

Victorian Racing Pigeon Body

VRPB



Victorian Racing Pigeon Body Incorporated AJ0013892J

CODE OF PRACTICE

For

Pigeon Keeping and Racing in Victoria

2024

VICTORIAN CODE OF PRACTICE

The Victorian Racing Pigeon Body (Incorporated) A0013892J

PIGEON KEEPING AND PIGEON RACING

IN VICTORIA 2024

Introduction

This Code of Practice (Code) has been produced by the Victorian Racing Pigeon Body Inc. (VRPB) as a guide to assist pigeon fanciers, pigeon organisations, local councils and state and federal regulatory authorities to implement the standards and guidelines, as set out by Animal Health Australia, regarding the keeping of racing pigeons.

Animal Health Australia is the Federal Government Agency responsible for producing standards and guidelines for the keeping of all livestock, including poultry and birds, in Australia.

The principal effect of this Code is to ensure that the welfare of pigeons is the paramount consideration in all activities associated with their keeping and racing.

Whilst this Code has been produced by the VRPB, the primary responsibility for compliance rests with the pigeon keeper / fancier and their associated club, association and/or a Federation (comprising member clubs). This Code should be treated as the base standard that all pigeon keepers / fanciers are obliged to meet. Due to the diverse nature of pigeon racing across Victoria, varying in geographic and climatic conditions, customised elements (for some Federations, Associations, or clubs) such as Liberation Protocols, Vaccination requirements and Long-Distance Racing, will be deemed as supplementary to this base State Code.

Refer also to the – Federal Government Animal Health Australia publication –

“The Australia Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Poultry 2022”
(Guideline’s)

All pigeon keepers are bound by sections of those Guidelines that refers specifically to pigeons.

The main issues that this Code will focus on are:

1. Welfare of Pigeons and Duty of Care
2. Housing and Feeding
3. Exercise and Training Pigeons
4. Releasing of Pigeons and Racing
5. Governance and Other Issues.

PREFACE

The Code was produced by the VRPB for the welfare of Victorian racing pigeons. Where a Federation, Association or Club adopts this Code as part of its rules or regulations, all members and affiliates are bound by its requirements. It must be studied carefully and is to be read in conjunction with the Constitution and Rules of the Federation, Association or Club (Federation Rules).

Pigeon owners who are not members of a Federation are not bound by this Code. The Federation cannot be held responsible for any actions, or behaviour, by non-members of a Federation.

POLICY

Under the broad umbrella of pigeon welfare, the Federation Rules identifies certain aspects and practices that are inherent to the operation of this Code. The Racing Pigeon is a domestic animal and occupies an appropriate place alongside other domesticated species within the general Australian Community.

Notwithstanding the need for adequate exercise required to enhance the health and performance of the racing pigeon, as a domestic animal, the Racing Pigeon should be regulated sufficiently to ensure its place within the urban community environment.

Therefore: -

a) The racing pigeon should be exercised daily, sufficient to ensure its fitness for the purpose intended. Apart from birds owned by fanciers living away from built-up metropolitan areas, or when pigeons are returning from racing and training, free flight exercise is to be on a planned basis. It should typically last 30 - 90 minutes, and be implemented to a maximum of twice daily.

b) Free non-flight time, at any time, is to be conducted under close supervision by the owner. Other than for planned free flight and non-flight 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 should be housed within a loft, designed to provide shelter and comfortable accommodation for its inhabitants. It should be built in such a manner as to ensure it does not negatively impact upon the amenity of the environment in which it is located and thus maintains the public dignity and image sought by the pigeon racing fraternity.

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1.0 Welfare of Pigeons and Duty of Care

The owner or handler who has 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. The welfare of the racing pigeon is the prime consideration in all activities associated with keeping and racing pigeons.

1.1 Ill-treatment & Neglect

The VRPB defines ill treatment of pigeons as injuring, tormenting, or torturing, causing unnecessary pain, stress, neglect or suffering whether through overcrowding, lack of food or water or otherwise. These acts are considered by the VRPB as unacceptable treatment of pigeons and a breach of the Code.

1.2 Handling Pigeons

Pigeons need to be handled in a professional manner, cupped in the hand with the feet between the handler's fingers. They must not be handled roughly or held by the head, neck, or wings.

1.3 Vaccinations

Every effort should be made to protect the pigeons from disease. To this end, vaccination protocols, as recommended by the Association of Avian Veterinarians, Australasian Committee (AAVAC), as outlined on the VRPB website, should be followed. Pigeons should be inoculated with the vaccines using the method and dose recommended by the manufacturer.

1.4 Health & Well Being

The health of the pigeon needs to be monitored on a regular basis and, if necessary, veterinary advice and help should be sought for treatment and prevention of disease and elimination of internal and external parasites and pests.

2.0 Housing and Feeding

2.1 Pigeon Loft Construction

Pigeons have traditionally been housed in buildings called lofts. Lofts are constructed in many different sizes and configurations to suit or fit individual circumstances. Lofts need to be built to ensure that the pigeons within are secure from predators and protected from the elements. Dryness within the loft is essential.

The construction plans for lofts need to consider local council by-laws regarding building and health regulations. Lofts need not be palatial buildings but should be constructed to good building practices, painted, and maintained to enhance the image of the sport and not be an eye-sore to the general community.

The VRPB 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. Instead, the VRPB encourages members and affiliates to be aware that to participate in the sport of pigeon racing as a member of a Federation is a privilege. This privilege may be revoked in the event a loft housing pigeons belonging to a member is not maintained and improved from time to time, in such a manner as to keep the public image of the sport intact, and the amenity of neighbours and indeed the health and welfare of the pigeons foremost.

2.2 Ventilation

The following is provided only as a guide but reasonably reflects the hallmarks of a well-organised and well-constructed pigeon racing loft. The loft needs to be dry and warm over the winter months. For the summer heat, the loft needs to have ventilation such as flaps and ventilators that can be adjusted and closed off as the winter approaches. The loft needs to be designed for ease of cleaning and for the comfort of the pigeons. "Box" type perches are most suitable for both. Where practical, the loft needs to be sited on the lot so the front of the loft faces away from prevailing winter winds and rain

There needs to be adequate air exchange within a pigeon-racing loft without causing draughts. Under- and over-floor ventilation promotes essential dryness required for a healthy loft.

Gabled roofs are preferred to provide adequate air displacement. Where a gabled roof is not provided, an opening at ceiling height at the rear to the outside, of no less than 100 mm (4") along the full length of the loft, is to be provided. Alternatively, a witch's hat-type chimney or similar ventilator or extractor should be placed centrally within the roof to effect the required air exchange and to promote good health and comfort for the pigeons, whilst taking full advantage of the morning winter sun.

2.3 Flooring.

Floor Areas may be either: -

- (a) Trafficable mesh grating floor, allowing for droppings to pass through for collection from below floor level.
- (b) Trafficable timber floor with suitable moisture absorptive qualities and for regular ease of cleaning, e.g., chip board, plywood.
- (c) Concrete slab floor (where concrete is utilised, a heavy-duty plastic must be laid underneath at pouring).

For the health of the pigeons, external open aviaries and/or sun yards are desirable.

2.4 Insulation

For the welfare and comfort of the pigeons, insulation is recommended, particularly beneath metal roofing, to prevent condensation and dampness in the loft.

2.5 Loft Cleaning

2.5.1 Dry Droppings

Above-floor compartment droppings that remain permanently dry and in a semi-powdered form and are of 25 mm (1") thickness or less are not considered a health hazard to either pigeons or humans.

2.5.2 Deep Litter

Deep litter, unless of a substance(s) approved by the VRPB, is not encouraged. Where, however, this method of loft floor dressing is utilised, the loft must be designed with sufficient weather protection to ensure the litter can remain permanently dry. This material must be regularly raked over to maintain both neat appearance and the biological activity with aerobic breakdown of organic matter.

2.5.3 Loft Cleaning Frequency

Loft floors are to be cleaned and droppings removed or raked over as above on a minimum basis of once per week. Removed droppings are to be placed in a covered receptacle in a dry location protected from access to flies and vermin, prior to removal from the property or appropriately used as garden fertiliser.

2.6 The Racing Loft

Racing pigeons need to be housed, fed, exercised, and trained correctly in order to reach peak fitness and maintain good health. Pigeons housed in the racing loft are expected to be released on a regular basis. Therefore, a higher stocking density is acceptable in a racing loft than in a breeding or stock loft where the birds are not released.

2.6.1 Race Loft - Minimum Space per Pigeon.

Where all space is occupied by the pigeons only, and excludes provision for owner occupancy, utensils, passageways, trapping and feeding centres, the minimum space per pigeon is 0.092m³. Therefore, a 1.8m deep x 2.1m long x 1.8m high race loft would be capable of holding 74 pigeons.

2.6.2 Perches

Perches can be of various styles to suit the individual fancier but there must be at least 10% more perches than the number of birds housed in the loft. Perches need to be provided at various height levels within the loft.

“Box” perches are the standard method of providing perching facilities for racing pigeons. These must be of sufficient dimensions to allow the bird to comfortably rest. Alternative styles of perching may be suitable, particularly V perching. Plank or dowel perching, as seen in small bird aviaries, is unsuitable for racing pigeons and is to be avoided unless it forms part of an aviary attached to the loft.

2.7 The Stock Loft

The Stock Loft is used to house the breeding pigeons of the fancier and, because of their value and perhaps not being homed to the loft, are not able

to be freed for exercise. These pigeons require extended space for their good health and well-being. The Stock Loft shall generally be of similar configuration as the Racing Loft with additional breeding compartments provided.

2.7.1 Stock Loft - Minimum Space per Pigeon

Adequate space to maintain health and well-being of pigeons within the Stock Loft shall be calculated as 2.5 times the allowance of the race loft as a minimum space per pigeon, i.e., 0.23m³ per pigeon (excluding nesting areas). Therefore, a stock loft 1.8m deep x 2.1m long x 1.8m high would be capable of holding up to 30 stock birds.

2.7.2 Breeding Pairs

Nesting pairs need to be provided with a suitable nesting box and bowl lined with a suitable nesting material. The space requirement for the nest area is additional to the minimum per bird space. Provision of a refuge may be necessary for the hen bird to escape an aggressive cock bird.

2.7.3 Youngsters

Young pigeons must not be weaned before they are capable of feeding and drinking independently of their parents. Squeakers should be “fully feathered” under their wings before being weaned.

2.8 Feeding & Watering Pigeons

2.8.1 Feeding at the home loft

It is recognised that there are many satisfactory methods for feeding racing pigeons and it is not intended to regulate this activity other than to document normal foods and feeding practice and ensure that pigeons receive sufficient nutrients to maintain good health and fitness. Racing pigeons thrive quite effectively on most grains and legumes. Those used commonly include peas, maize, sorghum, wheat, safflower, oats, rice, barley, pellet preparations and small grains such as linseed, canary seed, and canola. This feed needs to be fed on a daily basis and is usually provided after exercise. Feed is to be kept dry and in vermin-proof containers and ideally not left in the loft overnight.

2.8.2 Watering at the home loft.

Clean water is essential in the home loft and needs to be always available with or without additives. Water is to be changed daily and more frequently in summer months, especially in the stock loft. The VRPB recognises that this may be possible with automated watering systems.

2.8.3 Feeding and Watering in the Race Crates

Racing pigeons basketed in crates on the night and scheduled for liberation the following morning are to be provided with water before the scheduled release time. No feed is to be given to these birds as it is not required and may be detrimental to their flight home.

Racing pigeons basketed in crates on the night and scheduled for liberation other than the next day are to be provided with both feed and water on the days before release.

2.8.4 Feeding and Watering En-Route

Where transportation of racing pigeons to a scheduled race point is extended past, or likely to extend past, 15:00 hours (3.00 PM) the day after basketing, the transporter will stop to rest, feed and water the birds as

necessary. The transporter should reach the liberation or race point no later than three (3) hours before sunset or at least four (4) hours prior to release in the case of an overnight basketed race (short race).

3.0 Exercise and Training Pigeons

Racing pigeons need to be released on a regular basis to maintain good health and obtain race fitness. Pigeons released around the home loft need to be under the supervision of their owner or handler and are not permitted to land anywhere except on the home loft or yard. Exercise periods should be at least thirty (30) minutes per day and no more than one hundred and eight (180) minutes per day.

3.1 Free Flight

Free flight is a good way to promote health and well-being but it should not be used on its own to prepare pigeons for racing. It is necessary to take birds distances from their loft and teach them to return (free flight). This training is important for the physical development and mental preparation of the racing pigeon. It serves to both educate and develop:

- the physical conditioning (fitness) for the racing pigeons' upcoming event;
- the mental preparation for the upcoming event:
- via transportation;
- navigation and enhancing the homing ability

It should be conducted regularly with flying times from the loft ranging from thirty (30) minutes up to ninety (90) minutes.

3.2 Non-Flight Times

Open lofting of racing pigeons for long periods without control is not permitted. Other than the regulated exercise periods, pigeons are to be confined to their home loft.

4.0 Releasing of Pigeons and Racing

Pigeons must not be released away from the home loft for training or racing unless in good physical health and fitness. Owners and handlers must ensure that the pigeons under their care are physically fit to return to their home loft from the release point.

4.1 Fit to Race

Pigeons are only to be accepted for competition on the grounds they are of sound health and physically fit to complete the journey set for the event. All pigeons entered in competitions are to be inspected before being placed in the race crates.

4.2 Acceptance and inspection of Pigeons for Competition

The VRPB acknowledges that the depth of member expertise in pigeon care, from which suitably experienced personnel for the inspection of pigeons submitted for competition can be appointed, will vary.

4.2.1 Stewards

The VRPB will appoint or delegate persons annually to act as Stewards for the inspection of any pigeons submitted for racing or shows.

4.2.2 Unwell Pigeons

Pigeons must be referred to the Steward by handlers if they have any suspicion that the pigeon is not of sufficient sound health and physical wellbeing to participate successfully in the race or show.

4.2.3 Refusal of entry

The Steward retains the right to refuse an entry, without challenge, on the grounds of poor health, physical impairment, or neglect, if he considers its

opportunity to return safely is impaired or the pigeon is a health risk to other entries. Such refusals are to be documented by the organisation for action, as necessary.

4.2.4 Signs of poor health

Poor pigeon health can be described as a pigeon displaying symptoms consistent with disease or poor care, which may include, but not be limited to, general lethargy, difficulty breathing, nasal or eye discharge, pigeon pox lesions, weight loss, diarrhoea, vomiting and the like.

4.2.5 Signs of Neglect

Neglect can be described as the pigeon being presented in a soiled and generally dishevelled condition and/or harbouring external parasites or inadequately healed wounds.

4.2.6 Physical Impairment

Physical impairment is intended to cover any condition that is likely to diminish the chances of a racing pigeon to complete successfully a race entered, such as injuries, scaring, bruising or insufficient feathering

4.3 Inspection of Pigeons

Handlers of pigeons being entered into a race will bring to the attention of the stewards any pigeon suspected of being in poor health, injured or in a condition that might reduce its chances of returning to the home loft.

4.4 Clashes on the line of Flight

Clubs and Federations conducting pigeon races will endeavour to avoid “clashes” with pigeon releases by other organisations that might cause confusion within the flocks of competing racing pigeons flying in different directions to different locations and reduce the pigeons’ chances of

returning to their home lofts. Unless a joint liberation is agreed upon in advance.

4.5 Race Controls

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

4.5.1 Annual Appointment of Liberator/Conveyor

Federations will appoint annually, Release Officers and an Official Liberator/Conveyor, who shall be responsible for liberations.

4.5.2 Liberator/Conveyor Responsibilities

The Race Release Officer(s) will have control over the welfare of the pigeons, including their collection, transport and liberation.

4.5.3 Cancellation or postponement of Race

The Release Officers are empowered to cancel or postpone the race or alter the race point if considered necessary for the welfare of the pigeons. They shall direct the Liberator/Conveyor to make whatever adjustments are necessary for the welfare of the pigeons and to ensure members are notified

4.5.4 Procedure to follow prior to liberation

The appointed Liberator/Conveyor is responsible for the release of pigeons, at the liberation site, in such a manner as to avoid potential for injury. The authority to release pigeons, in all races, rests with the above-mentioned officers. The Liberator/Conveyor shall contact a pre-arranged and nominated officer at least 1 hour prior to the release, to obtain a report on route conditions and discuss local conditions and receive approval to liberate. After liberation, the Liberator/Conveyor will again contact the nominated officer to provide details of the liberation for announcement to competitors and will record and report details of conditions along the line of flight home.

4.6 Liberation

Pigeons must not be released either in a race or training where weather conditions limit the pigeon's ability to return safely to its home loft. Clubs and Federations conducting races must appoint a competent person as Liberator/Conveyor to manage and release the pigeons, (Liberator). The Liberator will release the birds at the scheduled time after obtaining approval to release the birds from the Release Officers. The birds are not to be released in rain or heavy fog.

On Liberation all birds must be given the opportunity to leave the units freely and willingly. Once the released birds have cleared any birds remaining in the units must be brought back to the basketing centre and the owner/s contacted for collection. No bird/s should be forced to leave the unit/s, especially once the released birds have cleared.

4.7 Weather Hold-Overs

Pigeons shall not be released in unfavourable weather conditions that may reduce each pigeon's ability to return safely to its home loft.

Where a liberation cannot occur because of adverse weather conditions, the liberation can be postponed until later in the day when the weather conditions for release are appropriate, provided there is still sufficient time in the day for the pigeons to reach their lofts. Should the weather conditions remain unsuitable for the release of the pigeons, they can be "held-over" until the next day, provided there are sufficient feed and water available for the pigeons.

On the second day, the responsible officer(s) can, after the weather is assessed, decide to: -

- a) Release the pigeons at the time scheduled for the previous day.
- b) Bring the pigeons back to an alternative liberation site and reconsider the situation at that site.

- c) Determine the possibility, or advisability, of holding birds at the release site for another day.
- d) Hold the pigeons at the site until it becomes evident the race must be declared cancelled and the pigeons returned home for collection by their respective owners, or to a place near home determined for a safe release.

Rain, fog, adverse winds or excessive heat or cold at the liberation site or expected to be encountered along the line of flight back to the home loft interfere with the pigeons' orientation and ability to home. Pigeons therefore are not to be liberated away from their home lofts, for training or racing, in such adverse conditions. Liberators or members are to wait until such conditions abate or cancel the liberation and revert to the aforementioned procedures.

4.8 Carriage of Racing Pigeons

The carriage of racing pigeons for both racing and training is to be within a recognised crate or pannier, allowing adequate ventilation and sufficient room for the comfort of the pigeons.

4.8.1 Race Baskets

The carriage of pigeons is to be made in baskets or units that allow for adequate air exchange and for the pigeons to view their outside surroundings.

4.8.2 Private Pigeon Baskets

The VRPB recognises that private pigeon transport baskets, crates or units are constructed in many sizes to suit individual circumstances, such as vehicle configuration.

4.8.3 Height of Pigeon Baskets

The minimum height for all containers for the carriage of pigeons, whether owned by an organisation or individual fancier, is 21 cm (8") and is exclusive of all wire and plastic mesh bottom inserts.

4.8.4 Space per Pigeon

The space allowance per pigeon will vary according to the duration of such confinement, the distance of the race or training flight ("toss") and the need for feeding and watering of the pigeons both en route and at the liberation site.

4.8.5 Number of birds allowed in basket depending on hours of confinement

This space allowance relates to pigeons being transported for private training, organisation training and/or racing, or for the conveyance of pigeons to the clubrooms for entry into competition.

4.8.6 Size of Basket for two (2) – nineteen (19) hour duration

For daytime confinement of short duration of up to two (2) hours, generally accepted space allowances should be respected e.g., 15-bird basket no more than 15 birds. For overnight confinement of up to nineteen (19) hours duration, and/or a journey of up to 350 kilometres, a minimum of 300 cm² per pigeon should be provided.

4.8.7 Size of Basket for nineteen (19) plus hours duration

For confinement in excess of nineteen (19) hours or over 350 kilometres, a minimum of 400 cm² per pigeon per basket should be provided.

4.8.8 Confinement commencement time

For competition events, the confinement period commences at the club starting time for acceptance of pigeons for entry.

FEED AND WATER PROVISIONS UNDER RACE CONDITIONS

4.9 The Provision of Water and Food during a competition

Pigeons being transported to a race point for release must be provided with clean drinking water and food, as detailed. The transporter must be set up to carry and provide clean drinking water and the necessary feed for the journey.

4.9.1 Food and water prior to release

The VRPB understands that pigeons need to be regularly fed and watered during transport to races. Once the birds are at the race point adequate water must be maintained to ensure the birds can drink at their leisure. The birds should not be provided with food for six (6) hours prior to release.

4.9.2 Food and water requirements prior up to release

In races where the birds are confined for up to nineteen (19) hours involving an overnight journey, and the race is 350 kilometres or less, measured from the longest competitor, adequate water must be maintained to ensure the birds can drink at their own will/leisure. No feed provisions are mandatory.

Where the confinement is expected to exceed nineteen (19) hours or the journey is in excess of 350 kilometres, provision is to be made to feed and water the pigeons.

4.9.3 Transporter Arrival Time

When feeding and watering of the pigeons is required, the organisation shall arrange for entries to be accepted at such a time that will ensure that the transporter will arrive at the liberation site by at least 13:00 hours (1.00 PM) on the day before the event is to start. In these cases, feed and water procedures are to commence as soon as practicable after arrival. The feed is to remain in front of the pigeons for up to 6 hours prior to release, whereupon it shall be withdrawn. The water shall remain available for the pigeons continuously until 1 hour before liberation.

4.9.4 Food and Water Provisions

Feed and water enroute are to be given by 16:00 hours (4.00 PM) daily where the journey time to the liberation site exceeds the 16:00 hour (4.00 PM) arrival time.

5.0 Governance and Other Issues

5.1 Performance Enhancing Drugs

Due to the significant time delay between the entry of pigeons for a race and the actual time of liberation, many performance-enhancing drugs illegally used in other contests are rendered ineffectual for pigeon racing. It is, however, policy that pigeon racing remains free of any administered performance-enhancing drugs and this has particular relevance to the use of corticosteroids. Any owner or handler found to have entered a pigeon with an administered performance-enhancing drug will be held responsible and be dealt with by the relevant authority.

Any pigeons found sick or dead within the race baskets at liberation can be sent for analysis. Where any inappropriate performance-enhancing substance is detected, the owner or handler will be held responsible and the matter dealt with by that member's Federation.

5.1.1 Random Drug Testing

Clubs and Federations shall have the right to conduct random testing of pigeon droppings for the presence of cortisone or any other performance enhancing drugs or substances. If an owner or handler refuses to produce a bird for testing, the bird shall be deemed to have produced a positive test result and may be disqualified.

5.2 Airports

Owners and handlers will not release pigeons at or near airports, or in a location that is likely to result in the birds flying over an airfield during their journey home.

5.3 Imported Pigeons

Owners and handlers must ensure that all overseas-bred pigeons in their lofts have been lawfully imported.

5.4 Breach of Code

Where this Code is adopted by a club or Federation as part of its rules or regulations, a breach of Code, depending on the severity of the breach, may result in either a fine, suspension or cancellation of membership.

5.5 Life Ring Registration

All life rings must contain a contact number to the organisation they belong to. Organisations affiliated with the VPRB must not allow the use of a life rings that do not have a contact number listed as lost bird will never be able to be returned to its owner.

5.6 Stray Pigeon Management

Clubs and Federations must instigate appropriate management of lost or injured pigeons belonging to their members. Failure to report a stray pigeon or collect a reported stray pigeon, particularly if reported by a member of the public, will be viewed very seriously, and may result in a fine, suspension or cancellation of membership.

5.7 Neighbours

A member shall attempt to resolve any neighbour's concerns or complaints in relation to their pigeons, such as the time of exercise around the loft,

cleanliness and odours, and do all that is reasonably practical to avoid conflicts from arising. Clubs and Federations, where practical, will ensure that their members are complying with parts of this code in relation to complaints.

5.8 Local Council Laws

Legislation regarding pigeons varies markedly between Councils. Members shall make themselves aware of local council laws and by-laws relating to keeping racing pigeons and ensure that their lofts, cleaning, feed storage, exercise times and other council requirements are met at all times.

5.9 Social media

In the modern age, social media plays an important role in communication, information sharing, and connecting pigeon fanciers across Australia. Members should endeavour to ensure that their comments are factual and constructive in nature as offensive comments reflect poorly on the sport of pigeon racing.

This Code of Practice was endorsed by the Victorian Racing Pigeon Board (Incorporated) on 17/03/24.

Appendix:

The Australia Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Poultry 2022 Standards (must do)

General standards in Part A also apply to minimise risk to the welfare of pigeons.

SB11.1 A person in charge must ensure every effort is made to avoid aggression towards both hen birds and immature nestlings by the appropriate selection of breeding stock coupled with appropriate housing.

SB11.2 A person must not lift or carry pigeons by the head, legs, neck, wings, feathers or tail feathers unless otherwise supported by the breast.

SB11.3 A person in charge must ensure pigeons are not weaned before they are capable of feeding and drinking independently of their parents.

SB11.4 A person in charge must ensure that at all times there are more perches, either box or V-shaped, available in the loft than resident pigeons.

Racing

SB11.5 A person in charge must ensure racing pigeons are not released away from the home loft for racing into extreme weather conditions or heavy lingering fog in any portion of the return journey.

Guidelines

General guidelines are also recommended in Part A to minimise the risk to the welfare of pigeons.

Housing GB11.1 Stock bird lofts should be roofed to maintain dry nesting areas.

GB11.2 Perches should be provided at several height levels.

GB11.3 Nest boxes should have provision for two sections in the event of the hen needing to seek refuge from the cock bird.

GB11.4 Nest bowls should be lined with a nonslip material or nesting material supplied.

GB11.5 Wherever possible mated pairs should be housed in a nest box.

Space allowances

GB11.6 **The minimum space available in the breeding loft shall be calculated as two & half times the allowance of the race loft as a minimum space per pigeon, i.e., 0.23m³ per pigeon (excluding nesting areas).

GB11.7 *The minimum space available to each bird in the racing loft should be 0.092m³ or 450mm x 450mm x 450mm.

GB11.8 If wire floors are used, mesh should be of not less than 18 gauge and 25 mm x 25 mm or its equivalent. Racing pigeons

GB11.9 With the exception of birds housed in rural and semirural areas or, returning from racing and training, free flight exercise should be in accordance with a plan, and for at least 30 minutes duration per day and not exceeding 180 minutes per day during both pretraining and the race programme.

GB11.10 Other than for planned free flight and nonflight times, all racing pigeons should be confined within their home loft.

GB11.11 During the months of June to August pigeons should be released from race/training points as follows:

- under clear sky conditions – release a minimum of 15 minutes after gazetted sunrise for the area under overcast sky conditions – release a minimum of 30 minutes after gazetted sunrise for the area.
- During the months of September and October pigeons should be released from race/training points as follows:
- under clear sky conditions – release at the discretion of the person responsible for the birds
- under overcast sky conditions – release a minimum of 30 minutes after gazetted sunrise for the area.

GB11.12 All off the ground lofts should have a minimum clearance height from the ground to floor level of 200 mm, allowing for a free flow of air under floor.

GB11.13 Off the ground loft flooring should be either;

- Trafficable mesh grating floor, allowing droppings to pass through for collection below floor level

- Trafficable timber floor with moisture absorptive qualities and for regular ease of scrape cleaning e.g., chip board, or plywood.

GB11.14 All on ground lofts should have a concrete slab floor and have a heavy duty plastic moisture barrier laid underneath at pouring. Adequate floor level ventilation should be provided.

GB11.15 External open aviaries and or sun yards which are exposed to the elements should be off the ground otherwise well drained, sanitary and vermin proof.

GB11.16 All metal housing roofs should be insulated.

GB11.17 Lofts should be lined with insulating materials e.g., plywood or chipboard.

GB11.18 Pigeons should be fed after exercise.

*For a race loft section of 1.8m width x 2.1m length x 1.8m height there is a space of 6.804m³. Divide this by 0.92m³ (the space for each bird) and the outcome is that the loft has the capacity for 74 pigeons.

**Therefore, a stock loft 1.8m width x 2.1m length x 1.8m height would be capable of holding 30 stock birds (6.804 divided by 0.23 equals 29.5)

