

PIGEONS

Code of practice
for
pigeon keeping and racing
in
Western Australia

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PREFACE

The **Code of practice for pigeon keeping and racing in Western Australia** is based on the *Code of Practice - Pigeon Keeping and Pigeon Racing* and has been adapted for use in Western Australia. The original Pigeon Code was prepared by the Pigeon Racing Federation of WA (Incorporated) and The Independent Pigeon Racing Federation (Incorporated). It was prepared in consultation with the relevant industry organizations and state agencies and is supported by the Department of Agriculture.

This code has been prepared to assist all persons handling or using racing pigeons in Western Australia, and reference to this code is made in Regulations provided under Section 25 of the *Animal Welfare Act 2002* for the purposes of a defence against cruelty. It is not intended to be used for either audit or compliance purposes.

It is based on current knowledge and technology. It will be reviewed in the future on a needs basis, to take account of advances in the understanding of animal physiology and behaviour, technological changes in animal husbandry and their relationship to the welfare of animals.

Further copies of this code are available from the Department of Local Government and Regional Development or from the internet at: <http://www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au>

CONTENTS

PREFACE	2
PART 1. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR RACING	4
1. DUTY OF CARE TO PIGEONS	4
2. ILL TREATMENT OF PIGEONS	4
3. ACCEPTANCE AND INSPECTION OF PIGEONS FOR COMPETITION	4
4. CARRIAGE AND CONVEYANCE OF PIGEONS	5
5. FEED AND WATER PROVISIONS UNDER RACING CONDITIONS.	6
6. RACE AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES, COMPETITIONS, AND THE RELEASING OF PIGEONS FOR FLIGHT WHEN AWAY FROM HOME	7
7. DRUG FREE RACING	9
PART 2. HOUSING, FEEDING, EXERCISE	10
8. THE PIGEON "LOFT"	10
9. FEED and WATER	12
10. EXERCISE	13

PART 1. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR RACING

1. DUTY OF CARE TO PIGEONS

1.1 The Pigeon Federations as parent bodies for its member clubs and affiliates believe that people who own or are responsible for the care of pigeons have a fundamental duty to take all reasonable steps to ensure the welfare of those pigeons.

1.2 The Racing Pigeon should be exercised daily, sufficient to ensure its fitness for the purpose intended:

- Free-flight exercise is to be on a planned basis, with duration time typically from 30 to 90 minutes and performed to a maximum of twice daily.
- Other than for pigeons returning from racing and training, daily times for free-flight exercise are to be on a planned basis, typically from daylight and concluding by 0900 hours and between 1530 hours and 1900 hours with adjustment according to the available daylight.
- Application to the Federation/s for planned exercise outside the typical hours should be made.
- Free non-flight time, at any time, is to be conducted under close supervision by the owner.

2. ILL TREATMENT OF PIGEONS

2.1 The Federations define ill treatment of pigeons as wounding, mutilating, abusing, tormenting and torturing, wanton or malicious beating and causing unnecessary pain or suffering. These acts are considered by the Federations as unacceptable treatment of pigeons.

3. ACCEPTANCE AND INSPECTION OF PIGEONS FOR COMPETITION

3.1 The Federations acknowledge the depth of expertise for pigeon care available from each member and within affiliate clubs. The Federation will draw on this expertise to provide suitably qualified personnel for the inspection of pigeons submitted for competition.

3.2 Stewards. The Federations will select annually from a list of names forwarded by each club to act as Stewards on the Federations' behalf for the inspection of pigeons submitted for competition.

3.3 Steward Instruction. All appointed Stewards are to be given Veterinary instruction at the Federations' expense.

3.4 Acceptance of Pigeons By Stewards. All pigeons are accepted by the Stewards on the grounds of sound health and physical fitness to successfully complete the journey set for the event.

3.5 Steward's Right of Refusal. The Steward retains the right to refuse an entry without challenge on the grounds of poor health, or physical impairment, or neglect, as to limit its opportunities to return safely; or on the grounds of a contagion hazard to other entries. Such refusals are to be documented for the Federations' action as necessary.

3.6 Health Examples. Poor pigeon health can be described as symptoms such as general lassitude from obvious sickness, respiratory disease indicated by wheezing, sneezing, nasal and eye discharge (i.e. Chlamydia infections), Pigeon Pox and the like.

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

3.8 Physical Impairment. Physical impairment is intended to cover any condition which is likely to diminish the chances of the pigeon to successfully complete the journey. Examples of impairment are:

- Injuries and scaring both old and new which are visible or felt when holding the pigeon.
- Insufficient feathering which is likely to inhibit the pigeon from flying, competitively, is an impairment.
- Insufficient primary wing flights is an impairment, as is also a pigeon presented in the eight and one half stage¹ of primary flight growth, irrespective whether number ten primary flight remains attached or not.

4. CARRIAGE AND CONVEYANCE OF PIGEONS

4.1 PANNIERS

4.1.1 Configuration. The carriage of pigeons is to be within the recognised rectangular or square pannier² configuration, allowing for adequate air exchange at both sides and top and for the pigeons to freely view their outside surroundings.

4.1.2 Size of panniers. The Federations recognise that private pigeon carry panniers are constructed in many sizes to suit or fit individual circumstances, such as vehicle configuration, and it is not intended to interfere with this freedom. Instead, the Federations set minimum space requirements per pigeon as follows:

4.1.3 Height Allowance in panniers. The minimum height for all panniers, whether owned by the Federations or otherwise, is 21cm and is exclusive of all wire and plastic mesh bottom inserts.

4.1.4 Space per pigeon in panniers. The space allowance per pigeon will vary according to the time such confinement is in force, the distance of the race and whether provision has to be made to feed and water the pigeons en route and at the liberation site.

¹Of the ten primary flights in a pigeon's wing numbered from 1 to 10 outwards, the stage is indicative when the eighth primary is full grown and number nine is only part way grown, to any length short of the full grown length.

² A term which means basket and can also be described as a crate or carry box. For pigeons, it is generally designed specifically for their confinement and conveyance.

4.1.5 Allowances. These allowances apply to any pigeons being conveyed in any pannier used for private training, Federation training and or racing, or for conveyance of pigeons to the club rooms for entry into competition.

4.2 Confinement Provisions

The allowance is made on the following basis:

4.2.1 Overnight confinement of 24 hours or less duration and or the race journey is 500 kilometres or less, measured from the longest competitor, allow 200cm² per pigeon per pannier. For competition events, the confinement period commences at the club starting time for acceptance of pigeons for entry.

4.2.2 Confinement in excess of 24 hours or 500 kilometres, as described, allow 300cm² per pigeon per pannier, so as to ensure the pigeons can achieve the normal reclining position, typical for extended travel.

4.2.3 An example of permissible pigeons per pannier is shown as follows: Pannier dimension 90cm x 60cm = 5400cm² divided by 200cm² = 27 pigeons for overnight confinement and when divided by 300cm² = 18 pigeons for extended periods and for when feed and water is necessary.

5. FEED AND WATER PROVISIONS UNDER RACING CONDITIONS.

5.1 No Feed. The Federations have determined that there exists a balance between the need to feed the pigeons en route and at the liberation site, so as to sustain reserves of energy to complete the journey, and the need to avoid the detrimental effect of commencing a journey on a full stomach. On this basis it is determined that for up to 24 hours confinement, en route, involving an overnight journey, and or the race journey is 500 kilometres or less, measured from the longest competitor, no feed provisions are to apply.

5.2 Feed and Water. Where the confinement is expected to exceed 24 hours and or the journey is in excess of 500 kilometres as described, provisions are to be made to feed and water the pigeons.

5.3 When to Arrange. When feeding and watering of the pigeons is required, the Federations shall arrange for entries to be accepted at such a time that will ensure that the Transporter will arrive at the liberation site by at least 1600 hours on the day before the event is to start and at which time feed and water procedures are to commence. The feed is to remain in front of the pigeons for a minimum time of 1 hour and no more than 3 hours, whereupon it shall be withdrawn. The water shall remain available for the pigeons continuously until one hour before liberation, whereupon it shall be withdrawn.

5.4 Supplementary Feed and Water. Supplementary feed and water en route is to apply by at least 1600 hours daily in the manner prescribed, where the journey time to the liberation site exceeds the 1600 hour provision for arrival time.

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

6.1 Annual Programmed fixtures

Notwithstanding the role and the provision for Stewards put in place for the inspection of pigeons being entered for competition, it is widely known that in Western Australia the months of April and May is a stressful period for a majority of pigeons in completing their annual moult cycle. This has specific reference to the shedding and replacement of the 8th, 9th and 10th primary flights in each wing, which, from general observation is seen to place both physical and psychological effects on some pigeons and leads to a reduced potential for flight in those birds, when so affected. For the general welfare of the pigeons, the annual programme of fixtures, arranged by the Federations, will be devised so as to coincide with the weekend falling nearest to the fifteenth day of May in each year. All pigeons entered for competition in the month of May shall be fully flighted, in terms of their primary wing flight growth, and such races in the month of May shall not exceed 160 kilometres.

6.2 Race Controls

6.2.1 Appointment. The Federation will appoint annually a committee comprising three or more members including the official Liberator and presided over by the Federation President, who will arrange and conduct the annual race programme.

6.2.3 Name. The Committee is to be known as the Race and Liberation Committee and will have control over the welfare of the pigeons, their collection, transport and liberation. They shall also compile, amend and manage the annual programme of racing, by the member clubs, in the interests of the welfare of the pigeons.

6.2.4 Powers. The Race and Liberation Committee is empowered to cancel, postpone or alter the race venue and to direct the Conveyors/Liberator, in charge of the pigeons, to make whatever adjustment are necessary for the welfare of the pigeons.

6.2.5 Conveyors/Liberator. The appointed Liberator has responsibility for performing the release of pigeons, at the liberation site, in such a manner as to avoid potential for injury to the pigeons on release. The authority to release pigeons, in all races, rests with the Race and Liberation Committee. The Liberator shall contact a, pre-arranged and nominated, Race and Liberation Committee member, at least one hour prior to release to report on conditions, discuss local conditions and receive approval to liberate. Having liberated, the Liberator will again contact the nominated Race and Liberation Committee member providing details of the liberation for announcement to competitors.

6.3 Race Delays and Hold-overs.

6.3.1 Where the liberation is delayed because of adverse weather conditions, such delay will remain in force until the Hold-over time is declared. When the Hold-over time is declared the pigeons will be held for a planned release the next day.

6.3.2 Second Day. On the second day, the Race and Liberation Committee will decide to:

- Release the pigeons at the time scheduled for the previous day, or,

- Bring the pigeons back to a shorter liberation site and reconsider the situation at that shorter distance, or,
- Hold the pigeons at the original site until Holdover time is again reached, and at which time the race will be declared cancelled and the pigeons returned home for collection by their respective owners.

6.4 Rain and Fog.

Rain and Fog at Liberation sites are known to interfere with the pigeons' ability to orientate. Pigeons, therefore, are not to be liberated away from the home lofts, for training or racing, into rain or fog and the liberators are to wait until such conditions abate or abort the exercise.

6.5 Liberation time.

The release of pigeons for both training and racing are governed both by conditions at the liberation site and the time of year.

6.5.1 During the months of June to August pigeons are to be liberated as follows:

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

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

6.5.2 During the months of September and October pigeons are to be liberated as follows:

Under clear sky conditions - release at the discretion of the Official Liberator. Under over-cast sky conditions release a minimum of 30 minutes after gazetted sunrise for the area.

6.6 HOLD-OVER CONDITIONS

6.6.1 The Hold-over time for any race is calculated by counting backwards from thirty (30) minutes after the gazetted time of sunset, at the home end, by the time derived from dividing the distance for the journey by 55 kilometres per hour (to the nearest quarter hour), which represents the recognised average speed for pigeons in flight, under adverse conditions³. The holdover time therefore represents the estimated absolute latest time for liberation, allowing the pigeons time to make the home lofts on the day of liberation, under adverse conditions.

6.6.2 Example. An example of a declared Hold-over time is shown as follows:

Journey is 500 kilometres and sunset at the home end is 1800 hours or 6.00pm. Journey time at 55 kilometres per hour, average speed for the pigeon, is $500/55 = 9$ hours. The latest time for release on that day before a Hold-over is declared is therefore, 1800 hours, plus 30 minutes, minus 9 hours = 0930 hours or 9.30am.

³For this purpose, Adverse Conditions refer to the presence of rain enroute and where this is associated with weather systems (side and head winds) which are likely to reduce the average speed of the race below 60 kph over the measured distance.

7. DRUG FREE RACING

Because of the significant time delay between the entry of pigeons for a race and the actual liberation time many performance-enhancing drugs illegally used in other contests are rendered ineffectual for pigeon racing. It is, however, policy that pigeon racing remains free of any administered performance enhancing drugs and this has particular reference to the use of any of the anabolic steroids and corticosteroids. Any competitor found to have entered a pigeon injected with any performance-enhancing drug will be held responsible and be dealt with by the Federation. Any pigeons found sick or dead within the race panniers at liberation will be sent for analysis. Where an injectable substance is detected the owner/s will be held responsible and be dealt with by the Federation.

PART 2. HOUSING, FEEDING, EXERCISE

8. THE PIGEON "LOFT"

8.1 Dimensions.

The Federations recognise that pigeon "Lofts" are constructed in many sizes to suit or fit individual circumstances, such as available space within a conventional residential block, and it is not intended to interfere with this freedom. Instead, the Federations set minimum space requirements per pigeon as follows:

8.2 Racing "Loft"

8.2.1 Height. The minimum common average, floor to ceiling height, for all "Lofts" will be 165cm.

8.2.2 Box Perches. The space occupied by wall mounted box perches with minimum dimensions 24cm (Height) x 24cm (Width) x 8cm (Depth) and the number of box perches exceeds the number of pigeons by a minimum of 10%. The box perch configuration represents the highest density for acceptable and adequate housing method for racing pigeons and is the standard adopted for the Code of Practice. The Code does not preclude other means of perch configuration but all configurations must contain a plus 10% surplus ratio between perch space and pigeon numbers allowable within the Living Quarters.

8.2.3 Minimum Space per Pigeon. Where all space is occupied by the pigeons, only, and excludes provision for feeding and or owner occupancy and utensils, as otherwise provided by passageways, trapping and feeding centres, the minimum space per pigeon is **92000cm³** or **0.092m³** or **(0.45m)³**. Where feeding is carried out in the occupied space, the minimum space per pigeon is **0.132m³**. In calculating minimum dimensions, no side of the loft can be more than four times the length of the other.

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

"Loft" dimension **180cm (Width) x 210cm (Length) x 180cm (Height) = 6804000cm³** divided by **92000cm³ = maximum 74 pigeons and minimum 81 box perches**, where feeding is performed elsewhere and there are no utensils within the living quarters.

For "Lofts" where feeding is performed in the Living Quarters, the maximum number of pigeons is calculated as **180cm (W) x 210cm (L) x 180cm (H) = 6804000cm³** divided by **132000cm³ = maximum 52 pigeons and minimum 57 box perches**.

8.3 Stock "Loft"

The Stock "Loft" is used for housing the breeding pigeons of the "Loft" and because of their value and invariable background of racing from some other inter or intra state lofts, are not able to be freed for exercise. These pigeons require extended space for their good health and well-being.

8.3.1 Living Quarters

The Stock "Loft" shall generally be of similar configuration as the Racing "Loft" except, in the place of Box Perches, that breeding compartments are provided. Typical dimensions for breeding compartments are 55cm (Width) x 45cm (Height) x 50cm (Depth).

Adequate space to maintain health and well-being of pigeons, within the Breeding "Loft", shall be calculated as two and one half (2.5) times the provision, as minimum space, per pigeon, in Living Quarters where feeding is provided externally, and owner occupancy and utensils are excluded.

The **Maximum allowable** number is calculated from the above example as follows:

"Loft" dimension **180cm (Width) x 210 cm (Length) x 180cm (Height) = 6804000cm³** divided by (92000cm³ x 2.5) = **30 pigeons (or 15 mated pairs of pigeons) for the space provided.**

8.4 The Ideal "Loft"

The following is provided only a guide but reasonably reflects the hallmarks of a well organised and well constructed pigeon racing loft.

There are a number of essential elements that make up the building of a "Loft". It needs to be dry and warm over the winter months and therefore needs to be built for that period of time. For the summer heat it also needs to have ventilation modifications, such as flaps and ventilators that can be adjusted and closed off as the winter approaches. It needs to be configured for ease of cleaning and for the comfort of the pigeons and box type perches are most suitable for both. Where practical it needs to be sited on the Lot so that the front of the "Loft" faces North East, in Western Australia, and to face away from the prevailing winter winds and rain, whilst taking full advantage of the morning winter sun.

8.5 Ventilation.

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

Gabled type roofs are encouraged to cater for adequate air displacement. Where a gabled roof is not provided, an opening at ceiling height at the rear to the outside, of no less than 10cm along the full length of the Loft, is to be provided. Alternatively, a "Witches Hat" type chimney or similar ventilator should be placed centrally within the roof to effect the required air exchange and to promote good health and comfort for the pigeons.

8.6 Construction.

The Federations recognise that existing pigeon "Lofts" have been constructed to a number of standards and designs and it is not intended for these "Lofts" to conform to the Code of Practice, while they continue to be utilised in their present configuration. Instead, the Federations set basic standards for all new, changed, extended or upgraded "Lofts" taking place after January 1 1995.

It is also recognised that in some municipalities regulations exist for construction of pigeon "Lofts" and where these regulations are in conflict with the Pigeon Keeping and Pigeon Racing Code of Practice, the Federations will make appropriate representation to those authorities, seeking their cooperation and assistance in the interests of conformity of regulations.

8.6.1 Off-Ground. All new "Lofts" shall be constructed off-ground with minimum height from ground to floor level of 20cm, allowing for free flow of air under floor.

8.6.2 Floor areas may be either of two configurations:

- Trafficable mesh grating floor, allowing for droppings to pass through for collection from below floor level.
- Trafficable timber floor with suitable moisture absorptive qualities, and for regular ease of scrape cleaning. e.g. chipboard, plywood.
- For the health of the pigeons, external open aviaries and or "sun yards" which are exposed to the elements are to be constructed off ground typically by using trafficable mesh floor for under-floor cleaning, or other suitable floor materials.

8.7 Insulation

For the welfare and comfort of the pigeons, where external cladding of a "Loft" consists of brick or metal such lofts shall be internally lined with plywood, or chipboard, or other heat retaining materials. For prevention of condensation dampness, all metal type roofs shall be insulated.

8.8 "LOFT CLEANING"

Where above floor compartment droppings remain permanently dry, compacted and unfriable, and are of 2cm thickness or less, and are used as part of the pigeon racing incentive, these are not considered a health hazard to either pigeons or humans.

8.8.1 Deep Litter⁴, unless of a substance/s approved by the Federations, is not permitted.

8.8.2 "Loft" floors are to be **cleaned** on a minimum basis of once per week.

9. FEED and WATER

9.1 Feed

The Federations recognise that there are many successful methods for feeding of racing pigeons and it is not intended to regulate this activity other than to document normal feeds and feed practice.

Essentially, racing pigeons thrive quite effectively on most grains and legumes, with wheat being the base staple. It is usual to supplement a wheat based diet to varying percentages with field peas, maize, sorghum, oats, rice, barley, certain pellet preparations and other small grains. The normal feed regime for racing pigeons is twice daily and given after exercise.

⁴A term used to denote permanent floor dressings comprising dried pigeon droppings and other organic and mineral materials.

9.2 Water

Clean water in the home "Loft", available at all times, with and without additives, is essential. Water is to be changed twice daily and more frequently in summer months, especially in the Stock Loft.

10. EXERCISE

The Racing Pigeon should be exercised daily, sufficient to ensure its fitness for the purpose intended.

- Free-flight exercise is to be on a planned basis, with duration time typically from 30 to 90 minutes and performed to a maximum of twice daily.
- Other than for pigeons returning from racing and training, daily times for free-flight exercise are to be on a planned basis, typically from daylight and concluding by 0900 hours and between 1530 hours and 1900 hours with adjustment according to the available daylight.
- Application to the Federation/s for planned exercise outside the typical hours should be made.
- Free non-flight time, at any time, is to be conducted under close supervision by the owner.
- Other than for planned free flight and non-flight times, all racing pigeons are to be confined within their home "Loft"⁵.
- Persistent fielding and or roof sitting habits are not allowable.

⁵Colloquial term. The name "Loft" (GB) is widely used in pigeon racing to indicate the pigeon cage, house or coop (USA) and has its origin as the traditional hay loft used for keeping pigeons, or in some European areas in the attic of the house.