

# FACT SHEET



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## Climate Change for Horse Owners

This project sought to engage horse owners to examine the potential impact on them of climate change. As the horse keeping population of Australia moves towards capital cities and major regional townships, horse keeping practices have shifted from broad acre or rangeland grazing to smaller properties. With this comes an increased need for horse property managers to demonstrate environmentally sound practices to protect drinking water quality and remnant habitat, and reduce neighbourhood complaints about issues such as dust, mud and erosion. New horse owners often find themselves being new land managers.



Little research has been undertaken to help commercial and private horse owners make informed decisions about how to adapt to climate change. For horse keepers, the quality and availability of pasture grasses, baled hay and manufactured feed, and maintenance of racetracks and sport horse grounds are major areas of potential impact. Without research, development of resource tools and science-led guidance, the horse industry collectively stands to suffer unnecessary economic loss and miss out on market opportunities.

Horse SA engaged with horse owners and organisations to discuss climate change impacts and the need to develop adaptive practices. A workshop, Horses & Climate Impacts, was held in June 2012 to identify horse keepers' attitudes, practices and knowledge in relation to meeting climate change challenges, identify gaps in research and, importantly, engage horse owners in a way that could lead to a positive approach towards commencement of adaptation measures.

Workshop presentations, the survey report and literature review are available on [www.horseslandwater.com](http://www.horseslandwater.com).

## The project

The project was delivered in four phases.

1. A Literature Review, presented as an issues paper by Melissa A Rebbeck, SARDI Climate Applications Unit, helped guide the framework for the workshop. A review of current literature identified climate change and horse related topics such as land management, pasture production, weeds, pests, breeding and fertility, horse health including Arboviruses, and wildlife borne diseases, bacterial infection and heart disease. It also found other topics likely to affect horses and industries, including event management, track maintenance and the carbon farming scheme and identified Australian researchers or agencies currently involved with investigating horses and climate impacts
2. A Horse Owner Survey conducted by Dr Kirrilly Thompson, Central Queensland University, identified horse keepers' attitudes, practices and knowledge in relation to meeting climate change challenges. It took a number of attempts to prepare a survey that horse owners responded to in a positive manner. The survey also provided important information on improving or updating existing programs, resources and other education and extension activities centred on horse keeping and sustainability
3. Workshop Design and Delivery – A professional facilitator, Monica Redden, was engaged to assist with the workshop which included horse organisation representatives, government and researchers.
4. Communication – A horse keeping and climate change online forum was established as an ongoing communication, information sharing and engagement tool. A combination of methods such as online prompts, personal, email, telephone, websites, Facebook, media releases were also used. All presentations, the survey report, literature review, workshop summary and brochure are uploaded on [www.horseslandwater.com](http://www.horseslandwater.com).



## Key Findings

From the literature review, it was recommended that a peer reviewed vulnerability assessment be carried out on the horse industry. A vulnerability analyses would add to the assessment of the impact of climate change on horses and horse industries as well as look at climate stressors and adaptation and score the overall vulnerability of the horses and industry as described by Allan Consulting Group (2005). This assessment could consider, in isolation, specific horse industries and aspects of horses and management such as veterinary, public health, natural resources, carbon trading, events and infrastructure, occupational health, water and pasture management in peri-urban properties and more. The vulnerability assessment could identify sectors in the horse industry needing priority support and research. The horse industry also needs support to mitigate climate change and little work has been done as to how much carbon horses and industry are emitting into the atmosphere.

Workshop participants also prioritised the following topics for further development as part of an Action Plan for the horse industry to progress climate change adaptation:

1. Statistics: National database for the horse industry
2. Education: Information and education available in relation to horses, climate change and adaptation
3. Promote a holistic approach to horse care
4. Priority research on pasture management information.

The key messages to emerge from the project relate to the need for adaptation of existing practices and for further research to support these changes so that adaptive practices are informed, cost effective and have relevance for horse owners, organisations and event managers.



### For more information

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- This fact sheet as well as the full range of publications from the Horse Program are available from the RIRDC website [www.rirdc.gov.au](http://www.rirdc.gov.au) or by phoning 1300 634 313