

MUSWELLBROOK RACE CLUB STRATEGIC PLAN



March 2017

OUR VISION

To be the leading NSW country race club by providing first class country racing experiences and events.

OUR MISSION

Engage with racing participants, patrons, clients and sponsors to deliver vibrant, successful and sustainable outcomes.

CORE VALUES

Integrity: Honesty in what we say, do and think

Sustainability: Robust and sustainable systems for the future

Quality: Service to all stakeholders that we are proud to stand behind

Community: Active contributor to the local area with community engagement

Passion: Enthusiasm, desire and commitment to succeed and improve

Safety: Look after each other and consistently look for safer ways to work

Teamwork: Sharing the challenges and the successes

OUR HISTORY

Muswellbrook Race Club (MRC) is one of the oldest continuous race clubs in NSW, spanning more than 150 years.

The racecourse was established at its current location by the land owner of the time Edward 'Hunter' Bowman who owned major parcels of land in the South Muswellbrook area known as Skellatar Estate. The racecourse precinct was named Skellatar Park shortly after its establishment.

The late Mr. Bowman was one of the State's best known racing identities. He was a member of the A.J.C. and served as president of the Upper Hunter Amateur Race Club, the Muswellbrook Jockey Club and the Polo Club from the late 1920's until his sudden death in 1952.

The Skellatar racecourse was then sold to Hunter River Farms (a syndicate of investors which included a number of committeemen from the Upper Hunter Amateur Race Club) but continued to be used for race meetings.

Muswellbrook Race Club is fortunate to now own the land on which the racecourse and grounds are situated after it was acquired from Hunter River Farms in the early 1960's.



FACILITIES AND TRACK

While the race club doesn't own houses and stabling, there is a great relationship between the club and two local mining companies (Bengalla & Mt Arthur Coal) who own and manage properties within the racecourse precinct. Muswellbrook Race Club is consulted in the first instance when properties become available so that horse trainers are given every opportunity to lease the properties.

Skellatar Park has five tracks being utilised including the course proper, B-grass, sand, cinders and dirt. This makes Muswellbrook Race Club one of the most significant regional training centres in Country NSW. An average of 100 horses utilise the track for training purposes with 25 individual trainers listed as having Muswellbrook as their home track.

With 18 race meetings scheduled annually, Muswellbrook Race Club maintains an excellent reputation for providing a high rating country race club facility and a track that is conducive to fair and competitive racing. Beautifully manicured gardens and lovely shaded lawn areas are a feature of Muswellbrook's facilities and we regularly receive positive feedback from visitors.

The country charm of racing at Muswellbrook has not been lost despite the relatively close proximity to the cities of Newcastle and Sydney. The short drive of less than 3 hrs from Sydney (thanks to the addition of the Hunter Expressway) has enabled city and provincial trainers to easily access racing in the Upper Hunter which has increased the overall quality of racing at Muswellbrook.

WORKING WITH LOCAL BUSINESSES - SPONSORSHIP

MRC enjoys tremendous support from a diverse range of local businesses both large and small and the club truly is a place where the thoroughbred, wine and mining industries meet. Muswellbrook Race Club is fortunate to have the following major sponsors:

Godolphin	Bengalla Mining
Horsepower	Arrowfield
Magic Millions	Coolmore
Mt Arthur Coal	Tabcorp
Two Rivers Wines	Muswellbrook Coal Company

Muswellbrook Race Club also has great support from Muswellbrook Shire Council

The club is most thankful to these businesses for their ongoing support which allows us to develop feature race days and aides in building the prominence of racing in the Upper Hunter. The fact that Muswellbrook Race Club is linked to these national and in some cases global brands speaks volumes for where the club is situated amongst its peers in terms of corporate support.

The Gold Sponsors Club currently involves another 35 local businesses who make use of the unique benefits of the innovative sponsorship club including great business networking opportunities, business promotion and the lure of being the Muswellbrook Cup naming rights holder each year. These businesses are a significant contributor to the success of our race days and are helping the club to grow by introducing new people to the sport of horse racing in this area.

Without these sponsorships, country race clubs simply would not survive. MRC strives to provide our sponsors with adequate benefit for their generous support which remains a constant priority for the club. The fact that the majority of sponsors are long term associates helps validate the club's efforts in this domain. The contribution of all of our sponsors is well recognised and most appreciated.

The support from local businesses is reciprocated by the club with a local buying commitment which continues to expand and evolve.



General Manager Duane Dowell and Chairman John Sunderland with Emma Williams & Renee McMorow from Hollydene Estate Wines - 2017 Gold Sponsor and Muswellbrook Cup Naming Rights Winners

COUNTRY RACING'S FUTURE

The increase in country prizemoney to a minimum of \$20,000 per race has provided great incentives for city and provincial trainers to make the trip to Muswellbrook where they know that their horses will get every chance to perform at their best. The introduction of 'Showcase' race meetings in the country for a minimum \$30,000 for each race has further increased the appeal for owners and trainers and helped to highlight emerging country cup carnivals – like our Muswellbrook Cup Day.

In addition, \$60,000 TAB Highway races in Sydney on Saturdays for country only trained horses has provided a great opportunity for owners to experience the thrill of having a runner on a metropolitan track with access to great prizemoney.

The Country Championships has been an outstanding success since its inception in 2015 with the popular concept continuing to grow. While it provides a fantastic occasion for country horses to race in a \$150,000 heat in their area and a possible \$400,000 final at Royal Randwick, the Country Championships also showcases our great country racing clubs to a wider audience.

Country racing has never been better positioned to grow and provide long term sustainable futures for all its participants. Racing NSW are to be congratulated on their work to secure increased revenue streams through race field’s legislation, wagering tax parity and increased TAB and Sky Racing contributions. Some of these increased revenue streams required long sustained campaigning and in the case of ‘race fields legislation’, years of court action to deliver favourable outcomes for the racing industry.

While a large portion of the increased revenue has been directed back to owners through prizemoney increases, funds are also directed towards improving the race track surfaces and infrastructure at country race clubs.

KEY CLUB STATISTICS

Track circumference	2010m
Home straight length	400m
Race meetings held each year	18
Races run per year	132
Wagering turnover (NSW TAB) at Muswellbrook per year	\$21,500,000
Prizemoney paid back to participants	\$2,700,000
Muswellbrook Cup prizemoney	\$80,000
Feature Race Days – providing better than minimum prizemoney	8
Returns to owners	>90%

OUR FUTURE

The growth and re-branding of Muswellbrook Race Club over the last 5-6 years under a new and motivated committee has provided consistent and reliable results. This has culminated in Muswellbrook Race Club winning the award for the TAB Country Race Club of the Year in 2013. In 2015 & 2016, the club was nominated for similar awards.

With revised and robust systems in place that were initiated by our newly appointed General Manager at the time Helen Sinclair in 2011, the exemplary efforts of her successor Duane Dowell and the motivated leadership of the MRC committee, our club is ready to take the next step.



There are exciting plans in the pipeline for MRC and we have the right management team and committee to see these plans come to fruition. The strategic plan indicates the goals of MRC, including improving facilities for racing participants and patrons, providing an even fairer racing surface with increased safety and building our showcase Cup Carnival and feature racing schedule.

These initiatives will not only enable MRC to drive toward being the premier country race club in NSW but will also rival the provincial race clubs in terms of race day experience and race club performance.

SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- Improve the safety for jockeys and horses by moving the position of the finish line
- Develop a feature race to carry sufficient prizemoney to enable it to progress to a 'black type' race within a realistic time-frame.
- Expansion and renovations to 'Silks' Racing & Function centre
- Work with local Council with a proposal to create an entertainment precinct in an area which overlaps with the racecourse land.
- Work with Racing NSW to improving the quality of race broadcasts, presentation and access to racing
- Develop marketing strategies to increase patron attendance at Muswellbrook race days
- Expansion of track drainage project
- Continuous improvement in cost reduction to improve race club sustainability
- Continue and further improve the commitment to local purchasing charters
- Continued and increased involvement with local groups for community support
- Work with Racing NSW to increase local employment with apprenticeships and traineeships
- Improved training facilities including the installation of an equine water walker or pool
- Lead the way in terms of Work Health and Safety in the racing industry
- Work with Racing NSW to develop more animal welfare facilities and programs

RELOCATION OF WINNING POST

The winning post position has for a considerable period been an area of some concern to the club. The position of the winning post sits at the extreme end of the home straight and in fact sits approximately 3 metres around the finish bend.

The safety concerns for this include the fact that jockeys have to quickly manoeuvre their horses around the bend immediately after running through the finish line. While there have been no recorded serious injuries noted because of this hazard, this modification is seen as a pro-active measure to significantly increase the safety of jockeys at Skellatar Park.



Proposal

The proposal is to relocate the finish post approximately 30 metres back down the straight to give sufficient time for jockeys to ride their mounts to the line and enough room to negotiate the bend at the end of the straight.

This proposed winning post position was the original position of the finish line until 1994 when the judge's tower was relocated to a new race club facilities building.

A big screen will also be positioned permanently near the new finish post to provide live race coverage, replays and results.

Effects of race distances

The effects of race distances at the track under the proposal are minimal as shown in the table below. The new race distances provide a more balanced and even distribution of race lengths.

Current Distance	New Distances Under Proposal	Effect For Horses
1000m	1000m	30m Longer run into the home straight
1280m	1250m	No change
1450m	1400m or 1450m	Minimal effect
1500m	1500m	200m run into first turn. (30m increase)
1750m	1700m	150m run into first turn. (20m shorter)
2300m	2300m	Minimal effect



EXPANSION AND RENOVATIONS TO 'SILKS' RACING & FUNCTION CENTRE

The expansion and renovations to the existing Racing and Function Centre is a critical element of Muswellbrook Race Club's strategic plan. Not only will it provide much needed improvements to race day jockeys, officials and patrons but will also deliver a first class and much needed facility for the Muswellbrook community. Early indications from building firms estimate the cost for this project to be in the vicinity of \$4million.

Key features of the 'Silks' Racing and Function Centre improvements includes:

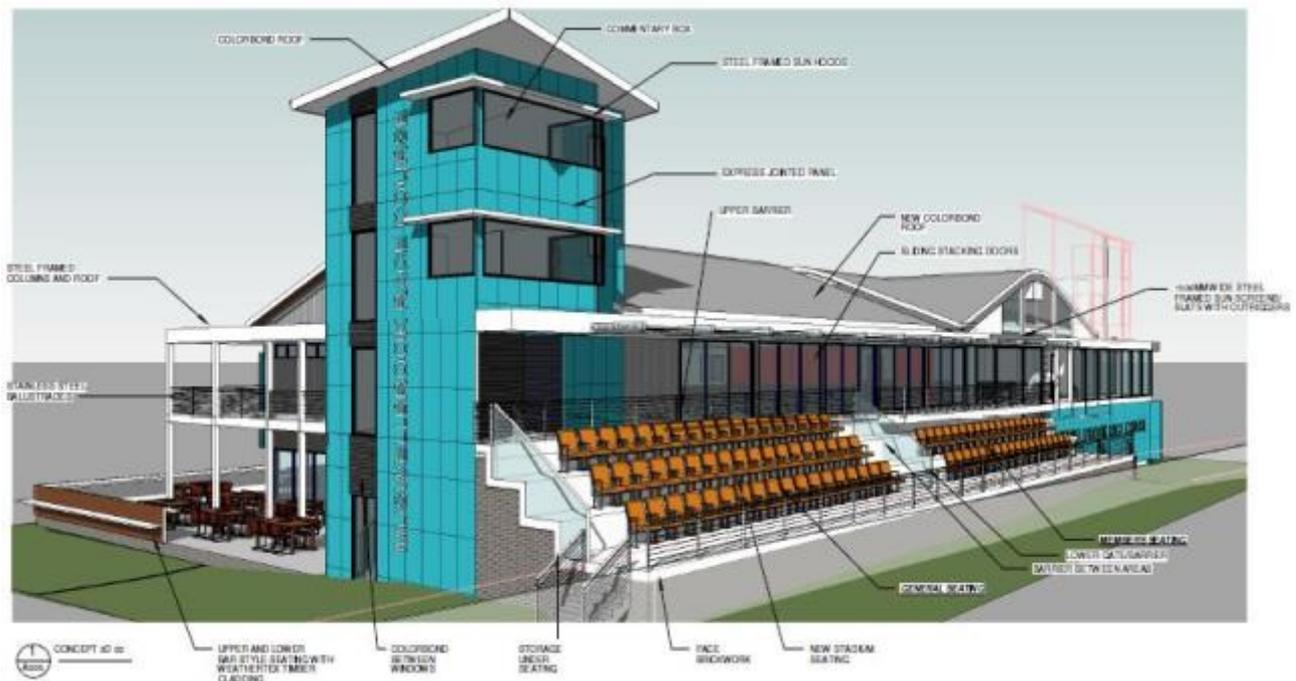
- Renovated male jockeys room with a 30% increase in size. The male jockey room is the oldest (and original) section of the main building having been a standalone building for the jockeys since the mid 1970's. It is believed to be more than 40 years old and the aged fittings in this area suggest that this is the case.
- Relocated Stewards room and doubling the size to provide a more spacious and workable space.
- Increase in size to 'weigh in' room by approximately 25%.
- Improve fixtures and fittings in female jockey's room.
- Possible inclusion of a jockey's spa room.
- Open plan racing office area and relocated communications room. New office shop front.
- New ground floor public bar and bistro with punter friendly TAB facilities.
- Increase 1st floor function room to comfortably accommodate approximately 250 people, up from 100. Provision to split the one space to two smaller function rooms. Open plan with improved and increased vision of the track in air-conditioned comfort.
- 3 tier terraced seating area for patrons.
- Viewing deck looking over the mounting yard.
- Relocation of judge's tower to match the new winning post position location. Camera angles to be improved for better racing vision to television audiences.
- Larger winner's room.
- Increased storage areas for catering and function equipment.
- Increased kitchen area in function centre.
- Installation of a big screen near the finish line to replace the existing semaphore (results) board

Current Building – Eastern Aspect



Proposed Building - North Eastern Aspect

Showing new judges tower, 3 tier terrace seating and extension of first floor function room.



It is noted that on numerous occasions every year, the race club is contacted with enquires made for function spaces for more than 120 people. In these instances, the race club is unable to accommodate such requests. With improved and extended function facilities, it is reasonable to expect that non-race day trade will significantly increase and provide increased revenue streams in this area. These projects will see Muswellbrook Race Club as the premier function space provider in the Upper Hunter.

FEATURE RACE DAY DEVELOPMENT

2016 saw MRC move its premier race day, the Muswellbrook Gold Cup away from the same day as the Melbourne Cup, to Friday 25th November. This finally gave our Cup its own identity, as well as a feature day where the best trainers, horses and jockeys could participate.

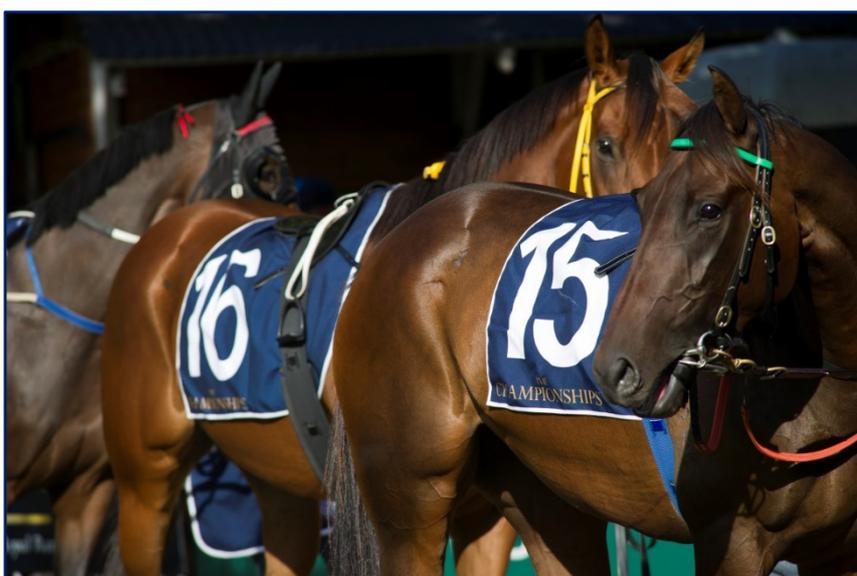
The main race (Muswellbrook Cup) now carries a healthy \$80,000 in prizemoney. The day is also slated as our “showcase” race day supported by Racing NSW, with the minimum prize money increased from \$20,000 to \$30,000. Total prizemoney more than doubled in 2016 to \$330,000 on Cup Day. This move certainly achieved the main objective of increasing the prominence of the Muswellbrook Cup Day.

A 40% increase in crowd numbers and 20% increase in NSW TAB wagering turnover confirmed that the ‘new’ Muswellbrook Cup Day was an outstanding success and will continue to grow into the future with added community events to supplement the Muswellbrook Cup ‘Festival’.

The MRC Board is also committed to investigating and developing a feature race that over time will capture the imagination of the racing participant. The club will work with Racing NSW and the Stakes Race Pattern Committee to determine what type of race would have the best chance of developing into a Stakes race in the future. Once determined, the strategy will centre on attracting large corporate support to lift prizemoney to a position that will attract the best horses to the race.

The Country Championship Wildcard race meeting in March is quickly becoming a must watch event with Muswellbrook hosting this feature race over the last two years and again being the host of the race in 2017. The first ever Wild Card race produced the eventual inaugural 2015 Country Champion “Artlee”, trained at Muswellbrook by Todd Willan, when he triumphed in the series final at Royal Randwick. In 2016 that honour went to the Scone trained “Clearly Innocent”. This evidently positions Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter at the forefront of Country thoroughbred racing.

MRC will continue to work with Racing NSW to provide the best outcome for the Country Championship Wildcard feature while ever it is hosted at Muswellbrook.



CREATE AN ENTERTAINMENT PRECINCT WHICH OVERLAPS WITH RACE CLUB LAND

The Muswellbrook Showground is situated in the centre of town and is currently for sale under expressions of interest. When the showground is sold, it is anticipated that land adjacent to the Race Club will be considered as an option for a new showground. In 2012, the Muswellbrook Race Club and the Upper Hunter Show Inc. committee entered into a memorandum of understanding to investigate a joint venture in developing an entertainment precinct which overlaps with race club owned land.

The Race Club has been working with all stakeholders including the Upper Hunter Show Inc. committee and Muswellbrook Shire Council on a strategic plan which may include;

- A new entry from Denman Road to separate training from visitor traffic;
- Provide a more direct and grand entry;
- Distance the entry road from the track and assist with the management of drainage;
- A sealed car-park with designated bus parking;
- Open exhibition grounds;
- A covered exhibition space for use as a marquee during race days and for bands, exhibitions and parades, indoor sports and livestock sales at other times;
- Other potential infrastructure – including the reticulation of the sewerage network to the Club and adjoining properties.

Muswellbrook Race Club will continue to work with all key stakeholders in regards to this project. This has an undetermined time frame and is dependent on outcomes not in the direct control of Muswellbrook Race Club.



Map image showing existing and possible new entrance to the racecourse precinct.

RACE BROADCASTS

Muswellbrook Race Club is committed to working with Racing NSW to deliver the best possible coverage of racing at Muswellbrook to national and international audiences. Improvements to future infrastructure will also include upgrades to broadcast equipment to ensure a reliable and quality product.

Relocation of the judge's tower as part of the masterplan of infrastructure improvements will include a modification of the current camera angle that is well known to deliver a misleading view of the photo finish on TV screens.

Providing the best imagery out of Skellatar Park is of vital importance to achieve the best possible wagering turnover outcomes for the club, Racing NSW and wagering operators.

INCREASING PATRONS TO RACE DAYS

As with most live sports, it is often difficult to attract people to race days. High quality telecasts from Sky Racing into homes and the ability to bet from your digital device has meant that race day admissions have not increased and in most cases decreased over the years.

Race Clubs are required to re-invent ways to attract people to the races and these are not always racing related. Providing entertainment for children to create a family friendly race day experience is critical in enhancing weekend race day crowds. Muswellbrook Race Club's community involvement includes utilising local groups to operate the entry gate with donations given to those groups for their contribution. This strategy has worked quite well from time to time over the last two years as this system encourages the respective group to bring along people and help promote the day to achieve a good return on their efforts.

A focus on renewed marketing strategies will be undertaken to better understand the needs of the race goer and what attracts them to the races at Muswellbrook. It is not a 'one size fits all' issue and various towns around the state may need to employ different strategies based on each town's demographic profile.

While Muswellbrook is situated within the largest thoroughbred breeding area of Australia, a lot of the town's population is employed or has interests primarily in the mining sector.

EXPANSION OF TRACK DRAINAGE PROJECT

In 2014, the racecourse underwent a renovation of the track drainage and irrigation systems. The total project cost was over \$500,000. The drainage work undertaken was from the 1000m to the winning post.

An expansion of the track drainage system to include the entire track and some rebuilding of the subsoil profile along the side of the course (900 metre point to the home turn 400 metre point) would further improve the durability of the track during periods of wet weather and provide an even fairer and safer racing surface.

COST REDUCTION TO IMPROVE RACE CLUB SUSTAINABILITY

The race club's main income driver is by wagering turnover. While some sections of wagering are increasing in revenue including international, fixed odds and digital wagering, the NSW TAB tote turnover income is remaining relatively steady. It is imperative that cost reduction methods are continually monitored for effectiveness.

Muswellbrook Race Club has undergone various cost improvement initiatives and will continue to seek improvements in this area. Some of the future cost reduction areas will involve a level of investment however they will deliver reduced ongoing costs into the future. These cost reduction strategies include:

- Investing in a Solar Power System to significantly reduce energy costs.
- Investing in new refrigerator equipment that is more energy efficient.
- Initiatives to decrease printing costs – particularly for race books
- Subsidies from Racing NSW Country to reduce race day ambulance costs
- Auditing of current suppliers list to seek cost reduction in ongoing goods and services
- Diligent purchasing to avoid waste
- Utilise Corrective Services and 'Work for the Dole' programs to reduce wages costs

CONTINUE THE COMMITMENT TO LOCAL PURCHASING CHARTERS

As discussed in a previous section, Muswellbrook Race Club is committed to supporting and working with other local businesses. Whenever possible, business will be conducted with local firms. Our Gold Sponsors will also be prioritised in this commitment.

Constant reviews will be conducted to ensure that the majority of race club expenditure (outside prizemoney) stays in the Muswellbrook and Upper Hunter area.

CONTINUED AND INCREASED INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Muswellbrook Race Club's involvement and support of local community groups continues to expand with a commitment to continue this into the future.

The Community Support Fund and the Race Day Support Program have been great success stories over the last few years with a number of local groups and charities benefiting.

The Community Support Fund includes the allocation of four \$2000 grants to local junior sporting or cultural groups. This has resulted in these local groups being able to benefit with new equipment including defibrillators, PA systems, canteen facilities, sporting equipment and shade marquees to name a few.

The Race Day Support Program involves groups manning the entry gate and running a BBQ generally on a family friendly Sunday race meeting. In return, the race club donates the proceeds of these activities to the club or group. Often these donations can be up to \$1000.

Muswellbrook Race Club is proud of its community support and this will continue to be a core value.

INCREASE LOCAL EMPLOYMENT WITH APPRENTICESHIPS & TRAINEESHIPS

Racing NSW has recently introduced an apprenticeship program with more than 40 apprentices being employed around the state amongst the country and provincial race clubs. Thanks to Racing NSW, Muswellbrook Race Club has been a beneficiary of this program with an apprentice recently employed as a trainee race track curator.

While it is largely dependent on local trainers, jockey apprenticeships are another area where it is hoped to see an increase in local numbers into the future. The Race Club is happy to play an active role in trying to attract more young people into the industry.

An Upper Hunter jockey school is also an avenue worth investigating given the excellent learning facilities at the Muswellbrook TAFE campus.

Traineeships in office administration have been offered in the past and this will continue as the need arises.



Record breaking jockey Robert Thompson.
A regular at Skellatar Park

IMPROVED TRAINING FACILITIES

In terms of training tracks, Muswellbrook Race Club is well equipped supplying 4 training tracks and a course proper for morning track work which are of very good quality for a country training facility.

The key training tool missing from the precinct is a fully functioning equine water walker or pool. This would be seen as an extremely valuable asset to the club and is an ongoing request made from local trainers. The race club is open to discussing options with a private entity in order to make this project a reality.



WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY

The racing industry continues to strive for improvement in health and safety for all its participants given the high-risk nature of horse racing.

Muswellbrook Race Club actively seeks safer systems to improve the well-being of everyone that visits or works at Skellatar Park. The club has a comprehensive health and safety online management system to record, learn and proactively improve the way we manage health and safety.

ANIMAL WELFARE INITIATIVES

Investment in animal welfare in recent times has been significantly increased to better care for horses in our industry. Race Clubs play an active role in implementing systems to ensure the comfort of horses on race days is maximised including water cooling equipment for warmer race days.

Muswellbrook Race Club and Racing NSW are also working with owners and trainers to help find rehoming options for horses once they have finished.



CONCLUSION

The staff and committee of Muswellbrook Race Club are excited about what the future holds for the club. The best attributes for Muswellbrook Race Club moving forward include:

- A sound financial position
- Sustainable and robust management system
- Stable workforce
- Committed and united Committee
- An enthusiasm and drive to be better
- A sound and sustainable sponsorship network
- A concerted focus on continued community involvement

We look forward to the next chapter at this very progressive and proud club.



Former Australian Cricketer Mark Waugh was among winning connections of 2016 Muswellbrook Cup Winner – Dylan's Rojo.

Notes:



SKELLATAR PARK RACECOURSE

MUSWELLBROOK NSW 2333

0265 411 699

www.muswellbrookraceclub.com.au