

Melbourne Cup: why we need to say 'Yup to the Cup'

JACK THE INSIDER

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By **JACK THE INSIDER**, COLUMNIST

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A lamentable social media campaign, “Say Nup to the Cup” featured among a lot of other narcissistic dross around the race that stops the nation. No one is forced to watch the race. Why people would want to openly state that they’re engaging in personal boycotts is beyond me. It is little more than an expression of an aggrieved sense of self-righteousness from those consumed by facts from animal liberation sources but unwilling to listen to others.

But the noise is growing louder by the year and is more and more agitating for the prohibition of thoroughbred racing.

People are entitled to their opinions, but the opinions need to be well-informed to carry weight.

I watched the 7.30 program by ABC journalist Caro Meldrum Hanna several weeks ago. Footage obtained by animal liberationists showed thoroughbreds – some little more than months out of racing — being sold for pet food and dispatched at slaughterhouses.

I didn’t want to watch it but felt I had to. It was gut-wrenching because if you carry a surname like mine, you love thoroughbreds and know and understand the rich history of racing in this country.

Meldrum-Hanna is part journalist, part advocate. On Saturday, in response to the Herald Sun’s front page photograph of a Derby fancy, she tweeted a photo of a horse recently killed at a slaughterhouse, suggesting it would make for a more suitable front page.

Rather than hollow moralising, my sister-in-law rescues racehorses. She retrains them and rides them in equestrian events. She has four in work at the moment and with drought conditions in NSW, she is paying just under a \$100 a day in feed alone. That is a burden she will bear but we should also appreciate that others can’t, or won’t, bear similar burdens.

That is not an excuse, but it is an explanation not given much emphasis on the 7.30 program. With most of eastern Australia in terrible drought, little consideration is given to what is

happening in slaughterhouses today with sheep, cattle and pigs prepared for human consumption. Abattoirs are working overtime. Your steaks and lamb chops might be cheap now, but I can assure you they won't be next year.

The ABC program led to calls for a ban on horse racing on social media from people upset by the footage screened. Aside from the tedious penchant for people to call for banning things they don't like, a prohibition on horse racing would necessarily lead to the slaughter of horses in their tens of thousands, a literal pyramid of equine corpses piling up.

As with the NSW Baird government's terrible decision to ban greyhound racing in NSW, any sensible person would instinctively appreciate government could, with a sermonising public announcement and a swipe of a legislative hand, take people's livelihoods away. That's why the decision was overturned in the case of the dish lickers. It was not so much an endorsement of the sport but a response to the heavy hand of government.

I don't think any government would be silly enough to propose a ban on thoroughbred racing, but we live in crazy times.

Clearly there are issues of animal welfare that need to be addressed but they are not insurmountable, nor should they be accepted as matter of fact. Simply, if governments can't properly regulate a sporting industry like thoroughbred racing or greyhound racing, they shouldn't be in government.

We know that there are people in these industries that do not do the right thing by their animals. We also know they are in the minority. They need to be weeded out with strong regulatory measures, codes of ethics established as sacrosanct and with increased money invested to police breaches.

The industry has the job in front of it to restore faith among the community. It must put animal welfare at the absolute apex of its considerations and ambitions. The industry will remain under attack from a range of sources. If it doesn't get its house in order, the sport many of us love will continue to be at risk from nay-sayers and armchair experts.

JACK THE INSIDER, COLUMNIST

Peter Hoysted is Jack the Insider: a highly placed, dedicated servant of the nation with close ties to leading figures in politics, business and the union movement.



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