



## **SUBMISSION ON JOCKEY NUMBERS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Prepared by the NSW Jockeys Association**

15<sup>th</sup> September 2025

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### **Executive Summary**

The New South Wales (NSW) horse racing industry currently has a sufficient number of jockeys to meet its demands, supported by robust apprentice programs and a stable pool of licensed jockeys.

However, the influx of international jockeys and a shortage of trackwork riders pose challenges to local jockeys, particularly in regional areas.

This submission evaluates the jockey workforce in NSW using quantitative and qualitative data, highlighting the adequacy of jockey numbers, the impact of international jockeys, and the need for a distinct "Trackwork Rider" occupation category. Recommendations are provided to address these issues while maintaining the industry's sustainability.

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### **Introduction**

The question of whether NSW has an adequate number of jockeys to meet the demands of its horse racing industry requires both quantitative and qualitative analysis. This submission evaluates the current jockey workforce, the impact of international jockeys, and the distinction between jockeys and trackwork riders.

Despite the "Jockey Occupation" (ANZSCO 452413) being on the Confident OFF List, international jockeys continue to enter Australia, prompting concerns from the NSW Jockeys Association (NSWJA).

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## **Quantitative Analysis**

### **Number of Registered Jockeys**

**Racing Australia Fact Book (2023):** NSW has 243 registered jockeys, including apprentices, senior jockeys, and approved/picnic riders.

Of these, 187 are active licensed jockeys (excluding approved/picnic riders and inactive jockeys).

### **Demographics:**

33% of active jockeys are female. However, among the 92 jockeys aged over 30, only 13% are female.

NSW has 67 licensed apprentice jockeys, with 70% being female, ensuring a steady influx of new talent.

**National Context:** Australia has 852 registered jockeys, with NSW representing a significant portion.

### **Racing Events and Jockey Demand**

**Racing NSW Annual Report (2022/2023):** NSW hosted 51,576 starters across 5,299 races (excluding 22 picnic race meetings), averaging 10 jockeys per race.

### **Workload:**

With 187 active jockeys, the average is approximately 275 races per jockey annually.

Accounting for inactive jockeys (e.g., those on workers' compensation) and interstate jockeys, the active workforce is closer to 160, reducing the average to approximately 200 races per jockey annually (or four races per week).

This workload is manageable, indicating sufficient jockey numbers to meet current demands.

### **Apprentice Jockey Programs**

The Racing NSW Apprentice Jockey Training Program enrolls 25-30 new apprentices annually, ensuring a balanced replacement of retiring jockeys.

These programs maintain a steady pipeline of skilled jockeys entering the industry.

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## **Qualitative Analysis**

### **Industry Expert Opinions**

Interviews with racing managers, trainers, and former jockeys confirm that NSW has an adequate number of jockeys for current racing activity.

**No horses have been scratched in NSW due to a lack of jockeys, reinforcing that supply exceeds demand.**

Trainers note a shortage of trackwork riders, distinct from professional jockeys.

### **Regional Distribution**

**Demographic Disparity:** Only 15% of NSW jockeys reside in Sydney, where all Group 1 races occur. The remaining 85% are based in regional NSW, traveling up to 110,000 km annually to attend race meetings.

Regional jockeys face greater competition from international jockeys, particularly impacting their opportunities.

### **Jockey vs. Trackwork Rider**

**Professional Jockeys:** Ride in races organized by Principal Racing Authorities (e.g., Racing NSW), earning a riding fee (\$262.50 per race) and 5% of prizemoney.

**Trackwork Riders:** Employed by trainers to exercise horses in the mornings, typically not licensed to ride in races unless also a professional jockey. Some jockeys ride trackwork gratis to secure race rides, while few are paid for trackwork duties.

**Key Issue:** While trackwork rider shortages exist, there is no shortage of professional jockeys.

The NSWJA recommends introducing a new Core Skills Occupation category for "Trackwork Riders" to address this distinction.

### **Apprentice Jockeys**

Apprentices serve a four-year apprenticeship, working trackwork six mornings weekly (4:00-5:30 AM) and riding in races, often traveling vast distances in NSW.

Fatigue is a significant concern, repeatedly raised with Racing NSW.

NSW enrolls 25-30 new apprentices annually, with 75-80% of first-year apprentices being female. However, only 13% of jockeys over 30 are female, indicating retention challenges.

International apprentice jockeys (e.g., from New Zealand, UK, Ireland) reduce opportunities for local apprentices, despite NSW having a robust apprentice pipeline.

### **International Jockeys**

The NSWJA welcomes international jockeys as members but notes concerns about oversupply:

Twelve international jockeys (from the UK, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa) who arrived since 2015 and are now Australian citizens report an excess of jockeys in NSW.

Short-term "fly-in/fly-out" international jockeys take opportunities from local jockeys without adding significant value to the racing product.

A 2020 NSWJA study found that international jockeys (arriving in the prior five years) earned \$874,390.45 in NSW in one season, impacting local jockeys' earnings.

### **Number of Rides**

Regional NSW race meetings average 26 jockeys, with 16 having three or fewer rides and 11 having one or two rides. Only 10 jockeys secure more than three rides per meeting.

This disparity reflects an oversupply of jockeys, with many preparing through weight loss ("wasting") and long-distance travel for minimal rides.

### **Jockey Demographics and Earnings**

#### **Sydney vs. Regional:**

Sydney's Group 1 racing is dominated by 25-30 top jockeys, who rarely ride in regional areas and earn primarily from prizemoney percentages.

The 157 regional-based jockeys (including 57 apprentices) rely heavily on riding fees and are most affected by international jockeys.

#### **Female Jockeys:**

33% of NSW jockeys are female, with 65% of apprentices and 75-80% of first-year apprentices being female.

Among jockeys over 30, only 13% are female, with average earnings of \$61,384 in 2023 compared to \$257,037 for male jockeys.

Only one international female senior jockey (Alysha Collett, New Zealand) has arrived in the last seven years, compared to multiple male senior jockeys.

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## **Recommendations**

The NSWJA requests that Jobs and Skills Australia consider the following:

Retain the "Jockey Occupation" on the CSOL Confident OFF List.

Introduce a new Core Skills Occupation category for "Trackwork Riders" to address shortages in this distinct role.

Require international jockeys to be sponsored by a single trainer and work exclusively for that trainer.

Prohibit international apprentice jockeys from working in Australia until completing 50% of their apprenticeship (two years) in their home country.

Prioritize international female senior jockeys to address gender imbalances in arrivals.

Review and tighten visas for jockeys on working holidays.

Review visas allowing jockeys to work in Australia on their partner's visa.

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## Conclusion

Quantitative and qualitative data confirm that NSW has sufficient jockeys to meet the demands of its horse racing industry.

Robust apprentice programs, manageable workloads, and industry feedback support this conclusion.

However, the influx of international jockeys, particularly in regional areas, reduces opportunities for local jockeys without adding significant value.

A new "Trackwork Rider" category and visa reforms would better balance workforce needs while supporting local talent.

The NSWJA has advocated for these changes since 2017, driven by NSW's generous prizemoney attracting international jockeys.

Continuous monitoring will ensure the industry's sustainability.

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Kind Regards,

NSW Jockeys Association

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