



## MEDIA RELEASE

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Unsustainable costs for owners, participants and the wider racing industry have encouraged NZ Thoroughbred Racing (NZTR) to investigate a better network of racecourses across the country.

After a lengthy analysis NZTR is now consulting with the industry following the release of its venue plan today. The plan proposes a reduction to 27 venues in total across the country by 2030.

This Future Venue Plan is not as a result of any Government processes underway. NZTR will be considering the outcomes of any advice of the Ministerial Advisory Committee and any decisions from the Government as consultation is progressed.

“While NZTR agrees with the Messara report that a reduction of venues is required, having already undertaken substantial work in this area over some years we have a view of how this could look,” NZTR CEO Bernard Saundry said.

“Despite the best intentions of committed and passionate volunteers, many of New Zealand’s racing venues are in urgent need of major development,” he said. “Spending is required to bring infrastructure up to standard and to meet Health & Safety obligations. An upgrading of venues will also improve the punter experience by providing better and more consistent track surfaces.”

The consultation document initially proposes that 10 venues are not allocated licences in the 2019/20 racing season. This includes Dargaville, Thames and Wyndham who are racing at other venues in the current racing season. The other affected clubs are Wairoa, Stratford, Blenheim, Reefton, Hokitika, Waimate and Winton.

NZTR anticipates that those clubs which lose their traditional venues will continue to race at an alternative track.

“A key commitment of the proposed NZTR Venue Plan is that all clubs in New Zealand will have an approved and appropriate venue at which to race. We see a future for every club,” Saundry said. Craig McNeill, who was the past-president of the Feilding Jockey Club in 1999 when it sold its property and relocated racing to Awapuni, believes clubs should embrace the opportunity for change.

“What a lot of people do not realise is that moving made us stronger not weaker,” McNeill said.

“We are focused on the community and sponsors like never before and that sees increased investment and attendance at our meetings.”

It is a view which is supported by Beaumont Racing Club president, Phil Williams whose club has been racing at Wingatui for 25 years.

“While the locals were disappointed when the move was mooted our sponsors stuck with us, some are with us to this day,” he said.

“Now we are very financially sound, we have no course maintenance costs and just have to concentrate on sponsors and entertainment. If we hadn’t moved, we would be gone without a doubt.”

NZTR will conduct meetings with stakeholders over the coming weeks with 19 March the deadline for feedback.

“Everything in the Venue Plan is up for debate and we want feedback to ensure the best possible result for the future of our industry,” Saundry said.

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**NOTE FOR EDITORS:** The Venue Plan consultation document will be available on the NZTR website later today [www.loveracing.nz](http://www.loveracing.nz)

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