

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN HOMING PIGEON ASSOCIATION
INCORPORATED

**CODE OF PRACTICE
FOR THE KEEPING
AND RACING OF
PIGEONS**

June 2008

Prepared by: The SAHPA Inc. Management Committee

PREFACE

This Code was produced by the South Australian Homing Pigeon Association Incorporated, herein referred to as the SAHPA Inc. (or as 'the Association'), for the welfare of pigeons in South Australia. All member clubs and affiliates are bound by the requirements of this Code. It must be studied carefully, and is to be read in conjunction with the Constitution and By-Laws of the SAHPA Inc.

Pigeon owners, who are not members of the SAHPA Inc. or affiliated clubs are therefore not bound by this document. The SAHPA Inc. shall not be held responsible for any actions, or behaviours by persons who are not members of the SAHPA Inc. and who keep pigeons in a manner contrary to this recommended code of practice.

The principal purpose of this Code of Practice is to ensure the welfare of the pigeons is the prime consideration in all activities associated with their racing, breeding and general management.

This Code provides the minimum acceptable standards for:

- Pigeon housing and environmental factors affecting the health of pigeons and the pigeon keeper.
- Racing and training practices - especially as they affect the individual pigeon(s) returning to the home loft.
- Transport of pigeons to races and training flights.
- Control measures to enhance the ability of a pigeon to return safely to its loft.

A breach of the Code by an SAHPA Inc. member will constitute an offence and may jeopardise SAHPA Membership.

A breach of this Code will also constitute an offence under the regulations pursuant to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1985.

POLICY

Under the broad umbrella of pigeon and pigeon keeper welfare, the SAHPA identifies certain aspects and practices which are related in this Code of Practice.

The racing pigeon is a domestic animal and occupies an appropriate place alongside other domesticated species, within the Australian Community. This has been the case since the middle of the 19th century when pigeons were imported into Australia from the UK and Europe for domestic purposes (pleasure and racing).

Notwithstanding the need for adequate exercise (required to enhance the health and performance of the racing pigeon), the activity of a racing pigeon outside the race loft should be regulated sufficiently to ensure its continued place within the urban community.

On this basis, certain over-riding factors are evident.

- a) The racing pigeon (in preparation for racing) should be exercised daily, sufficient to ensure its fitness for the purpose intended. Duration is typically from 30 - 90 minutes, and performed to a maximum of twice daily. The exception to this may involve birds owned by fanciers living away from built up or metropolitan housing areas, and or for pigeons which are returning from racing or training.
- b) Free non-race or training time, is to be conducted under close supervision by the owner. Other than for planned loft flying, race and training times, all racing pigeons are to be confined within their home loft. Persistent fielding and/or roof sitting habits are prohibited.
- c) The racing pigeon shall be housed within a loft, designed to provide shelter and comfortable accommodation for its inhabitants, and built in such a manner as to ensure it does not negatively impact upon the amenity of the environment in which it is located. All pigeon lofts (racing and stock) should be constructed in such a manner as to maintain the public dignity and responsible image sought by the SAHPA Inc and the pigeon racing fraternity in South Australia.
- d) Pigeon lofts are places where dust and pigeon droppings can accumulate. It is therefore the responsibility of the pigeon keeper to keep the loft dry, clean and vermin free at all times. In doing so this will ensure the local amenity, good health of the pigeons and good health of the pigeon keeper is maintained.
- e) The SAHPA Inc recognises, and accepts its responsibility to foster new members who wish to participate in the sport of racing pigeons. Junior members are to be especially encouraged. For new members, the SAHPA Inc. will provide advice on loft size, pigeon health and management, and general loft amenity for new and aspiring junior members on request.

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1. DUTY OF CARE TO PIGEONS

1.1 The SAHPA Inc., (as the parent body for its member clubs and affiliates) believe that a person who owns, races or is responsible for the care of pigeons has a fundamental duty to take all reasonable steps to ensure the health and welfare of those pigeons. For the purposes of this Code, the owner of a pigeon shall be taken to be the person(s) who has paid membership to the SAHPA and who is primarily responsible for the day to day management of that bird.

1.2 A member, or affiliate, having responsibility for the care or charge of a pigeon or pigeons, has a duty to take all reasonable measures to ensure the welfare of that pigeon or pigeons.

1.3 A member, or affiliate, having responsibility for the care or charge of a pigeon or pigeons, has a duty to take all reasonable measures to ensure the cleanliness of the pigeon loft(s), and the general amenity of his (her) immediate area.

2. ILL TREATMENT OF PIGEONS

2.1 The SAHPA defines ill treatment of pigeons as wounding, mutilating, abusing, tormenting and torturing, wanton or malicious beating and causing unnecessary pain, neglect or suffering. These acts are considered by the SAHPA Inc. as unacceptable treatment to pigeons. Ill treatment is defined within the provisions of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1985, to be any action or inaction which results in unnecessary or unreasonable pain, suffering or distress. The owner has a responsibility to provide the pigeon with adequate and appropriate food, water, shelter, exercise, good health and safety.

2.2 The SAHPA stipulates that:

It is an offence to ill-treat any pigeon and substantiated cases by SAHPA Inc members shall jeopardise membership.

2.3 All SAHPA Inc. Members shall abide by the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

3. ACCEPTANCE AND INSPECTION OF PIGEONS FOR COMPETITION

3.1 The SAHPA acknowledges the depth of expertise for pigeon care available within each affiliated club. Experienced personnel shall be provided for the inspection of pigeons submitted for competition (ie, the club race committee).

3.2 Pigeons will only be accepted by the club race committee, on the grounds of sound health and obvious physical well being. Pigeons must not be accepted for competition when poor health, neglect and or physical impairment are apparent.

3.3 Poor Health. Poor pigeon health can be described as symptoms such as general lassitude from any obvious sickness, respiratory disease (indicated by wheezing, sneezing, nasal and eye discharge), pigeon pox lesions, and any other ailment to which pigeons are susceptible.

3.4 Neglect. Neglect can be described as the pigeon being presented in a soiled and generally disheveled condition and/or harbouring external mites and parasites.

3.5 Physical Impairment. Physical impairment is intended to cover any condition, which is likely to diminish the chances of a racing pigeon to successfully complete a set journey (damaged or missing flight feathers).

4. CARRIAGE AND CONVEYANCE OF PIGEONS

4.1 Container Specifications for the conveyance of pigeons. Many designs for pigeon conveyance are suitable. In broad terms this includes the general configuration, size, height, and space per pigeon.

4.1.1 Configuration. A person responsible for the carriage of pigeons must ensure they are transported in a suitable pannier, allowing adequate air exchange at the sides and top and for the pigeons to freely view their outside surroundings. This pertains to pigeons being conveyed for private training, organised training and/or racing, or for the conveyance of pigeons for any other purpose.

4.1.2 Size of Containers. The SAHPA Inc. recognises private pigeon carry containers are constructed in many sizes to suit individual circumstances, and it is not intended to interfere with this freedom. Size is generally determined on the basis of what can be comfortably be carried by the pigeon owner.

In addition the SAHPA Inc. sets minimum height and space allowances per pigeon.

4.1.3 Height Allowance. The minimum height shall be 21 cm (210mm) and is exclusive of all wire and plastic mesh bottom inserts.

4.1.4 Space per Pigeon. The space allowance per pigeon will vary according to the duration of transport, the distance of the race and whether provision has to be made to feed and water the pigeons *en route* and at the release site. (see 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.3 below for examples)

4.1.5 Space Allowance. For short time durations (ie pigeons being conveyed in any basket used for private training, SAHPA Inc. training and/or racing, or for the conveyance of pigeons to the clubrooms for entry into competition) these allowances may be varied.

A person conveying a pigeon must ensure the cages meet the following standards.

4.2.1 For Races of 500 kilometers or less, allow a minimum of 200 cm² per pigeon per pannier.

4.2.2 For Races exceeding 500 kilometers, allow a minimum of 250 cm² per pigeon per pannier.

4.2.3 For conveyance to clubrooms, or short training flights, these provisions may be varied to less than 200 cm² per pigeon per pannier.

5. FEED AND WATER PROVISIONS UNDER RACE CONDITIONS

5.1 Short Journeys. There exists a balance between the need to feed and water the pigeons *en route* and at the release site so to sustain reserves of energy to complete the journey, and the need to avoid the detrimental effect of commencing a journey on a full crop. On the basis of past best practice, and advice from racing pigeon veterinarians it has been determined that for up to 24 hours confinement, *en route*, involving an overnight journey, and the race is 500 kilometres or less – birds are to be watered as soon as practical once the destination has been reached. No feed will be provided for birds in competition when transportation is overnight and the birds are released in the next am.

5.2 **In all other Cases.** Where the confinement is expected to exceed 24 hours and/or the journey is in excess of 500 kilometres as described, provisions are to be made to feed and water the pigeons. In these circumstances, the transporter will aim to arrive at the release site by 1600 hours on the day before the event is to start (at which time feed and water procedures are to commence). The feed is to remain in front of the pigeons for a minimum of one (1) hour and no more than three (3) hours, whereupon it shall be withdrawn. The water shall remain available for the pigeons continuously until one hour before release, whereupon it shall be withdrawn.

5.2.1 Supplementary Feed and Water. Supplementary feed and water *enroute* is to apply by at least 1600 hours daily in the manner prescribed.

6. RACE AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES, COMPETITIONS, AND THE RELEASING OF PIGEONS FOR FLIGHT WHEN AWAY FROM THE HOME LOFTS.

6.1. Annual Programmed Fixtures.

6.1.1 The SAHPA Inc. will annually appoint a Race Release Panel, which shall be appointed by the SAHPA Management Committee and be responsible to the General Secretary. These appointees and the general secretary are responsible for conducting the Annual Race Programme. Advice may be sought from the race release panel when the racing programme is being framed.

6.1.2 Responsibility. The race release panel and the general secretary will have control over the welfare of the pigeons including their collection, transport and liberation from races. This shall be done with the view to contributing to the body of knowledge required to plan and arrange a successful racing season. Where necessary, advice shall be sought from the management committee should it become necessary to consider variation to a release point in mid season.

6.2 Race Controls.

6.2.1 Racing Association

In South Australia, pigeon races are conducted by the SAHPA (through affiliated member clubs and organisations). Although the rules of this organisation are not binding in law, the cooperation of members (with instructions and requirements from the management committee) is generally in the best interest of the sport, the birds and competitors. The management committee and the general secretary are empowered by their members to direct the race release panel to cancel, postpone, or alter the race venues and make adjustments to the race programme as necessary for the welfare of the pigeons.

6.2.2 Releasing Birds.

The person who releases the pigeons (the liberator) must ensure the birds are released in such a manner as to avoid potential for harm or injury. The liberator must consider local weather conditions and any other factors (in conjunction with the race release panel) which may impinge upon the ability of birds to successfully complete the event. Pigeon racing clubs require a race release panel member or the general secretary to provide details of the release for announcement to competitors.

6.2.3 Conveyers & Liberator. The appointed liberator has responsibility for performing the release of pigeons at the liberation site. The authority to release pigeons, in all races, rests with the race release panel and the liberator. The liberator shall be contacted by a pre-arranged and nominated member of the race release panel or the general secretary at least one hour prior to the planned release to discuss *enroute* conditions, local conditions and receive approval to liberate. Having liberated the pigeons, the liberator will contact the nominated delegate to provide details of the liberation for announcement to all flyers.

6.3 Race Delays and Holdovers.

6.3.1 Race Day. When the liberation is delayed because of adverse weather conditions (a declared 'hold over'), this delay will remain in force until the 'hold over' has been re-assessed by the race release panel and the liberator. The 'hold over' and a planned release time decided for the next day will be notified to all flyers through the general secretary and the various clubs.

6.3.2 Second Day. The race release panel in conjunction with the liberator may decide (in consultation with the management committee and or the general secretary):

- a) To release the pigeons on the second day at a new release time or
- b) In the case of adverse weather conditions still prevailing, hold the birds at the original release site for a possible release on the third day.

c) When no release is possible, the race release panel in conjunction with the liberator (in consultation with the management committee and or the general secretary) shall declare the race cancelled. In this case the pigeons shall be returned and released at a suitable location near Adelaide and all flyers notified through their club systems.

6.3.3 Third Day.

The race release panel in conjunction with the liberator may decide (in consultation with the management committee and or the general secretary):

- a) To release the pigeons on the third day at a new release time or
- b) In the case of adverse weather conditions still prevailing shall declare the race cancelled. In this situation the pigeons shall be returned and released at a suitable location near Adelaide and all flyers notified through their club systems.

6.4 Rain or Fog or Heat.

6.4.1 Rain and fog at release sites are known to interfere with the pigeons' ability to orientate. Pigeons therefore are not to be released away from the home loft³, for racing into rain or fog.

6.4.2 Heat. Where temperature conditions are expected to be 32° Celsius or above, either *en route* or at the release location, a hold over should be declared or the race cancelled as per the procedures noted above.

6.5 Release Time.

The release of pigeons for racing is also governed by conditions at the release site, conditions *enroute* and the time of the year. During the months of June to August (period of least sunlight flying time), pigeons are to be released under the following guidelines:

- Under clear sky conditions – release a minimum of 15 minutes after gazetted sunrise for the area.
- Under over-cast sky conditions – release a minimum of 30 minutes after gazetted sunrise for the area.

During the months of September and October (period of increasing sunlight flying time) pigeons are to be released under the following guidelines:

- Under clear sky conditions – release at the discretion of the liberator in consultation with the race release panel.
- Under over-cast sky conditions – release at the discretion of the liberator in consultation with the race release panel.

7. PERFORMANCE ENHANCING DRUGS: DRUG FREE RACING.

It is SAHPA Inc. policy that pigeon racing remains free of any administered performance enhancing drugs (and in particular to the use of anabolic steroids, corticosteroids or any other substance declared 'banned' by the SAHPA Inc). Any competitor found to have entered a pigeon (into a race) administered with performance enhancing drug(s) will have their SAHPA membership reviewed by the SAHPA Inc. Any pigeons found sick or dead within the panniers at liberation may, at the discretion of the management committee, be

sent for drug analysis. Where any inappropriate performance enhancing substance is detected, the owner(s) will have their SAHPA membership reviewed by the SAHPA Inc.

7.1.1 Any SAHPA member found guilty of administering performance enhancing drugs to their birds or being an accomplice to administering performance enhancing drugs to racing pigeons for the purpose of gaining an advantage over his/her/their competitors will be disqualified from competing in all races that are conducted under the auspices of the SAHPA Inc. for a period of time determined by the Constitution, Rules and/or By-laws of the SAHPA Inc. – Refer TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP Rule (9) – Performance Enhancing Drugs.

THE PIGEON “LOFT”

8.1 Dimensions.

The SAHPA Inc. recognises pigeon lofts are constructed in many sizes to suit or fit individual circumstances (such as available space within a conventional residential block), and it is not intended to interfere with this freedom. SAHPA Inc. encourages members and affiliates to be aware of minimum building standards for lofts and to view membership of the Association is a privilege. Owners of racing pigeons however must ensure the following minimum standards are met:

8.2 Living Quarters – Racing Loft

8.2.1 The recommended minimum space available to each bird in a loft is recommended to be 0.092 m³ or 450 mm x 450 mm x 450 mm. (the approximate size of a pigeon auction pen).

An example of maximum permissible pigeons and minimum box perches per occupied space in the loft is described as follows:

Loft dimension 1800mm (Width) x 2100mm (Length) x 1800mm(height) = 6.804m³ divided by 0.092m³ = maximum 74 pigeons and a recommended minimum 81 perches.

8.3 Stock Bird Loft.

The stock bird loft is used for housing the breeding pigeons which are not generally freed for exercise (because of their perceived or actual value as breeders of race birds). These pigeons require additional space for their good health and well being.

8.3.1 Stock Loft Size. The stock loft shall generally be of similar configuration as the racing loft, except, in the place of box perches, breeding compartments are provided. Recommended minimum dimensions for breeding compartments are 550 mm wide x 450 mm high x 500 mm deep. Adequate space to maintain health and well being of pigeons, within the breeding loft, is calculated as two and one half (2.5) times the provision required for race birds.

The recommended maximum allowable number is calculated using the above example as follows:

Loft dimensions 1800 mm wide x 2100 mm long x 1800 mm high = 6.804 m³ (6804000 cm³) divided by (0.092m³ x 2.5) = maximum 30 pigeons, (or 15 mated pairs) and a recommended minimum of 20 perches.

8.4 The Ideal Loft.

The following is provided as a guide only but reasonably reflects current requirements of a well-organised and well-constructed pigeon racing loft. The essential elements which make up the building of a loft include the following:

- It needs to be dry and warm over the winter months and therefore needs to be built for that period of year in mind.
- For the summer heat it also needs to have sufficient ventilation, such as flaps and ventilators that can be adjusted and closed off as the winter approaches.
- It needs to be configured for ease of cleaning and for the comfort of the pigeons and box type perches are most suitable.
- Where practical, it needs to be sited on the allotment so the front of the loft faces away from prevailing winter winds and rain, whilst making full advantage of the morning winter sun.

8.5 Ventilation. There needs to be adequate air exchange within a pigeon-racing loft. Under and over floor ventilation promotes essential dryness required for a healthy loft. Gabled type roofs are encouraged to cater for adequate air displacement. Where a gabled roof is not provided, an opening at ceiling height at the rear to the outside, of 100 mm along the full length of the loft, is to be recommended. Alternatively, a 'witches hat' type chimney or similar ventilator may be placed centrally within the roof to effect the required air exchange and to promote the good health and comfort for the pigeons.

8.6 Recommended Construction.

8.6.1 Lofts have been constructed in many designs and standards and it is recommended that all lofts conform to local council requirements and this Code of Practice. New or upgraded lofts must be constructed in accordance with Council requirements.

8.6.2 Off - Ground. It is recommended that all new lofts constructed off-ground shall have a minimum clearance height from ground to floor level of 200mm (allowing for free flow of air under floor).

Floor areas may be either of two configurations:

- a) Trafficable mesh grating floor, allowing droppings to pass through for collection below floor level.
- b) Trafficable timber floor suitable for regular ease of scrape cleaning.

8.6.3 On – Ground

It is recommended that all new lofts constructed on-ground should be of concrete slab floor construction and shall have a heavy duty plastic moisture barrier laid underneath at pouring. Adequate ventilation facilities in loft walls should be provided.

8.6.4 Aviaries

For the health of the pigeons, external open aviaries and or sun yards which are exposed to the elements are recommended. Ideally they should be constructed off ground (typically using trafficable mesh floor for under floor cleaning, or other suitable floor

materials). The ability of the aviary floor (of whatever material) to dry out quickly after wet weather is important to ensure the health of the pigeons.

8.6.5 Insulation.

It is recommended that where external cladding consists of brick or metal such lofts shall be internally lined with plywood, or chipboard or other suitable insulating materials. Where metal roofs are installed it is recommended that the ceiling be insulated to prevent condensation from the metal roof adding to dampness within the loft.

9. LOFT CLEANING.

It is recommended that all loft floors be cleaned on a regular basis (generally daily for race lofts in the racing season, weekly or monthly for stock lofts and off season race lofts) It is recommended that protective equipment (such as a P2 face mask and a cotton jacket) be utilized by the cleaner during such activity.

10. FEED AND WATER.

The owner of racing pigeons must ensure the following standards are met:

10.1 Feed. There are many successful methods for feeding of racing pigeons and it is not intended to regulate this activity other than to document normal feeds and feed practice. Essentially, racing pigeons thrive quite effectively on most grains and legumes, with wheat and peas being the base diet. It is usual to supplement this diet with varying percentages of maize, sorghum, oats, rice, barley, certain pellet preparations and other small grains generally available from feed merchants. The normal feed regime, for racing pigeons, is to feed once or twice daily, after exercise. As a regulatory minimum, pigeons must be fed at least once daily (preferably in the pm).

10.2 Water. Clean water to be available at all times. It is recommended that water should be changed once or twice daily. Covered or protected water containers are recommended.

11. STRAY BIRD MANAGEMENT.

The SAHPA Inc. and affiliates recognise that appropriate management of lost or injured, pigeons belonging to SAHPA members is a critical part of the SAHPA Inc. Charter. Accordingly, non-adherence to our strict policies relating to lost bird acknowledgment and collection will be viewed very seriously and may result in suspension or cancellation of membership.

12. COMPETENT VETERINARY ADVICE

SAHPA Inc. is able to recommend competent avian veterinary professionals. The Australian pigeon community receives advice from vets who are also racing pigeon enthusiasts. The advice is therefore current and professional. Concerns with the health of persons handling pigeons can be discussed with these professions in the first instant to

review management practices. Good management practices will ensure the good health of pigeon and the pigeon handler's good health is maintained. Publications can be recommended as a means to provide excellent professional third party advice.

13. ACKNOWLEDGMENT.

The South Australian Homing Pigeon Association Inc., greatly appreciate and expresses gratitude to the Racing Pigeon Federations of Western Australia and the Central Cumberland Racing Pigeon Federation for allowing the SAHPA Inc., to use the main contents and concepts from those federations in framing this SAHPA Inc. Code of Practice.