

# RESEARCH PROJECT

# Traveller Horse Ownership



**PAVEE POINT**  
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE



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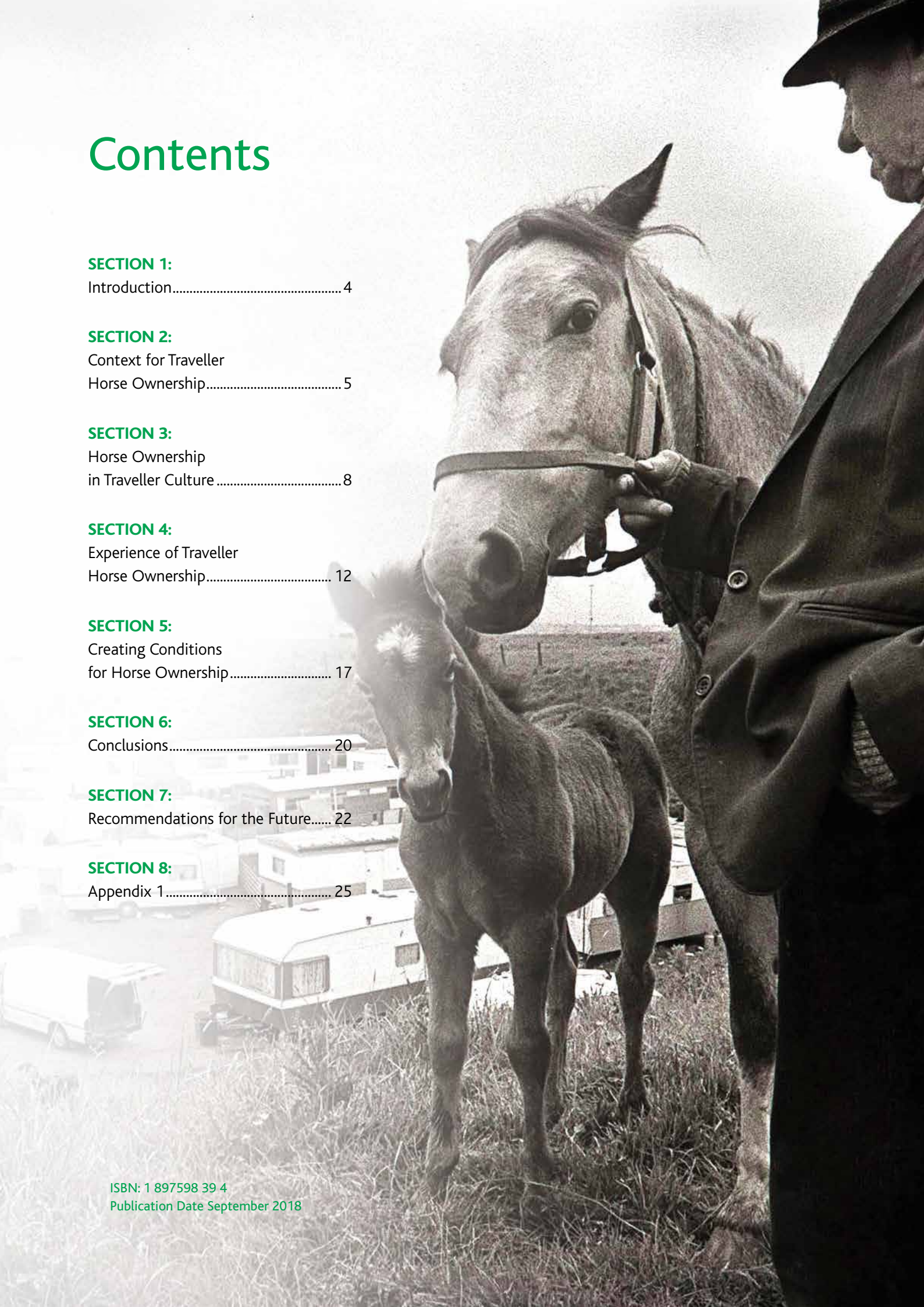
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# Foreword

On behalf of Pavee Point we are delighted to present to you this important research on Traveller Horse Ownership. This report demonstrates unequivocally the significance of horse ownership in the Traveller community. It highlights the important role that horse ownership plays in the Traveller community culturally, economically, socially and even politically. Horse ownership has been an inter-generational custom of the Traveller community. This report also highlights some of the health benefits that accompany horse ownership. This is particularly relevant due to the stark health inequalities between the Traveller community and the settled population.

We also see that as a result of legislation it is becoming increasingly difficult for Travellers to continue with this cultural tradition. It is not that Travellers do not want to comply, but rather that there is very little funding or other supports available that would facilitate a conducive environment for safe and responsible horse ownership. Despite this, many Travellers take great care and pride in their horses. This report contains several recommendations in relation to funding; the establishment of horse projects and horse associations; and training and husbandry skill courses. One of the key recommendations in the report calls for more effective partnership approaches between stakeholders-with a particular emphasis on the need for increased engagement between local Traveller organisations and local authorities. Examples of such successful partnerships are documented in the report.

We would like to sincerely thank all of the Traveller organisations and individuals who gave their time, knowledge and expertise in making this report possible. We would also like to acknowledge and thank the authors of the report- Niall Crowley and Ann Irwin-for their work in undertaking this important research.

The challenge for all of us now is to work collectively and effectively towards the implementation of its recommendations and Pavee Point looks forward in working with you towards realising the ambition set out in this report.

**Martin Collins & Ronnie Fay**  
**Co-Directors**  
*1st September 2018*





# SECTION 1: Introduction



**This research was prompted by the dearth of national information available on Traveller Horse ownership and the experience of Traveller horse owners in Ireland. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine currently fund a number of local Traveller Horse Projects and are concerned that there may be a level of under-registration of horses owned by Travellers and a lack of engagement with the Horse Welfare services, which may have led to increased levels of seizures under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2014 and the Control of Horses Act 1996.**

This research project was commissioned by Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, and funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, to provide a national picture on Horse ownership, activities, skills, and knowledge within the Traveller Community, identify key enablers and barriers to engagement and compliance with Horse Welfare and registration systems, and establish good practice strategies for supporting responsible horse ownership within the Traveller community. The research was undertaken by Niall Crowley and Ann Irwin.

## METHODOLOGY

This report was informed by the results of a number of research methods.

- An on-line survey. The survey was directed at Traveller organisations and eighteen responses were received.
- A series of semi-structured interviews. Interviews were held with Traveller organisations and Traveller horse owners around the country to explore the issues in relation to horse ownership.

- Interviews with stakeholders. Stakeholders included representatives of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the CEO of Horse Sport Ireland, the Associate Professor of Public Health in University College Dublin, and CEO of the Irish Horse Welfare Trust.
- Three regional workshops with Traveller horse owners and Traveller organisations. The workshops sought to verify the findings of the research and the draft recommendations.

## THIS REPORT

This report is the result of the research. It sets out:

- The context for Traveller horse ownership;
- Horse ownership in Traveller culture;
- The experience of Traveller horse ownership;
- Creating the conditions for Traveller horse ownership;
- Conclusion and recommendations

## SECTION 2:

# Context for Traveller Horse Ownership

### LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

**The Control of Horse Act 1996 provides the main legislative context for considering the current situation and experience of Traveller horse owners. The purpose of the Act is to “provide for the control of horses and to make provision for the licensing of horses in urban and other areas where horses cause danger to persons or property or nuisance and to amend certain other enactments relating to animals and to provide for related matters”<sup>1</sup>.**

Under the Act, a horse must have a passport within 6 months of its date of birth or by 31 December of the year of birth, whichever date occurs later. As well as enabling the identity of an animal to be proved, the passport contains a declaration of whether the horse is intended for human consumption. This declaration must be signed if the horse is being given certain types of medication that render it unsuitable for the human food chain. The owner can also choose to sign this declaration voluntarily. A foal should be micro-chipped and issued with a passport before it leaves the birth holding. Foals under the age of six months that are unweaned and accompanied by their dam or foster mare do not need to have a passport. Passports must accompany horses whenever they are moved either within Ireland or moving out of the country. A passport is valid for the horse's lifetime. The passport includes the horse's Unique Equine Life Number (UELN) and identifies it with the issuing body.<sup>2</sup>

The Act tasks local authorities with establishing bye-laws and 'control areas', areas to which bye-laws apply. In the control areas, a horse owner must have a licence for every horse that they own. A licence normally lasts for a year. This licence can be revoked if a horse offence has been committed. Horses without licences in control areas can be impounded and in order to retrieve a horse from a pound the horse owner must pay a penalty and must show they have access to land registered as equine premises. The local authority keeps a publicly available register of all licences issued.

When applying for a licence, the local authority must be satisfied that the person applying is a fit person to keep a horse and that the horse will be properly maintained and stabled. If a person under 16 owns a horse, the head of the household in which they live is considered to be the owner, as horses may not be sold to anyone under 16 years of age. Anyone permitted

to have a horse in a public place must ensure that it is wearing a bridle and is under adequate control. It is illegal to allow a horse to graze, feed, stray or remain in a public place without the consent of the local authority. People wishing to ride a horse on a public road may do so provided that the horse has a licence, is fitted with a bridle and is under the control of someone over 16 years of age.

After the Act became law in August 1997 the majority of local authorities introduced bye-laws under the Act. These bye-laws cover issues such as:

- The prohibition on an inadequately controlled or unidentifiable horse being in a public place or on private property without the property owner's consent;
- Horses seized under Section 37 of the Act;
- Provision of services of a veterinary surgeon for a horse;
- Recovery of detained Horses by the owner or keeper;
- Disposal of a horse detained under Section 37 of the Act;
- Fees to be paid by the owner or keeper of the detained horse;
- Records to be kept in respect of a detained horse;
- Service of notices; and
- Penalties.

Bye-laws differ from local authority area to local authority area. There appears to be no standardisation or discussion between local authorities in relation to these and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is not involved in the drafting of the bye-laws.

1. *Control of Horses Act 1996*

2. *The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine has approved a number of organisations for the purposes of issuing identity documents for horses and maintaining approved databases. The list of these issuing bodies is published on the Department's website.*



Further horse related legislation has impacted on the situation and experience of Traveller horse owners. The **Control on Places where Horses are Kept Regulations 2014** and **Commission Regulation 262/2015**<sup>3</sup> requires that the keeper of the equine (the owner of the land on which the horse is kept), who may or may not be the owner, is required to register the land with the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine and to maintain certain information. The purpose of registration is to ensure that the Department has a full picture of where horses are located, so that it can alert owners quickly in the event of a contagious disease outbreak, quickly implement disease control measures and also give advice on appropriate precautionary, containment and control measures as soon as possible.<sup>4</sup> Registration is a once-off process and is free of charge but those that fail to register may be prosecuted. Horse owners are unable to register a horse, obtain a passport or have a horse slaughtered for human consumption without a Premises Registration Number (PRN). Registered persons must keep records of the equines on the premises and the movement of equines off and on to the premises.

The **European Communities (Welfare of Farmed Animals) Regulations 2010** relates to the protection of animals that are being kept for farming purposes. It covers horses but does not apply to an animal used in competitions, shows, cultural or sporting events or activities. It applies to any animal of a kind of species that is normally bred or kept for the production of food or for the purpose of the farming of land or of animal husbandry. The Act places obligations on the owners of animals to take the necessary steps to ensure the welfare of animals in their possession, and that the conditions under which an animal is kept conform with its needs for development, adaptation, domestication, and with its physiological and ethological needs, all in accordance with experience and scientific knowledge. It brings veterinary inspectors into the implementation of horse related legislation as enforcement officers.

A number of important policy-related documents make specific reference to Traveller horse owners. The Report of the **Task Force on the Travelling Community** recommended that "where Traveller families keep horses, they should be required

to secure adequate grazing areas for their animals. In the urban areas, there can be no requirement on local authorities to provide for this, due to lack of space. In other areas, local authorities have been able to assist in the provision of grazing facilities. This should continue and where possible, be expanded with the support of the relevant Department". It further recommended that "within the training and work schemes provided for Travellers, there should be support in developing their skills at breeding and caring for horses in order to create employment for young Travellers and to ensure the continuation of a tradition that is culturally important to them. This should be explored with FAS and the VEC's".<sup>5</sup>

**Reaching New Heights: Report of the Irish Sport Horse Industry Strategy Committee** states that "the committee acknowledges the tradition of keeping horses within the travelling community but notes the challenge for the travelling community in providing suitable premises for their horses. The committee notes the engagement of certain local authorities with the travelling community to set up structured and organised Traveller horse projects. Such projects have merit. A review of all existing projects should take place with a view to agreeing a template for Traveller horse projects which could be followed by other local authorities". This report is regarded as the strategic plan for the horse industry and informs policy in that area<sup>6</sup>.

The **Farm Animal Welfare Council**, in 2010 advice to the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Marine on horse welfare, emphasised that "in situations where an owner can no longer adequately provide for or where the equine can no longer fulfil the purpose for which it was bred, owners should be proactive in seeking to dispose of the animal before its welfare is compromised - including consideration of the option of humane disposal where the horse cannot be sold/ transferred to another responsible owner. Such action will help prevent the emergence of long-term and severe animal welfare problems". It noted that horse owners should be aware "that if a horse is not registered it could lead to a significant cost to the owner in the future. Disposal options for undocumented horses are limited and expensive".

3. European Union (Identification of Equidae) Regulations 2015 that came into operation on 1 January 2016.

4. Department Press Release - <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/press/pressreleases/2012/february/title,61295,en.html>

5. Task Force on the Travelling Community Report, 1995

6. <http://www.horsesportireland.ie/?s=Reaching+New+Heights>



## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND THE MARINE

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine are the key source of funding both for the control of horses and for developmental initiatives with particular groups of horse owners, including Traveller horse owners.

Under the Control of Horses Act, the Department provides funding for the seizure of horses. There is a high level of investment in enforcement and some positive anticipation that levels of impounding are dropping. The Department also seeks to address and reduce indiscriminate breeding and wants to improve breeding. There is concern at the oversupply of low quality horses. There is an interest to secure accurate information about horse numbers and the location of horses and zero tolerance of animal neglect.

The Department recognises that there is a cohort of horse owners who would benefit from more developmental support. This includes Traveller horse owners and has resulted in annual funding for a wide range of largely small scale but important Traveller horse projects.

There is a significant focus on equine training for Travellers in the projects funded for 2016. Training has been funded in Cork City, Leitrim, Laois, Longford, Galway City, and Wicklow. Training is being considered in Cork County Council, Tipperary, and Sligo. Training and stabling type projects are also significant. A feasibility study has been funded in Galway City. Funding has been provided for facilities in Offaly and Kilkenny, and to secure grazing land in Longford and to develop facilities in Meath.

A number of such initiatives are under consideration in Kildare and Leitrim where a site has been identified. The local authority in Mayo is seeking to identify a site and the local authority in Sligo has offered sites.

Training and stabling type facilities have also been funded in Dublin and Limerick for horse owners more generally. The Department considers that those using these facilities include Travellers.

Passport and micro-chipping clinics have been supported in a number of areas including Galway City and County and Offaly. These have been provided through horse welfare NGOs and are considered affordable and accessible.

While the funding is provided through local authorities there is some liaison with Traveller organisations involved in these projects. Traveller groups are named in eight of the projects, some 45% of the projects. Horse welfare NGOs are named in four of the projects.

This research project has been funded by the Department through Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre.



## SECTION 3:

# Horse Ownership in Traveller Culture

### A MULTI-FACETED ELEMENT OF TRAVELLER CULTURE

**All the respondents to the survey for this research stated that the horse is 'critical - a central part of Traveller culture' or 'important, though it used to be more central to Traveller culture'. In one interview for this research, it was stated that it is impossible to overstate the importance of horses to Travellers as "Horses are of huge symbolic importance. There are deep emotional attachments that stem from the historical social, cultural and economic links with horses".**

Horse ownership plays a central and multi-faceted role in Traveller culture. It is deeply entwined with Traveller identity and is an element in the Traveller economy, sport and recreation, and Traveller health and wellbeing. This role has changed over time with its origins in the demands of the nomadic way of life of the Traveller community. In earlier days, horse ownership had a stronger economic imperative whereas this element is now less present.

Horse ownership in the Traveller community is described as a family tradition. One interviewee stressed the intergenerational aspects of Traveller horse ownership, emphasising that the family unit is at the heart of the tradition of horse ownership. It predominantly involves men but women play a slowly increasing role. Horses tend to be passed down from father to son but there are examples of fathers giving horses to their daughters, and some girls have participated in equine training provided to young Travellers.

Ciara Ridge notes the interviewees for her 2014 dissertation, when talking about horses, as touching "on a number of themes including tradition; heritage; horses as Travellers' means of making a living; their role for pastimes and in quality of life for Travellers; and the role that horses have in supporting Travellers' health".<sup>7</sup>

### IDENTITY

**Horses are central to Traveller identity and are a tangible marker of Traveller culture. When Travellers talk about Traveller culture, according to interviewees, the talk will be of horses. It is a way of connecting through shared appreciation and understanding. One interviewee stated that horse ownership is "part of who the Traveller is". Horse ownership, involvement with horses, and even chat about horses were described as "a way of keeping in touch and keeping the culture going" for Travellers living in standard housing and for Travellers in institutions such as prisons. Horses "keep you linked to the community".**





Interviewees described art competitions for young Travellers where all the entries contained some reference to horses. Horses are ever present in storytelling within the community. Plaster horse heads are often found in the entry to Traveller dwellings. Repeatedly, interviewees referred to the horse as a “symbol”.

Some interviewees tracked a relationship between the level of Traveller horse ownership in an area and the strength of Traveller identity in that area. Low levels of horse ownership, it was acknowledged, can be because of other economic traditions dominating within the families in a particular area. Where there was a denial of identity, it was rare to find Traveller horse owners. Other interviewees saw young Travellers going through an identity crisis and the potential of horse ownership in resolving this.

It was noted that while horse ownership was a marker of distinctive identity, Traveller participation in horse ownership was also a means of social networking with settled people and often provided the only moments where Travellers got to experience an equality in their relationship with settled people. Shared interest in horses is a source of solidarity between Travellers and settled people.

In the report of the National Traveller Horse Ownership Seminar in 2013, Chrissie Sullivan stated that, “The ownership of horses is the last most tangible link back to the Traveller nomadic way of life. Travellers needed horses for economic purposes and for their way of life. The issue of horse ownership should never have become a negative issue and media portrayal has not been helpful”.<sup>8</sup>

Horse ownership is understood as a tradition that goes far back in Traveller history. The intergenerational aspect of Traveller horse ownership is vitally important and great store is given to handing down this tradition over generations. Some Travellers have horses that have been bred from the one strain and handed down through the family for generations. When a horse is handed down, according to interviewees, it holds a sentimental value, like a piece of jewellery. According to one interviewee for this research, it is as if it “holds the person” who used to own it. Another interviewee describes how he has always owned horses and the skills he has learned from his father and he, in turn, is passing them on to his own children. This is regarded as crucial in passing down a key aspect of identity in the context of a majority population that does not value or facilitate Traveller culture.

A number of interviews noted that horse ownership is a show of defiance against what is perceived as a deliberate undermining of the Traveller way of life. One interviewee stated that Traveller culture is being eradicated and there is no recognition of Traveller ethnicity<sup>9</sup> but Travellers still keep horses despite tough conditions.

## ECONOMY

**Traditionally, the horse was very important to the Traveller economy. The horse facilitated the nomadic nature of the Traveller economy, as well as being important assets to breed, buy and sell. However, the changed economic context means there is little financial gain. Many Travellers had to get rid of their horses due to the expense and there was a sense communicated that current horse owners are the true holders of the tradition given their tenacity in the face of difficulty.**

While there was repeated clarity that “no one was making a fortune” out of horse ownership, trading or buying and selling horses, remains part of the economic purpose pursued by Travellers in owning horses. Horses are still viewed by some Travellers as a “banker” in economic terms, a way of saving money for an emergency. Horse ownership can be a start in economic life for a person in this way. In these instances, the family would own one horse or a small number of horses and sell when they have a need of additional income.

Traveller horse owners still have a presence at horse fairs in Ireland and abroad. This is particularly true of those families that own a lot of horses and there is some horse breeding for sale by Traveller horse owners. However, this is largely underdeveloped and largely unrecognized. According to Martin Collins, “It must be recognized that a lot of horse fairs in Ireland and England would not be viable and would cease to exist, if not for the participation of Travellers and Gypsies at these events. This would be a huge loss to local economies”.<sup>10</sup>

There is some acknowledgement that there was irresponsible breeding and over-population. One interviewee suggested that “Travellers are addicted to numbers”. Indiscriminate breeding is identified as an issue. However, there are cost barriers as the castration of colts is expensive. Culling of horses is difficult in a context of strong attachment to the horses. The challenge to “breed from the best and cull the rest” was posed in order to establish quality control.

While it was suggested that a small number of Travellers may have engaged in the horsemeat industry, selling horses for horsemeat, in general the sale of horses for horsemeat is not seen as part of the Traveller tradition and is looked down on. A number of interviewees stated that engagement in the horse meat industry is not widespread amongst Travellers and in general Travellers do not engage in this activity. None of the interviewees were aware of or knew any Traveller involved in this activity. In any case, failure to register horses within the allowable timeframe means that most Traveller horses are stamped out of the food chain as passport control at the abattoirs is now much tighter.

7. Ridge C., ‘What is the direct and indirect impact of legislation in Ireland with regard to Traveller horse ownership?’ Student Dissertation UCC, 2014

8. National Traveller Horse Ownership Seminar, Cork, 2013, Traveller Visibility Group Report

9. Traveller ethnicity was formally recognised by the State, March 1st 2017

10. National Traveller Horse Ownership Seminar, Cork, 2013, Traveller Visibility Group Report

## RECREATION & SPORT

**Recreation and sport, particularly trotting and sulky racing, are significant reasons that Travellers own and keep horses.**

Keeping horses for this purpose can be expensive and there are high levels of skills required to care for the horses and to engage in racing. Travellers who keep horses for this purpose tend to be concentrated in particular areas, such as Cork, Donegal and Tipperary. Racing can be highly competitive and winners are given high levels of respect. Prize money can be quite substantial and racing is used as a fundraising activity for charitable purposes in some areas.

There are traditional days identified as days for sulky racing. On-road sulky racing is strictly regulated by local authority byelaws and has been the subject of much negative media attention. A number of research participants stated that it should not be too difficult to arrange for roads to be closed periodically to allow for racing on the road, though the Irish Horse Welfare Trust raised animal welfare issues in relation to sulky racing on the road. The lack of access to a track was mentioned by a number of research participants as forcing them to engage in on-road racing. Travellers do travel to some tracks that are available but there are few of these and some have closed due to insurance costs. The track in Dundalk is used by a number of Travellers and is regarded as an important venue.

There is an awareness of the Irish Harness Racing Society (IHRC) and some links were reported. According to one interviewee, the IHRC receives low levels of funding in comparison to the other larger NGOs. He and other interviewees pointed to the potential in the development of this sport stating that this type of sport is a significant industry in other countries, citing an annual turnover of €6 billion in France.

There is a ban on sulky racing in most areas and trotting on the road is not allowed. There was concern amongst those interviewed to see steps taken to facilitate safe sulky racing. There was consensus that there are ways to do this safely if there are organised road closures and those racing have the skills and equipment to do it in the right way. According to a number of those interviewed banning road racing will only make the situation worse and a more logical approach would be to explore how it can be enabled and facilitated.

Some Travellers have horses for general recreation rather than specifically for sport or racing. It is the tradition they wish to continue and it offers them access to productive and enjoyable activity.

## HEALTH

**There was significant consensus about the health benefits that flow to Travellers from the ownership of horses. This was predominantly identified in terms of mental health. It was linked to the importance of combating suicide among Traveller men, for whom the rate of suicide is 6.6 times the national average.<sup>11</sup>**

Many interviewees spoke of the difficulties for Traveller men to maintain a sense of identity that is positive when they face constant barriers including to their capacity to earn a living, there are few employment or enterprise opportunities available to them, and their culture is under constant threat. Early school leaving continues as an issue for Travellers. Poor education experiences, poor employment opportunities and discrimination in access to work combine to leave Travellers with significant levels of time on their hands.

Horse ownership is seen as filling this time productively. The routine and structure that is provided by caring for horses gives many Traveller men something to do that is therapeutic and benefits the wellbeing of those involved. Many derive a sense of pride that is beneficial to self-esteem and mental health. Particular benefits were seen in this regard for older Traveller men.

However, in the context of horse ownership becoming increasingly restrained due to the implementation of local authority bye-laws, the negative consequences to mental health and wellbeing of not being able to keep and care for horses were widely spoken of by research participants.

## HORSE-RELATED SKILLS AND EXPERTISE

**A high level of horse-related skills and expertise among Traveller horse owners was identified by research participants. Older Traveller horse owners are seen as the more knowledgeable, particularly in families where there has been a long tradition of having horses. The traditional skills held are still relevant and, in some instances, Travellers provide services to other Traveller horse owners. There is a perception among interviewees that these skills are beginning to die out because the restrictions and barriers to horse ownership have limited the interest and participation of the younger generation. Where young Travellers are engaged, research participants were agreed that the passing on of knowledge and skills within families needs to be supported and resourced.**

Generally, there is agreement that there is room to deepen skills levels and broaden the numbers holding the high-quality skills. There is an interest in equine related training courses and events organised by Traveller organisations and horse welfare groups. However, difficulties increasingly experienced by Traveller organisations in getting insurance for these events is a growing barrier to their organisation.

<sup>11</sup> *Pavee Point Position Paper on Traveller Men's Health, 2016 quoting the All Ireland Traveller Health Study (2010)*



Some interviewees stressed the value of Travellers passing on knowledge to Travellers in these training settings. A number of those involved in skills development stated that informal settings are better for older Travellers where their skills can be exchanged and passed on to the younger generation. In this context the notion of 'knowledge transfer groups'<sup>12</sup> was highlighted and subsequently explored. There was agreement that they would be a useful way for older Travellers to pass on their skills to younger people and among themselves and to deepen their skills in a more informal setting. More formal training may be more appropriate for younger Traveller horse owners. Other interviewees recognised the need in some instances for external expertise, in particular where there is mutual understanding and an acceptance of the skill set on offer.

The need to develop husbandry practices was raised, particularly the practice of worm dosing, doing teeth, and caring for hooves. The level of care is identified as mixed in these areas. Those that do not care well for their horses were criticised by research participants and are seen to give all Traveller horse owners a bad name.

Access to appropriate land is seen as crucial to the care of horses. There can be a high parasite load if the horse is tethered in one place all the time and dosing will not work if the horse is put straight back out in the same space, ultimately leading to resistance to dosing. Research participants identified the need for advice on parasite control and new skills development to address the lack of basic training amongst some.

It was further identified that the tradition of harness making and repair could be resuscitated in such skills development.

## TRAINING PROGRAMMES

There are a number of accredited programmes that have been developed and delivered to Traveller horse owners in different areas around the country. These include a QQI Level 3 introductory programme for people returning to education or that have literacy difficulties. This programme introduces the notion of a horse project and the elements required for a successful project. There are QQI Level 4 and 5 programmes in horse care and welfare, stud management, horsemanship, equine breeding and farriery.

A number of Traveller horse owners have gone on to third level education in the Kildalton College for Equine Studies, the Racing Academy and the University of Limerick's Equine Studies. Some Traveller horse owners have completed leadership skills courses.

## MAINSTREAM EMPLOYMENT

A number of interviewees identified an interest in employment opportunities for Travellers in the horse industry. This was not seen as a response to the issues facing Traveller horse owners but it was one additional way for Travellers to pursue their engagement with horses. "Travellers could be equine dentists or jockeys, pursuing a career in the mainstream" according to one interviewee.

Attempts to gain a foothold for Travellers in such employment were reported by research participants. Contacts made with stables in their area seeking placements had led to nothing. Distance from such stables and lack of contact were identified as another barrier. Issues of discrimination were raised by interviewees and the need for positive action in reserving places for Travellers.

One interviewee noted that it is 'a big jump from the field to the horse yard'. A progression pathway is needed that includes work experience and training. Employment in horse projects would be a key step on the pathway. Work placements could be done in the Irish Horse Welfare Trust. The Trust is trying to get live in accommodation and have the go-ahead from the Department for an education building. They could thus equip people with training and a reference.

## CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

There is limited evidence of culturally appropriate information materials for Traveller horse owners. Issues of culturally appropriate information and communication were specifically explored in relation to communicating messages relating to the developmental role of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to Traveller horse owners. This was identified as an ongoing challenge for design of materials and channels of communication used.



12. The idea draws on a model that Teagasc and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine use to upgrade standards and outcomes in farming through what they call discussion groups. Farmers sign up for a three-year period and attend five facilitated group meetings each year. They must complete a farm improvement plan over this period. They receive €750 payment for participation each year.

## SECTION 4:

# Experience of Traveller Horse Ownership



The number of individuals and families that own horses varies considerably from place to place and the number of horses owned varies widely from family to family. This reflects the tradition within particular families as well the purposes for which horses are owned. Beyond the anecdotal, horse ownership among the Traveller community is not possible to quantify at this point, particularly in the difficult and complex contexts that prevail around horse ownership at local level. Attempts made on the basis of this research may be so misleading as to be best avoided.

Horse ownership is, however, generally viewed as having decreased over the last twenty years. There are a number of reasons for this that are associated with the legislative context in which Travellers now own horses, as well as changes in the social and economic circumstances for many Travellers. The survey identified a number of challenges to Travellers keeping horses, in particular issues of land and facilities and of control and compliance.

### LAND & FACILITIES

Access to land is a significant and constant issue for Traveller horse owners. It was the most often cited challenge by the survey respondents, 100% of whom identified it as a barrier.

It is not easy to access or afford appropriate land on which to keep horses. In particular, as outlined above, various legislative Acts and regulations make it mandatory for the keeper of a horse (the owner of the land on which the horse is kept), who may or may not be the owner, to register the land and to maintain certain information, placing a considerable responsibility on landowners that are not themselves the horse owners. Many landowners are reluctant to engage at this level

particularly as they must be tax compliant to register, though informal renting arrangements<sup>13</sup> still exist.

There are considerable costs involved in renting land and this can act as a significant barrier to Traveller horse owners, the majority of whom would not be economically well-off, particularly given that the area of land has to be sufficient to allow for the rotation of the animals. The high costs of feed, which have been compounded by tillage shortages, adds to this barrier. Landowners can also be reluctant to rent land for keeping horses as they are seen to be hard on the land.

Difficulties in accessing appropriate land is compounded by discrimination by landowners in not being willing to rent land to Travellers. Research participants related incidents of landowners refusing to rent land to them but renting the same land to non-Traveller horse owners. There were stories of having to travel considerable distances to rent land, causing further barriers for Traveller horse owners.

Traveller group housing or halting sites rarely have linked facilities for keeping horses. The provision of land for this purpose by local authorities has in some instances been blocked by protests from settled people.

*13. Where the landowner does not register.*



A number of Travellers with a large number of horses reported having built up relationships with landowners and manage quite well, though they sometimes have to travel quite large distances. For others, any green space in built up areas has to be availed of, which is often inadequate to sufficiently cater for the welfare of the horses. The lack of access to land has led to tensions noted in some areas. In one instance Travellers were reported as putting a significant number of horses on commonage and breaking gates in the process.

## CONTROL AND COMPLIANCE

**Horse care and welfare was a significant concern of all those that participated in this research. Compliance with the legislation and regulations governing horse ownership is seen as an important way of ensuring this.**

Traveller horse owners are critically aware of the need to ensure that their horses are cared for. However, there was a view amongst a number of research participants that compliance with the legislation is difficult for many Traveller horse owners. A total of 61% of survey respondents stated that 'compliance with the legislation' is a barrier to Travellers keeping horses. Interviewees were keen to stress that compliance with the legislation and horse welfare need to be decoupled. Many horse owners that are not compliant with the legislation have well cared for horses. They are unable to meet the standards set by the legislation for reasons associated with:

- Costs, including veterinary costs, microchipping costs and, where pedigree is necessary, DNA samples;
- Literacy with an amount for form filling required;
- Difficulty with access to equine registered land and the fear of tracing a horse back to the owner in case of an accident.

A number of those interviewed stated that the legislation and regulations were introduced in a way that did not create the conditions for Travellers to be able to comply. One interviewee who has engaged with many Traveller horse owners stated that there were no attempts to explain the reasoning behind the legislation when it was first introduced. She stated that the approach was one of enforcement rather than explaining why it was important, thus linking it to the welfare of the horse and providing support for owners to comply with it. Many research participants stated that the paperwork was a significant barrier to Traveller owners, as was the expense involved.

Compliance is a general problem, not confined to Traveller horse owners. The most recent estimates indicate that there are approximately 124,000 sport horses in the country, of which 4,783 horses are unregistered with affiliated owner. The number of unregistered horses with unaffiliated owners has not been estimated.<sup>14</sup> Many research participants believed that

there is a correlation between levels of compliance and the existence of a horse project in the area, with significantly higher levels of compliance reported in areas where a horse project was able to explain the importance of, and support owners to meet, the requirements.

Chipping and passport clinics hosted by Traveller organisations with the Irish Horse Welfare Trust and funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine have assisted levels of compliance, largely because they are both accessible and affordable, and also because they are generally organised in conjunction with a horse project or Traveller project, who provide background support to the Traveller horse owners.

## IMPOUNDING

**It is difficult to overstate the depth of feeling about the issue of impounding evident among research participants. It was a predominant concern in interviewees from the Traveller community. Significant levels of despair and anger accompanied many of the stories of impounding and horses being put down. Impounding was raised by the majority of research participants from all sectors, and a total of 78% of survey respondents stated that the 'threat of impounding' is a barrier to Travellers keeping horses.**

There is consensus amongst Traveller horse owners, Traveller organisations and horse welfare organisations that the pounds are inadequately regulated and that there is no monitoring of their operations. There was further consensus that many horses are ill-treated when they are in the pound as there is no monitoring of the welfare of the horses in the pound.

While the process of impounding came in for widespread criticism, the provision of pounds through private companies operating for profit was viewed as particularly problematic. There was a strongly held view that the privately owned pounds are driven by a profit motive and there were many reports of incidents relating to horses being impounded that were legitimately being kept.

A lack of transparency in the selection of these companies was suggested in some instance. There were many accounts of locks to field gates being deliberately broken prior to raids for wandering horses, dubious confiscation of horses, irregular payments, and failure to follow procedures. A lack of consistency in implementing regulations across the country was highlighted and the need to develop and agree a template was suggested.

An analysis of the figures from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine show the stark increase in the numbers of seizures in the years since 2008. Between 2008 and 2014, for example, the total number of horses seized increased by 361%.

14. UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science 2013. *Economic Contribution of the Sport Horse Industry to the Irish Economy*

TABLE 1: HORSES SEIZED 2008-2015

| YEAR      | NUMBERS OF HORSES |                     |          |            |
|-----------|-------------------|---------------------|----------|------------|
|           | SEIZED            | RE-CLAIMED BY OWNER | RE-HOMED | EUTHANISED |
| 2008      | 1,069             | 609                 | 175      | 285        |
| 2009      | 1,467             | 553                 | 721      | 159        |
| 2010      | 2,418             | 643                 | 1,059    | 710        |
| 2011      | 2,950             | 546                 | 742      | 1,604      |
| 2012      | 2,969             | 446                 | 384      | 2,125      |
| 2013      | 4,727             | 381                 | 407      | 3,932      |
| 2014      | 4,923             | 246                 | 416      | 4,231      |
| 2015      | 2,679             | 150                 | 335      | 2,184      |
| 2008-2014 | 3,854             | -363                | 241      | 3,946      |
|           | 361%              | -60%                | 138%     | 1385%      |
| 2008-2015 | 1,610             | -459                | 160      | 1,899      |
|           | 151%              | -75%                | 91%      | 666%       |

Source: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine<sup>15</sup>

While impounding is a general problem, Travellers are seen to have been particularly subject to control of horses activity and horses being picked up, a view shared by a number of interviewees from outside the Traveller community. Travellers were also seen as particularly vulnerable given the difficulties experienced in seeking to access equine registered land.

A number of research participants stated that many Travellers cannot afford the fee to secure a release of the horse or the release of the full number of their horses and there is no consistency in fees charged around the country. Large numbers of horses are reported as being put down, leading to significant levels of despair and frustration amongst horse owners. There were many accounts of the lengths that Traveller horse owners go to when their horses are impounded.

There are significant costs associated with the impounding and retrieval of horses that are borne by local authorities, and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, as well as on Traveller horse owners. The current situation was described as a 'lose/lose' one where the only people benefitting are the private pound operators. There was consensus from research participants from all sectors that this situation needs significant review and change.



15. <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealthwelfare/animalwelfare/controlofhorses/>



## ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

**Local authorities are critical players in the context of Traveller horse ownership. They are responsible for the development and enforcement of bye-laws, as well as being key to Traveller horse owners accessing land. Almost 90% of survey respondents stated that the local authority is one of the key elements that would contribute to a successful horse project.**

Relationships between local authorities and Traveller horse owners vary. In response to the survey, 14% of respondents described the local authority as being 'very supportive', with a significant majority stating they are only 'supportive to an extent' or 'not at all supportive'.

Some interviewees reported valuable partnerships with local authorities, others suggested the relationship was improving on foot of a growing understanding within the local authority. Many, however, reported difficult relationships with the local authority in their area, with a number of survey respondents and interviewees expressing considerable frustration at the local authority, which some described as one of the central power holders in relation to Traveller horse owners.

The majority of research participants were very critical of the byelaws in their area, for which the local authority is responsible. In most areas, the byelaws are seen to impose restrictions such that Traveller horse ownership has become very difficult. A number of research participants from Traveller organisations reported writing submissions to the local authority prior to the publication of bye-laws but all reported that these were ignored. There were no instances of consultation with Travellers on the development of bye-laws reported by research participants.

There was agreement that it is difficult for the local authority to be both enforcer (of the bye-laws) and provider of developmental support. This is compounded by the prioritisation of a control agenda and enforcer role by local authorities reported by most interviewees. There were few reports of local authorities working proactively with horse projects or Traveller organisations in relation to horses, though there some reports of individuals within local authorities that were seen to be supportive. Similarly, only in rare cases an understanding of the centrality of horses within Traveller culture was reported among local authority staff. A lack of in-house coordination on the issue of horse ownership within local authorities is also identified.

A further complication reported by the majority of research participants from Traveller organisations is the lack of dedicated personnel within local authorities for engaging with horse owners. In the majority of local authorities, the same

section and staff deal with accommodation issues as with horse ownership issues. This is a significant issue. Traveller are often in conflict with local authorities in relation to accommodation issues. Dealing with the same section and, in most cases the same people, in relation to horse ownership issues confuses these issues with accommodation issues and makes it difficult for constructive discussion between Traveller horse owners and the local authority.

These issues were identified in a report for Cork City Council<sup>16</sup> that highlighted the difficulty associated with conflicting roles within the local authority – care and welfare, development and compliance – particularly when the same members of staff deal with all three. It was recommended that compliance issues be dealt with separately and by different members of staff.

The relationship between Traveller horse owners, horse projects, and the local authority was seen as an important relationship to get right for those who are seeking a more developmental approach to supporting responsible Traveller horse ownership. Ciara Ridge's observation that "the essential point to note here is that what authorities see as success is different to what Traveller horse owners feel is success"<sup>17</sup> was reflected by research participants who identified that there may be conflicting perspectives on horse projects between the projects and local authorities. A number of interviewees stated that the main interest of the local authority was in addressing the problem of wandering horses, whereas the interest of the projects and horse owners is wider, associated with facilitating cultural expression as well as facilitating Traveller horse ownership safely and within the framework of the legislation.

In a significant number of instances local authorities were viewed as being a major barrier to the development of horse projects. This included blocking access to land and failing to act as the channel for Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine funds. Some research participants did not view this channel as being useful precisely because it allowed the local authority to block progress. A number of interviewees suggested a value in the Department using its power as provider of funds for the control of horses by local authorities to establish a standard for a more developmental approach to Traveller horse owners by the local authorities.

While there is much work to be done on developing this relationship in most areas, there was optimism in some instances that this relationship was improving and a better dialogue with the local authority was reported in some instances. It was suggested that it takes time and effort to build this relationship between Traveller horse owners and the local authority, and to develop the necessary mutual understanding of the importance of horses to Traveller culture and identity to underpin this relationship.

16. Joe Horan, 2014, *Recommendations in respect of the Traveller Interagency Group working in Cork City*

17. Ridge C., 'What is the direct and indirect impact of legislation in Ireland with regard to Traveller horse ownership?' *Student Dissertation UCC, 2014*

## ENGAGEMENT WITH VETERINARY AND HORSE WELFARE SERVICES

There is a generally positive relationship reported by interviewees between Traveller horse owners and veterinary and horse welfare services. In response to the survey, 70% of respondents stated that the Vet service was either 'very supportive' or 'supportive to an extent'. A total of 75% reported the same in relation to horse welfare services.

Particular and positive mention was made by interviewees of the Irish Horse Welfare Trust (IHWT) and the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ISPCA), with individual staff members cited as being particularly helpful and supportive. Research participants noted their appreciation for the passport and chipping clinics of the Irish Horse Welfare Trust.

Traveller horse owners were seen to know their local vets. Positive reports about individual vets were evident in the interviews with only a few instances of "frosty relationships" noted. In many instances the Traveller horse owners care for their own horses and suggest that it must be an emergency before going to the vet. This relates to their own skills allied to cost factors.

The Veterinary College in UCD has developed relationships with urban horse owners and students work with them as part of their work experience. They have established an ambulatory clinic that covers the Leinster area and charges a fee at the going rate. There is potential for this to be further developed to include Traveller horse owners.

## ENGAGEMENT WITH THE GARDAÍ

Research participants reported mixed relationships with the Gardaí. Where they are positive, it tends to be because horse owners have reached an understanding with the Gardaí in relation to wandering horses. These relationships vary from very informal to semi-formal.

In all cases where these relationships exist, it is thought that they are mutually beneficial, cutting down on the problem associated with wandering horses. A number of research participants highlight individual Gardaí as being particularly supportive and willing to work with them.

There is a perception that these Gardaí take a pragmatic approach to the issue of wandering horses in an effort to avoid "lifting horses" (impounding). A number of interviewees reported instances of good practice including the identification of people within the Traveller community that the Gardaí can contact if wandering horses are seen and the contact will identify the horse owner to get horses off the road. This is operational in a number of areas including Galway, Bray and Tipperary and is thought to have reduced the scale of impounding of horses.

The Tipperary Horse Owners Association reported being involved in what is perceived to be a constructive negotiation with the Gardaí about the possibility for sulky racing on specified days on particular roads under agreed conditions.

In response to the death of a number of horses, Cork City Joint Policing Committee established a Horse Control Forum in September 2011. This was subsequently re-named the Horse Forum. In addition to addressing the welfare and the number of horses in its terms of reference, the Forum sought, among other responsibilities, to facilitate responsible horse ownership. Traveller organisations and Traveller horse owners engaged with the Forum from the beginning. However, they found it difficult to make progress on the idea of facilitating the ownership of horses as an expression of Traveller culture.

## ENGAGEMENT WITH TRAVELLER ORGANISATIONS

Traveller organisations emerge from the perspective of research participants as a key support for Traveller horse owners in their local area.

They have worked to give voice to Traveller horse owners and have offered support in their engagement with the authorities. This support can be assistance in dealing with the inappropriate impounding of horses, building longer term and formal relationships with relevant authorities, and acting as a conduit or provider of equine training opportunities.

They have worked with Traveller horse owners in a range of projects to improve the conditions for horse ownership among Travellers. These initiatives are included in the next chapter.

This role is often by default, in the absence of other supports to Traveller horse owners. The Traveller organisations are not necessarily resourced to play this role and, in some cases, are not able to play these roles to the scale necessary.



## SECTION 5:

# Creating Conditions for Horse Ownership



### HORSE PROJECTS

**Traveller horse ownership has traditionally been a private affair, confined to families, where skills are passed on from one generation to the next. The majority of Traveller horse owners are skilled in the care of horses and the horse's welfare is of paramount importance to them.**

The Control of Horses Act, subsequent byelaws and other regulations have introduced a compliance regime that is viewed by Travellers as imposing an unwelcome formality on their traditions. Associated compliance requirements have had a significantly detrimental effect on Traveller horse ownership. Traveller horse owners feel that their cultural connection to horses is under severe threat. A number of research participants identified the significant changes that Traveller horse owners have had to make to maintain their horse ownership, with some describing these as major sacrifices. However, it was generally acknowledged that if the tradition is to be preserved, ownership of horses by Travellers will need to undergo further change.

A significant aspect of this research project was to identify the elements that would create the conditions for Traveller horse ownership. It is clear from the research that one size does not fit all. Needs differ from area to area, between urban and rural settings, and between the different purposes pursued by Traveller horse owners.

While Traveller horse owners in some areas do not view a horse project as desirable and would prefer supports to enable them to continue their current way of keeping horses privately, the majority of research participants view horse projects as crucial.

They are seen as key to:

- Providing facilities such as land and stables;
- Supporting tradition;
- Providing horse owners the opportunity to organise and to have a say;
- Facilitating training in horse welfare;
- Ensuring compliance with legislation and regulations; and
- To develop employment opportunities.

Horse projects are not a panacea for Traveller horse owners. In her dissertation, Ciara Ridge identified a tension with horse projects<sup>18</sup>. She noted that "the authorities' idea of a horse project and some Travellers opinion of what a horse project is are two totally different things; authorities would see a horse project as a means to educating families and younger children growing up in horse owning, management and welfare and from which other things can happen, yet there was concern that some Travellers perceived horse projects as an avenue where I can get 30 acres of land so I can bring in my 30 or 40 horses". While identifying the value of such projects, she also noted the dangers of such projects becoming specific to certain families.

<sup>18</sup>. Ridge C., 'What is the direct and indirect impact of legislation in Ireland with regard to Traveller horse ownership?' Student Dissertation UCC, 2014



Horse projects are established in a number of areas and there are plans in progress to establish such projects in other areas. Research participants, where no such developments have taken place, indicated that they would like some support to explore the establishment of a horse project. They suggested that they believed it would be highly beneficial.

Horse projects can and should take diverse forms in different areas. These currently include the formation of Traveller Horse Owners Associations, the employment a dedicated worker, and what can be termed training and stabling initiatives. The survey responses indicated that a successful horse project should:

- Be based on Travellers identifying the needs and taking the lead;
- Have the support of a Traveller organisation, the local authority, the ETB and the vet service.

Research participants suggested that Traveller horse owners must be the key actors in a developmental approach, based on horse projects. This participation needs to be adequately and appropriately organised.

Traveller Horse Owners Associations are established or are being developed in number of areas. These associations are seen as key to ensuring that Traveller horse owners take a lead in the development of horse projects. A number of research participants suggested that a National Traveller Horse Owners Association should be developed to represent the interest of Traveller horse owners at national level. This national association would need to be adequately resourced.

A number of Traveller organisations employ workers to support the development of horse projects and other initiatives with Traveller horse owners. This can lay the foundations for a developmental strategy to support Traveller horse owners. This was identified by some interviewees as the "necessary first step" in some areas. Where these workers are in place, significant progress has been made in working with Traveller horse owners.

Traveller organisations are seen by research participants to be a key resource in enabling a developmental approach. Many of the projects developed to date can be classed as training and stabling initiatives. These include the provision of land and stables for a number of Traveller horse owners along with training facilities for current and future Traveller horse owners. Local authorities play a key role in providing land and the ETB in the provision of training resources. Vets can play a role in supporting horse welfare on the projects.

Research participants highlighted the potential to further expand this spectrum of horse projects to fully respond to the needs of Travellers horse owners and to maximise the potential in this horse ownership. These further types of horse projects included knowledge transfer groups, a racing track, and breeding initiatives.

A number of characteristics can be identified from across the spectrum of horse projects already in place that could serve as a template for the further evolution of a developmental strategy based on them. These include:

- Roots in an acceptance and understanding of Traveller horse ownership as entwined with Traveller culture and identity.
- Acknowledgement of the need for a long-term developmental approach to Traveller horse ownership.
- The centrality of the needs, voice, and active involvement of Traveller horse owners.
- The concern for responsible horse ownership.
- The provision of land.
- The availability of the support infrastructure that can be offered by Traveller organisations.
- Investment in relationship building based on trust and equality across the full range of interests involved.
- An inter-agency structure that brings together all those that have a stake in the issue of Traveller horse ownership and that hold resources that could be deployed in a developmental strategy and enables them to operate as partners.

Traveller organisations need direct access to necessary resources if they are to be effective in developing the necessary range of horse projects. There are instances where funding has been directly provided by the HSE and other sources of funding to such initiatives as the Traveller organisations are thought to be best placed for such a role. This model could be further expanded upon in a developmental approach.

Research participants suggested that this more developmental approach through such horse projects would assist the economic, social, and health gains evident in horse ownership to be realised and do so in a manner that ensures compliance with the law and best standards of horse welfare.



## TRAINING AND STABLING INITIATIVES

In Cork, an inter-agency structure was established, including Traveller organisations, from which a Traveller Horse Project sub-group was formed. Funding was secured and substantial land identified. The aim was to secure 20 to 30 acres grazing land, 16 stables, and an education facility for young Travellers. Horse owners would cover the cost of horse feed, bedding, veterinary fees, microchipping, passporting, insurance of the facility, and light and heat. But, the sale of council land to fund the project has been delayed and leases on the land identified have not been finalised. The horse project is named in the County Development Plan and the Leader Partnership is funding a dedicated worker for the project. While a champion for this within the local authority has retired, there is a willingness to drive on with the project.

In Kerry, an inter-agency approach was developed that involved Kerry County Council, Tralee Town Council, the Gardaí, Kerry Travellers Health and Community Development Project and the Traveller horse owners. This approach was used to develop a project that supports Traveller horse owners to comply with the Control of Horses Act. The land around an old dump was acquired from Tralee Town Council. Traveller horse owners pay rent and insurance through Kerry Travellers Health and Community Development Project for access to the horse project. They provide their own hay. All the horses must be micro chipped and there is a limit on the number of horses per family. The project is self-financing.

In Clare, the Shannon (Traveller) Horse Project was established in 2010 as an action under the Traveller Inter-Agency Group's Plan. The project provides 33 acres of land and caters for 12 horses and 12 foals. There is a sand arena on the site, and plans are underway to develop stables on the site. Teagasc has provided training to horse owners on grass management.

The Tipperary Traveller Horse Owners Association have explored the idea of a training and stabling project. Land and access to land is a particular issue. However, they fear such a project would be divisive in not being able to serve all their members but only a small number. They recognise, however, that if you have an opportunity you must take it, but see it as one step along the road rather than the solution. The Association has put a submission into the Department of Agriculture for a grant to fund premises to meet, a workshop, and a sulky racing track.

Traveller organisations in Wicklow wanted to develop such a project. After a large scale impounding of horses they were invited to meet with Wicklow County Council and a number of other stakeholders on the issue. Wicklow County Council got 20 acres of land to start an educational project for Traveller horse owners in a good location. This would have catered for four horse owners and would have served as a base for training, creating awareness, and supporting compliance. However, the project was stalled due to protests by settled people. Another site was offered but the location was too distant to be of use.

## SECTION 6:

# Conclusions



### SUSTAIN THE TRADITION

**The cultural significance of horse ownership to the Traveller community cannot be overstated. Horse ownership still plays a major role within the Traveller community. This is true in particular for men but there is some evidence of an emerging involvement of women. Travellers remain a significant group of horse owners in Ireland.**

This research project was tasked with documenting the experience of Traveller horse ownership, including key enablers and barriers being faced by Traveller horse owners. Notwithstanding the genuine efforts being made by Traveller organisations, Traveller horse owners, a number of horse welfare organisations and a small number of local authorities, the research points to a crisis in Traveller horse ownership in Ireland.

In seeking to control the ownership of horses and ensure compliance with legislation and regulation, there has been no acknowledgement or facilitation of the cultural significance of the horse to Travellers. Neither has there been any acknowledgement of the wider health and other consequences of an erosion of the traditional way of life on Travellers.

It has been difficult for many Traveller horse owners to comply with the legal requirements relating to horse ownership. This has been compounded by the economic crisis and the difficulties in meeting horse welfare needs in a constrained economic context and increasing costs. The more difficult context for horse ownership is leading to a situation where many young Travellers see no future in this tradition.

This research reveals significant division between Traveller horse owners and those who would enforce horse welfare legislation. This division is bad for Traveller horse owners who lack the conditions required for the welfare of their horse. It is also bad for implementation of the legislation given the breakdown in trust and relationships that are required for successful implementation.

There needs to be a shift in thinking and perspective on both sides of this divide. This should start with a new definition of success that could be agreed between Traveller horse owners and those concerned to ensure horse care and welfare. This would be based on an affirmation of:

- The critical importance of horse ownership to Traveller cultural identity and wellbeing and an acknowledgement of the difficulties associated with holding on to the custom. Success must involve respect for the cultural tradition of Traveller horse ownership and Traveller horse owners having access to the conditions needed to give full expression to this tradition and having a capacity to pass this tradition to future generations.
- Traveller horse owners operate within a larger industry in Ireland related to horses. Standards of care and welfare are important to sustaining such an industry. Success must involve responsible horse ownership that encompasses quality breeding and care of horses.
- Traveller horse owners have a particular niche and experience within this industry. Traveller organisations have been an important source of support for Traveller horse owners, the only such support in many instances. Success must involve opportunities for organisation among Traveller horse owners and participation for these and other Traveller organisations in decisions that impact on Traveller horse owners.
- Currently the enforcement work dominates the response to Traveller horse ownership with evidence of some significant development work being supported. Success must involve a combination of developmental work and enforcement work, but an improved balance between these where development work dominates the response to Traveller horse ownership.



## DEVELOPING A MODEL

In seeking to make this understanding of success a reality, it is clear that a developmental approach to Traveller horse ownership must involve a broad understanding of what a Traveller horse project is. A model to underpin and secure responsible Traveller horse ownership would include six strands of initiative:

### 1. DEVELOPMENT WORKER

A dedicated person working with the local Traveller horse owners can lay the foundations for a developmental strategy to support Traveller horse owners. Workers on the ground can make contacts with and build trust from the horse owners. They can explore needs and the most effective responses to those needs with the horse owners. They can enable organisation among horse owners and the building of relationships with key authorities. This was identified in interviews as the “necessary first step”. They are in place in a number of areas and are associated with a developmental approach and with progress being made in these areas.

### 2. HORSE OWNER ASSOCIATION

Traveller Horse Owners Associations should form a key element in the development of a model to ensure the future of Traveller horse ownership.

A National Traveller Horse Owners Association should be established. It would have to have a clear function and secure good buy in from Traveller horse owners.

In the more immediate term, local Traveller Horse Owner Associations should be established in areas where there is an interest in so doing. Local Traveller Horse Owner Associations can enable Traveller horse owners to have a voice, to articulate their needs and concerns, and to negotiate with the relevant authorities. They provide a structure for this work and create the conditions for building capacities for such work. Drawing responsible horse owners together builds standards and stimulates others to follow suit.

### 3. TRAINING AND STABLING

Training and stabling projects are what have traditionally been given the title of horse project to date. However, the research has revealed other strands of activity that merit inclusion under this heading.

Training and stabling projects include land and stables for a number of Traveller horse owners along with training facilities for current and future Traveller horse owners. A number of these projects have been established and it is clear that they support and stimulate responsible horse ownership, reduce indiscriminate breeding, and improve horse welfare. They build skills, especially among young Travellers, support compliance by Traveller horse owners with equine legislation, and resolve the land issues for a number of Traveller families that own horses in the area. Traveller organisations have worked hard in seeking to develop such training and stabling projects. This has not been easy nor has it met with quick success.

### 4. KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER GROUPS

Knowledge transfer groups have the potential to deepen the skills of older Travellers and to serve as a mechanism to raise overall standards in and outcomes from Traveller horse ownership. They are not an operating project at present. However, they were raised in the interviews as having particular potential for sustaining and developing high standards as well for opening up new opportunities for Traveller horse owners.

### 5. RACING

Trotting and sulky racing are an important and valued element to Traveller horse ownership in a number of areas. Tracks should be developed so that racing can be carried out in a regulated, safe environment.

Organised on-road racing should also be explored. Tipperary Traveller Horse Owners Association, for example, has engaged with the Gardaí around sulky racing on the roads and found they were open to considering this provided it is regulated. The Association came up with rules including age limits and racing rules. There is possibility of a pilot project with four roads nominated and six days selected for racing. However, the County Council are not supportive.

### 6. BREEDING

A number of interviewees with expertise in the field identified that Traveller horse owners have a product in the heavy cob they breed that could sell well internationally. Cobs, such as the Gypsy Vanner, are popular in riding schools, trekking, hippo-therapy and in riding for the disabled. Markets exist in countries such as Germany, USA and Canada.

There would be a need to breed a better quality to achieve this goal. A stud book would need to be established for this purpose. Supports for production and marketing would be needed. A working group including Traveller organisations, an Irish Traveller Horse Owner Association, the Irish Horse Welfare Trust, and Horse Sport Ireland was identified as being needed to develop such an ambitious project. Someone to lead the project could be employed under Horse Sport Ireland.

## FUNDING SUPPORT

**Funding from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is the key source of funding for the development of a developmental model to ensure Traveller horse ownership. It will be important to continue and further expand this funding.**

While the critical importance of local authorities in facilitating Traveller horse ownership is acknowledged, this research concludes that the current arrangement whereby the funding is strictly channelled through local authorities is not helpful in most areas. Where best practice can be identified in this area – where local authorities are actively and positively pursuing to facilitate Traveller horse ownership – the current funding model should be retained and built upon. However, in areas where the local authority is not acting as an enabler, the funding should be available directly to Traveller organisations and those seeking to develop projects.

## SECTION 7:

# Recommendations for the Future



### RECOMMENDATION 1: A STRATEGIC APPROACH

A strategic approach to the facilitation of Traveller horse ownership is required. The Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine should prepare a strategy to promote and support Traveller horse ownership based on achieving the model of success as defined in this report. This should be pursued in partnership with Traveller horse owners and Traveller organisations. This strategy should form part of the commitments in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy.

A national steering group should be established by the Department to develop, support and monitor the strategy. The funding stream established by the Department should serve as the core funding. As enforcement costs reduce due to increased and strategic investment in development work, this funding stream should be increased.

A key element of the strategy should be to continue the support for the development of regional and local Traveller horse projects, as defined in this report. This should be done in association with a range of stakeholders including Traveller horse owners, Traveller organisations and, as appropriate and possible, local authorities<sup>19</sup>.

### RECOMMENDATION 2: A MODEL FOR IMPLEMENTATION

This research outlines a six-stranded model for horse projects in response to the recommendation in 'Reaching New Heights', the Irish Sport Horse Industry Strategy. This model should form part of the implementation plan for that strategy.

The model is outlined and encompasses the wide spectrum of activities required to respond adequately to the needs, interests, and traditions of Traveller horse owners and the variation in need in different geographical areas. This wide spectrum would also reflect developments already taking place on the ground.

Activities at local and regional level should be supported across the full spectrum of this template in reflecting different local contexts and possibilities. In some areas, the implementation of this template should build on and sustain initiatives already in place at local level. In other areas, new foundations should be laid.

There should be investment in two foundational elements:

#### ■ Employment of a development worker on the ground.

The development worker lays the initial foundations for further developmental work with Traveller horse owners. They make contacts, build trust, identify needs and appropriate responses to needs, make links with key stakeholders, and support the voice of and organisation by Traveller horse owners.

*19. Local authorities can be a key partner in such projects but are not always willing or able to play such a role and this should not preclude the development of horse projects.*

- **Establishment of Traveller Horse Owners Associations.** Local Traveller Horse Owner Associations enable Traveller horse owners to articulate their needs and concerns, to develop responses to their situation and experience, and to negotiate with the relevant authorities. A national Traveller horse ownership association could emerge out of this work at local level to play a similar role at national level.

There should be investment in two developmental elements:

- **Training and stabling initiatives.** These initiatives should provide land, stabling and training for Traveller horse owners. Training facilities should target both current and future Traveller horse owners.
- **Knowledge transfer groups.** Knowledge transfer groups should be funded to allow Traveller horse owners to sign up for a defined period to a process of an annual series of facilitated discussion groups designed to raise overall standards in and outcomes from Traveller horse ownership. Implementation by Traveller horse owners of agreed practical steps to implement the learning should be part of the process.

Traveller horse projects should be designed and implemented to an agreed standard that reflects a number of characteristics:

- Respect and understand Traveller horse ownership as entwined with Traveller culture and identity as foundational;
- Support and secure responsible horse ownership and reduce and eliminate indiscriminate breeding;
- Acknowledge the need for a long-term developmental approach to supporting Traveller horse ownership;
- Ensure the needs, voice, and active involvement of Traveller horse owners are central;
- Build on the support infrastructure that can be offered by Traveller organisations;
- Invest in relationship building based on trust and equality across the full range of interests involved;
- Resolve issues of access to grazing land as the central impediment experienced by Traveller horse owners;
- Establish an inter-agency structure that brings together all those that have a stake in the issue of Traveller horse ownership and that hold resources that could be deployed in a developmental strategy through the horse project.

## RECOMMENDATION 3: MAINSTREAM TRAVELLERS AND TRAVELLER HORSE OWNERS WITHIN THE INDUSTRY

**The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine should support initiatives that enable Travellers to engage with the equine industry in a range of different roles with knowledge and competence.**

Breeding, sport and employment form three further elements of the spectrum for the above-mentioned template for horse projects. Initiatives in these three areas should include other key stakeholders such as Education Training Boards, Horse Sports Ireland, Horse Racing Ireland, Irish Horse Welfare Trust, Traveller organisations and Traveller horse owners.

The three mainstreaming elements of the template should be:

- **Breeding.** A pilot initiative should be established to support a defined number of Traveller horse owners to develop a breeding initiative focused, for example, on the Gypsy Vanner breed.

This initiative should be developed by a working group that includes Traveller organisations, Traveller Horse Owner Associations, the Irish Horse Welfare Trust, and Horse Sport Ireland.

Horse Sport Ireland should play a leadership role in this with funding made available for them to employ a project worker.

It should be supported by the establishment of a stud book.

Business planning and business processes such as marketing should be supported.

- **Sports.** An initiative should be developed to support Traveller horse owners in the sport of trotting and sulky racing. Travellers are involved in such sports in a number of areas around the country. However, the lack of facilities raise issues of safety and horse welfare.





Traveller access to existing facilities and associations necessary to pursue these sporting opportunities should be supported and secured.

Dedicated tracks would allow for a more regulated approach, ensure safety, underpin horse welfare and ensure no use of drugs. Support should be made available for developing or securing additional facilities as found to be necessary.

- **Employment.** An initiative to put Travellers in a better position to access the full range of different jobs and roles in the equine industry should be developed. These opportunities range from employment in horse projects and stables in the mainstream horse industry and jobs such as dentists or jockeys.

This initiative should include informal and formal training, work-placements, and positive action. It could start in the Traveller horse projects and would include ETB training.

It should allow for a leading role by the Irish Horse Welfare Trust as they develop their facilities for training and work-placements.

It could involve organisations such as RACE reserving places for Travellers.

## RECOMMENDATION 4: ENFORCEMENT

This research has identified a number of issues in the implementation of the enforcement elements of the legislation. These relate to the bye-laws introduced by local authorities and to the approach to and anomalies in impounding wandering horses. A coherent and standardised approach to enforcement is required. Targeted supports for compliance also continue to be necessary.

- **Bye-laws.** The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government should establish standards for the engagement of local authorities in both the developmental and enforcement elements of the strategy to promote and support Traveller horse ownership.

These standards should address the design and provision of accommodation facilities and the identification of a liaison person to deal with Traveller horse owners.

They should address the bye-laws put in place on this issue by local authorities. Current bye-laws should be reviewed against this standard and developed in a more coherent form, while allowing for local particularities.

- **Impounding.** National standards for impounding should be developed by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Systems of accountability should be developed by local authorities for those implementing this impounding.

- **Supports.** Targeted and accessible chip and passport clinics should be continued and expanded. This should involve the Irish Horse Welfare Trust and local Traveller organisations.

## RECOMMENDATION 5: LOCAL AUTHORITIES

As key actors in relation to Traveller horse ownership, local authorities should:

- Identify liaison officers with responsibilities that include to deal specifically with Traveller horse owners and Traveller organisations on all issues relating to horses. Different personnel should work with the Traveller community in relation to development and compliance. They should seek to achieve an appropriate balance between development work and enforcement work in playing this role in a strategic manner, aligned with the national strategy;
- Act in a brokerage role to enable access to land for Traveller horse owners.
- In their capacity as the providers of Traveller specific accommodation, ensure that halting sites and group-housing schemes include facilities to cater for Traveller culture, including traditions such as horse ownership. Where it is not possible to provide grazing facilities onsite, alternative arrangements should be explored.



# SECTION 8:

## Appendix I

### SOURCES

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### INTERVIEWS

Brian Dillon, Support to Tipperary Traveller Horse Owners Association

Bríd Farrell, Niall O'Nuallain, Department of Agriculture

Damian McDonald, CEO, Horse Sport Ireland

Eamon McCann, Wicklow Travellers Development Group

Emma Gilchreest and a Traveller representative who asked not to be named, Offaly Traveller Movement

Evie Finlay, Clonakilty Traveller Development Group

Hughie Friel, Donegal Traveller project

Jim O'Brien, Bray Travellers Community Development Network

John Sullivan, Traveller Visibility Group, Cork

Lesley Jones, Irish Horse Welfare Trust

Martin Collins, Pavee Point

Pat Wall, UCD

Sharon Power, Irish Horse Welfare Trust

### FOCUS GROUP HOSTS

Wicklow Traveller Development Group

Offaly Traveller Movement

Limerick City Community Development Project











*This research project was tasked with documenting the experience of Traveller horse ownership, including key enablers and barriers being faced by Traveller horse owners. Notwithstanding the genuine efforts being made by Traveller organisations, Traveller horse owners, a number of horse welfare organisations and a small number of local authorities, the research points to a crisis in Traveller horse ownership in Ireland.*

*It reveals significant division between Traveller horse owners and those who would enforce horse welfare legislation. This division is bad for Traveller horse owners who lack the conditions required for the welfare of their horse. It is also bad for implementation of the legislation given the breakdown in trust and relationships that are required for successful implementation.*

*There needs to be affirmation of the critical importance of horse ownership to Traveller cultural identity and wellbeing and an acknowledgement of the difficulties associated with holding on to the custom. Success must involve respect for the cultural tradition of Traveller horse ownership and Traveller horse owners having access to the conditions needed to give full expression to this tradition and having a capacity to pass this tradition to future generations.*



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