

**Australian Horse Industry in crisis due to drought**

Current NSW Department of Primary Industries figures indicate that 97.3% of NSW is currently either drought declared or marginal. Increasing numbers of horses being sold at sale yards for not much more than the price of a bale of hay are being reported and more often than not the majority end up meeting their final fate in the doggers yard.

Nicole Pearce, President of Horses in Drought Incorporated, said "the drought is worsening and we are unfortunately seeing alot of horses suffering, be it lack of funds, education, or some horse owners being to damned proud to accept help and/or advice. The bottom line is that our horses welfare should be first and foremost."

Based in both NSW and VIC, Horses in Drought Incorporated are a non-profit organisation dedicated to providing horse owners with an alternative to euthanasing or selling horses, by giving them the opportunity to move horses to temporary homes kindly offered in good faith. Horses in Drought Inc. also provide assistance with sourcing fodder. Horses in Drought Incorporated promote responsible horse ownership and encourage owners to take action before it is too late.

Ms Pearce stated that "a strong message needs to be sent out to all horse owners. Drought management plans need to be put in place now (really they should have been put in place months ago). I understand that in the current climate, this will come at an initial cost to owners, however, it will only benefit them in the long run, and hopefully will reduce the numbers of horses that might otherwise become casualties of the drought."

Horses in Drought Incorporated Vice President, Samantha Merritt, had the misfortune of witnessing first hand the effects this drought is having on some poor unsuspecting horses in VIC last week. Samantha visited a property, escorted by Police, after Horses in Drought Inc. had been notified that a number of horses were being taken from a sale yard after not being sold to be destroyed in a back paddock on the owners land. This is not an isolated case, and there is considerable fear that many more horses may suffer the same fate if horse owners don't act responsibly and take action before it is too late.

Prices of stockfeed are already on the increase and unless horse owners purchase feed now, they will be faced with prices that could well be up to four times the current amount within the next six months, that is, if there is any feed available.

Information on preparing drought management plans can be obtained through a number of excellent resources. Horses in Drought Inc. recommend the Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation (RIRDC) publication by David Nash, titled "Drought Feeding & Management for Horses".

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