a solid breeding platform and a consistent influx of young stock.

On average there is 160 new imports arriving in Singapore and Hong Kong each year, to sustain the horse pool at around the 1000 mark it is necessary to ensure that the racing career of the pool is maximised.

Handicapping within a rigid Class System

There are many facets of racing in Asia that are unique to both handicapping and programming. When assessing form in insular horse pools it is paramount to ensure there is a balance across all race classes to guarantee consistency in programming and opportunities afforded.

As in most regions horses can drop back through the grades, this factor ensures that horses can remain competitive throughout their entire career, therefore Handicappers have had to become accustomed to the fact that they are in fact dealing with an ageing pool in some instances that are no longer competitive at their peak levels but remain sound enough to continue to compete.

Repeat Competition under repeat Conditions

Due to the fact there is an enclosed population within the Asian region there is inevitably repeat competition between horses within the classes, to ensure competition levels are retained within the races it is necessary as far as practicable to re evaluate racetrack performance at a higher level to stimulate betting turnover. Unlike Australia, New Zealand or Europe horses cannot be taken to out of town tracks or interstate to find their level of competition.

Within Hong Kong, Singapore and other nations with enclosed pools their racing is restricted to that domain, therefore handicappers must be flexible within the ratings. Due to the enclosed population there is mainly open age racing at handicap level, the handicapper must remain mindful of the age improvement afforded three year olds throughout the season under the weight for age scale

Unique Racing Characteristics within the Asian Region

- Mix of local and expatriate participants
- Challenging racing factors – track deterioration (Turf and Synthetic race surfaces).
- Industry and public expectations
- Existing conventions – introducing change
- Emphasis on Handicapping and Implications as a betting medium with significant links to race planning

Due to the fact that racing is funded by betting turnover the handicapper must remain mindful of industry and public expectation in all facets of handicapping with consistency and transparency being paramount. Whilst there have over the years been moves a foot in certain regions to standardize penalties these moves are unsubstantiated and detract from the expertise of the handicappers opinion and knowledge.

The Class System & Programming within Asia (emphasis on Hong Kong and Singapore models)

Races in Hong Kong are conducted within a class structure consisting of five classes.

Race Class Hong Kong	Standard upper rating limit
Class 1	120
Class 2	100

Race Class Hong Kong	Standard upper rating limit
Class 3	80
Class 4	60
Class 5	40

Similar to Hong Kong, Singapore utilizes a class system consisting of 5 classes, however in addition there are various types of condition races conducted within the race planning platform, these range from the Restricted Maiden races for two and three year olds to races restricted by number of wins and set weights according to rating bands.

Race Class Singapore	Rating Bands
Class 1	80 and above
Class 2	71 to 89
Class 3	57 to 74
Class 4	44 to 61
Class 5	43 and below

The majority of the stock imported into Hong Kong and Singapore is sourced from Australia and New Zealand. They arrive at varying levels of competition from unraced two and three year olds to winners at moderate level up to black type performers.

Horses move between classes relative to the merit of performance displayed, ideally young horses on the improve are identified and progressed to higher grades whereas older performers who are no longer running to there best level of competition will lower in the ratings to ensure competitiveness.

Race planning is a key component to generating gambling interest and ensuring field sizes are maintained at optimum levels. As in any racing platform there is a pyramid structure in place relevant to the available horse pool with the majority of races programmed being for the lower class races where the majority of eligibility exists. Of the annual race program 95% will be conducted at handicap level.

Handicapping in Singapore

Within Singapore a numerical scale is used to determine handicap weights for races. The official Malaysian Racing Association rating allocated to each horse compares him to all other horses at that point in time. Whilst there is minimal interaction with the horse

population of Singapore and the Malayan race clubs, there are specific invitation and Pattern races where there are horses from both regions nominated. In these instances the handicapper from either country has the ability to review and reassess the relevant rating of the visiting horse, with horses travelling from Malaysia it is not unusual for the rating to be lowered by up to 12 points (6.0kg). A similar discretion is in place when horses from Macau competes in invitational races in Hong Kong.

Almost 95 per cent of the races are handicaps, which are divided in to five classes, but the benchmark method is also used.

The Handicapper is not restricted in any way to a set penalty but a minimum of 5 rating points for winners in races excluding Class 1 and pattern races is an adopted practice . Horses running a prominent placing may also receive a penalty relative to the overall merit of performance, horses finishing close to placegetters may not have their ratings adjusted, whereas beaten horses may gain relief if they display that they are not performing to their current rating, although a one off performance does not necessarily gain relief if there remains valid excuses for that performance. It is not practice to lower last start winners or horses returning from extended spells. The maximum level of rating relief afforded any given performance is 4 points.

Race programmes are set at quarterly intervals with Pattern races and their relevant lead in races are set to specific dates, other races are drafted in to the race day program but may be changed at any time prior to the closing of entries to best cater for the available horse population at the time. This factor as would be expected is simple to monitor when racing at a singular racetrack with an encapsulated horse pool.

Ratings Based Handicapping in Australia

Ratings Based Handicapping was adopted by Racing Victoria in March 2004 and followed shortly after by Racing NSW in early 2005, over the preceding period RBH has been developed to satisfy the needs of the industry offering complete transparency, it has been adopted in some form by all states and is generally accepted by the industry.

However experienced participants who regularly deal with ratings still criticise the use of a template, the accuracy within and the significant compression of weights that have become the normal.

Personally I had great concern over the accuracy of templates and the fact that the handicapper was expected to project the placement of horses upcoming starts by publishing a rating figure which could not be amended. Over the period of my tenure as Senior Handicapper my panel and I had developed accurate track and class ratings for the entire state, relevant to Metropolitan, Provincial, Country TAB and Non TAB racing. At the time of RBH commencement I was happy to proceed with three individual templates

covering the three sectors within NSW but was over ruled by the Board in favour of the simplicity of a single number line template.

New South Wales - The Benchmark Platform

Adopted in 2009 the Benchmark System has been successful in the Sydney Metropolitan area, the platform has increased competitiveness in races and afforded increased opportunities to participants in the placement of their horses.

There has been a minor increase in field sizes throughout the state, probably not to the extent that was originally anticipated however there has been a stemming of the slide that was apparent over recent years.

A lack of respect of the art of handicapping by the Board of Racing NSW has seen the appointment of Racing And Sports Pty Ltd as the administrator of the handicap ratings. This rather left field decision has come as a shock and appears an unnecessary expense, however the lack of experience within the current Panel ensures that deadlines are achieved.

Personally I perceive a problem with adapting ratings that are solely for the use of punters that are not open to scrutiny or justification by the industry. The fact that these ratings do not have to adapt to the regulatory standards required by the various Racing Principal bodies remains an issue. I concede that the figures issued are solely a guide to the handicappers, however in most instances the figures are being carried over, once again this measure dilutes the opinion of the handicapper and lowers the perception of the role of the person appointed to decide on such issues

The Benchmark system has increased the weight spread in races across the state, it has taken trainers a little time to adapt to the principal, however the increased opportunities afforded has out weighed any negativity that may have arisen from the increased weight to be carried.

The compression of weights is still of concern with the minimum advertised 5 kilogram spread not being deemed sufficient by racing purists. The Benchmark system has assisted in creating an increased weight spread in races thus increasing opportunity and stimulating turnover.

Unfortunately the initial plan of the body to solely conduct Benchmark Racing within the state has due to concerns and lack of understanding by participants seen the reinstatement of Class racing and some terms races to the calendar. The adoption of these races has led to some confusion as to how they are assessed and sit within the Benchmark platform.

It is fair to comment that the full benefits of Benchmark racing and programming remains unsuited in some instances to the country regions of NSW. Over the past six months there

has been a reinstatement of Classes 1,2 and 3 to again cater for the lesser performed horses within the pool.

The situation of assessing races solely off a rating has seen the compression of weights increase and the lowering of the overall ratings to a point where they are overly compressed specifically between the 65 to 75 level.

It was never the intention of Ratings Based Handicapping to utilise the ratings at Black Type handicap level, due to the volatility of differing form lines specifically within Group 1 and 2 level.

A prime example has been the major Group 1 Handicaps conducted during the autumn and spring periods in NSW since the inception of the new policy. These handicaps have been far too compressed a prime example being the Doncaster Handicap where of a total of 200 nominations only 30 were deemed worthy of being assessed off the limit weight of 51.0kg.

Current Handicapping practice within the state appears to be reluctant to exceed 58.0kg as a top weight in Group 1 Handicaps, even though the quality of performer at the top of weights would carry weight for age (59.0kg) on a regular basis throughout the season. The compressed nature of the weights has seen the majority of races having the weights raised at acceptance time.

Racing NSW with the inception of Benchmark handicapping has done away with the previous Ratings Based template, whilst there is a template within the system it is not displayed to the public.

Victoria

Commenced Ratings Based Handicapping in March 2004 and overall has been accepted by the industry. The geography within the state has ensured that the pool of horses is significantly easier to accommodate within the programming platform than the larger states of New South Wales and Queensland.

The adoption of the template as a guide to owners and trainers has been welcomed by the industry. It is utilised in all races outside of Black Type events where the handicapping is left to the discretion of the handicapper.

Fillies and Mares are allocated a 2 kilogram allowance in all races against the male horses relevant to their rating.

When 3 Year Olds race against the older horses in Non Metropolitan events they receive an allowance that is determined quarterly relevant to the Maiden race scale.

3 year olds who race against older horses in metropolitan races the handicapper will assess their form against the weight for age scale to determine an appropriate allowance in the race.

Western Australia

Has adopted a Ratings Based platform similar to Victoria, where a template is utilized, and the ratings differentiate from the Victorian equivalent but remain relevant to racing within WA. As an example the strength of open handicaps are considered to be 5 points inferior to those conducted within the Melbourne metropolitan area.

Unlike Victoria the mares and age allowances are factored into the rating (similar to New Zealand) so that the figure is considered to be a “true rating”. An interesting initiative has been to conduct Ratings Based Races relevant to the minimum weight, this is the opposite to the other states and sees all races weighted from the bottom up with an open top weight.

Queensland

Utilises a Ratings Based Handicapping System and has a template in place that in the opinion of RQL has incorporated within the flexibility necessary to accommodate the various racing clusters within the state.

The template is similar to what I proposed in NSW at the inception of RBH, the Queensland equivalent despite being a single template has 5 separate components consisting of Metropolitan, Provincial 1, Provincial 2, Country 1 and Country 2. Group and Listed races are not included within the template.

Being such a diverse racing state the quality of racing is extremely variable, unlike other states Queensland has a diverse programming platform consisting of handicap, set weight, and terms racing including Class 1,3 and 6 plates.

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Template	No	Yes	No	Yes
Min Top Weight	58.0kg	58.0kg	58.0 kg	58.0 kg
Min Weight	53.0 kg Metro /Provincial 54.0 kg Country	53.0 kg	53.0 kg Metro 54.0 kg Prov 55.0 kg Country	53.0 kg Metro 54.0 kg Prov B

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Min Top Weight at Acceptance	57.0 kg	57.0 kg	57.0 kg Metro/Prov 58.0 kg Country	57.0 kg
Max Top Weight Quality Handicaps	61.0 kg	61.0 kg	61.0 kg	61.0 kg
Fillies & Mares Allowance	2.0 kg	2.0 kg	2.0 kg	2.0 kg
3 Year Old Allowances	Aug - Oct 2.5kg Nov - Jan 1.5 kg Feb - Apr 0.5 kg May - July Nil In races of 1800m and beyond Aug - Oct 3.5kg Nov - Jan 2.5 kg Feb - Apr 1.5 kg May - July 1.0kg	Aug - Oct 2.5kg Nov - Jan 1.5 kg Feb - Apr 0.5 kg May - July Nil	Aug - Oct 2.5kg Nov - Jan 1.5 kg Feb - Apr 0.5 kg May - July Nil	Aug - Sep 2.0kg Oct - Nov 1.5kg Dec - Jan 1.0 kg Feb - Mar 0.5 kg April - July Nil

An overview of other Nations

United Arab Emirates

A handicap ratings system similar to that in place in Europe is the current handicapping platform (0-140). Horses are rated in pounds on the scale but weighted in kilograms.

In races up to and including 1600 metres the minimum topweight is 62.0kg. beyond 1600 metres the minimum topweight is 60.0kg. The minimum weight is 51.0kg.

Europe

Racing in Britain, Ireland, France, Germany and Italy is virtually identical, except that in the last-named three countries the racing weight is in kilograms. The ratings are also published in kilograms, not pounds. However, as these countries are members of the World Thoroughbred Racehorse Rankings, they are fully conversant with the 0-140 scale that is in place in Britain and Ireland.

Each country has a centralised handicapping system and the majority of races are handicaps or ratings-related. The remainder of the programme comprise maidens, conditions, weight-for-age, Listed and Pattern races.

Hong Kong

The majority of the races are handicaps (95%) and a merit-based system is employed in which there are six classes with a 20lb spread in each. The weights are published in pounds and the maximum top weight is 133lb (60kg) with a minimum weight of 113lb (51kg). The published ratings are local ratings and are considered to be 20lb higher than the international level.

Japan

The races themselves consist mainly of maidens, conditions and weight-for-age contests. There are very few handicaps. The Japanese handicappers rate all their races on the international scale (0-140).

South Africa

A panel of handicappers decides the merit rating of each horse after analysing each race performance. These ratings, except for two-year-olds, are published on a weekly basis and are on the same level as the 0-140 international scale.

The merit rated handicaps are divided into five divisions from E to A. Divisions E to B have what is known as a merit benchmark. The maximum rating in Division E is 74, in Division D it is 80, in Division C it is 90 and in Division B it is 98. In all cases the minimum weight is set at 50kg and the top weight at 58kg.

However, at the handicappers' discretion, and after taking the weight-for-age allowance into account, younger horses with higher ratings than the benchmark can be included. However, they are penalised 0.5kg, or one pound, for every merit point (pound) above the benchmark to a maximum of 8 points (or 4kg) in Divisions B and C, and four points (or 2kg) in Division D.

There is no provision for a higher rating in Division E and there is no benchmark for Division A, which is open to all horses at the handicappers' discretion.

Other types of races that feature in South African racing are:

Novice Plates: For one-time winners and maidens. Winners penalised 2.5kg. Graduation Plates: For one and two-time winners only. Maidens excluded. Two-time winners concede 2.5kg to one-time winners.

Allowance Plates: Open to all horses except maidens. Grade One and Two winners are also excluded for six months from the date they won the Graded race. Penalties are usually 2.5kg for each race won up to four races and the 2kg for each race thereafter.

Advance Plates: Similar to Allowance Plates but usually confined to horses that have won three races or more.

United States of America

Racing is structured entirely differently in the United States. There are no official handicappers as there are in the other major racing jurisdictions and there is no centralised handicapping, nor any ratings-related races.

The ability of the racehorse therefore is often assessed by the owner or trainer. If the owner or trainer decides that they have an above average horse, they have the opportunity to enter it in the best races, i.e. stakes or Graded races. On the other hand, if they think their horse has little ability, they can enter it in the poorest races, usually a claiming race, for US\$5,000.

A claiming race is a race in which the weight to be carried is determined by the owner or trainer in relation to the claiming price or the number of races won within a determined period. The horse can then be claimed (purchased) by another person for the advertised claiming price. The claim has to be made prior to the race and if several people make a claim for the same horse the outcome is decided by ballot.

Many people regard claimers in the USA as on a par with handicaps, the difference being that the owner and/or trainer decide the ability of their own horse and can place it accordingly. Whilst the low-value claiming races accommodate the moderate horses, there are also valuable claiming races for better horses. Claiming races can range from US\$5,000 to US\$100,000 and in some cases even US\$500,000.

In addition to claiming races, there are a large number of conditions and allowance races in the States. After winning a maiden, a horse will probably be entered in a non-winners of two, a race for horses that have not won two races other than a maiden, claimer or starter (newcomers' race). He can then progress to a non-winners of three, and then a non-winners of four.

If he continues to make progress, he can contest what is generally known as beaten allowance races, in which a horse receives an allowance less than the base weight for not having won a certain amount of money at a certain distance after a specified date. For example, the conditions might read: weight 124lbs, non-winners of \$28,000 twice at a mile or over since April 15 allowed 3lbs, non-winners of \$18,000 twice at a mile or over since November 15 allowed 5lbs.

Assuming that the horse progresses further, he can then run in open stakes company and contest Listed and Graded races.

Although there is no central handicapping system in place, several of the major races are handicaps (for example the Santa Anita Handicap, Donn Handicap and Hollywood Gold Cup). The weights for these races are decided by the racing secretary of the course concerned.

Another major difference between the USA and other racing jurisdictions is that the majority of racing takes place on a dirt surface. The tracks are left-handed and flat and therefore there is a great reliance on the clock and race times. The horses are usually trained at the racetrack and on average there would be between 1,000 and 1,400 stalls available. Race track trials or workouts are timed, reported and printed in the racing papers and on the racecard.

Each racetrack stages its own race programme and that responsibility is given to the racing secretary. It is his or her job to devise races that will attract horses both in terms of quality and quantity.