

Equestrian Australia National Structural Review

Following recent announcements regarding a discipline-based model for our sport's structure, I want to provide you with detailed information about where we are in this process and address the concerns that have been raised across our community.

This communication outlines information from our 2023 white paper and aims to give you the full context of what we're considering, why, and what it means for you as a member.

Why Are We Having This Conversation?

Our Sport's History of Challenges

To understand why structural change is being discussed, it's important to acknowledge our recent history:

- **2020 Voluntary Administration:** Equestrian Australia entered voluntary administration after the ASC withdrew funding due to governance concerns. We successfully avoided liquidation when members agreed to constitutional changes, but this highlighted the urgent need for sustainable governance structures.
- **Ongoing Governance Issues:** Our 2023 white paper identified that over 270 volunteers are required just to run committees across the nation, with significant resource duplication across states and governance challenges that have cost our sport over \$800,000.
- **Member Feedback:** There's a strong desire among our members for positive change, to move beyond governance issues that have held us back in the past and continue to hold us back. We all recognise that our current structure has become inefficient and is no longer suited to our sport's needs.

Recent Communications and Debate

Current Community Discussion

The current discussions about structural change have generated varied perspectives across our equestrian community. These conversations are taking place at all levels, from individual members to discipline committees to state branches, and reflect the importance of these decisions to our sport's future.

Historical Context from the Previous Administration Process

During the 2020 voluntary administration process, EA Discipline Committees sent a joint letter to State Branch Chairs and CEOs, with the EA Dressage Committee stating it was "a plea to them concerning the current impasse we're in with their non-acceptance of our voice and our vote as members." This historical context shows that tensions between different levels of governance have existed for some time.

State Branch Position

Each state has its own considerations and concerns about potential changes, focusing on specific issues including:

- Facility management and governance arrangements
- Historical commitments to member funds and local representation
- Maintaining state government relationships and funding
- Employment and transition concerns for current staff

Ongoing Dialogue

We recognise that this is a complex issue with many different perspectives. Some members and stakeholders view structural change as necessary for the sustainability and growth of our sport. In contrast, others have concerns about the potential impacts on local representation and established relationships.

This ongoing dialogue between EA, state branches, discipline committees, and members demonstrates the complexity of the issues being considered and the importance of ensuring all voices are heard in any future decisions.

What We Found Through Extensive Consultation

Our 2023 analysis wasn't developed in isolation. We conducted:

- **3,000-member survey responses** providing invaluable insights into member needs
- **Over 20 stakeholder interviews** with industry leaders, athletes, coaches, and officials
- **Strategic Working Group review** that benchmarked possible models from equestrian sports globally, as well as other sports
- **EA Board roadshow** with members travelling to state branches and meeting with boards, committees and stakeholders
- **Annual Strategic Forum** with over 50 invitees from branches, disciplines and key stakeholders
- **Hundreds of informal conversations** across the community

EQUESTRIAN AUSTRALIA GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES
THE SUPPORT OF ITS PROGRAM PARTNERS



What the Data Shows

Our research revealed several concerning realities about our current structure that help explain why change is being considered:

Massive Committee Overhead: We currently operate 51 committees across national and state levels, requiring 273 volunteers to fill governance roles. This is an extraordinary number for a sport with only 20,000 members nationwide. To put this in perspective:

- We need more than one committee volunteer for every 73 members
- Some individual disciplines require more governance volunteers than entire smaller sports have total participants
- Each volunteer takes on significant legal and financial responsibilities, often with personal liability
- Many positions remain unfilled due to the complexity and risk involved

The Committee Breakdown:

- Dressage alone has 8 committees requiring 44 volunteers
- Jumping has 8 committees requiring 44 volunteers
- Eventing has 7 committees requiring 46 volunteers
- Show Horse has 7 committees requiring 46 volunteers
- Plus additional committees for Coaching, Driving, Endurance, Vaulting, and Interschool
- This doesn't include the hundreds of additional volunteers needed for actual events and competitions

Structural Inconsistencies: The complexity is compounded by inconsistent structures across states. Some committees are sub-committees of state boards, others are separate legal entities operating independently, and some disciplines have different governance arrangements in different states. This creates:

- Confusion for members about who to contact
- Different rules and procedures for the same sport depending on location
- Varying membership benefits and costs across states
- Inconsistent safety and integrity standards

The \$800,000 Governance Crisis: This figure represents the devastating cost of our governance structure's complete failure in 2020. When Sport Australia reviewed our governance and found it fell "well short of acceptable standards," they withdrew all federal funding.

EQUESTRIAN AUSTRALIA GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES
THE SUPPORT OF ITS PROGRAM PARTNERS



This forced Equestrian Australia into voluntary administration - essentially bankruptcy proceedings - costing over \$800,000 in administrator fees, legal costs, and restructuring expenses. This wasn't money spent on sport development or member services; it was money spent just to keep the organisation from being liquidated entirely.

Resource Duplication Examples: The analysis identified wasteful duplication across states in:

- **Finance Operations:** Seven separate accounting systems, audit processes, and financial reporting
- **Legal and Compliance:** Multiple legal advisors, insurance policies, and compliance frameworks
- **Marketing and Communications:** Eight different websites, brands, social media accounts, and communication strategies
- **Membership Systems:** Different membership categories, fee structures, and processing systems
- **Facility Management:** Uncoordinated facility planning and inconsistent standards

Comparison to Best Practice: As our white paper noted: "The significant dispersion of decision-making and accountability as well the volume of committees, at governance level, is at odds with the model used by other Olympic sports." Most comparable national sporting organisations operate with:

- Single governance structures rather than federated models
- Discipline-focused delivery rather than state-based administration
- Shared services to eliminate duplication
- Professional management supported by volunteer expertise, not volunteer-heavy governance

The Real Cost: Every dollar spent on duplicated administration, excessive governance, and crisis management is a dollar not reaching:

- Grassroots sport development and club support
- Coach and official education and development
- Safety improvements and facility upgrades
- Athlete pathways and squad programs
- Member services and communication improvements

This isn't just about efficiency - it's about ensuring our limited resources actually reach the people who make our sport happen: the riders, coaches, officials, volunteers, and clubs who deliver equestrian sport across Australia.

EQUESTRIAN AUSTRALIA GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES
THE SUPPORT OF ITS PROGRAM PARTNERS



The Proposed Discipline-Based Model

Key Elements Under Consideration

The white paper outlines a structure centred around these principles:

National Discipline Committees with Enhanced Autonomy

- Each discipline would operate like a separate business unit with autonomy, budget, and resources to run their own sport
- Discipline Committees would work independently with state and regional committees and clubs
- Clear budgets and accountability for discipline growth and member services

Preserved Local Delivery

- No intention to centralise the delivery of events
- The goal is to redeploy dollars and resources by reducing duplication and getting them into the hands of those who run events and competitions
- Local staff to remain where needed to support sport delivery

Shared National Services

- EA would provide background services that ALL disciplines need: database, financial systems, general communications, interaction with FEI and Australian Sports Commission, memberships and horse registrations
- Eliminate duplication in areas like IT, member services, marketing and finance systems

Streamlined Membership Model

- Simple membership structure with an affordable base-level membership
- Additional fees would apply depending on participation in different disciplines
- Consistent approach across the country

Addressing Your Concerns

State Government Funding and Facilities

Concern: Will we lose state government funding and facility management?

Our Response: We have advice from state and territory governments that the proposed structure will not place state funding at risk. State funding is typically granted for initiatives that increase participation or bring major events to a state; the goal of any restructuring is to do more of this. Evidence from other sports shows they have actually received more state funding after making similar changes.

EQUESTRIAN AUSTRALIA GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES
THE SUPPORT OF ITS PROGRAM PARTNERS



Regarding facilities, we recognise the importance of having a network of top-class facilities across the country. Any new structure would focus on ensuring these are managed and funded to enable events and competitions year-round, wherever members may be.

Protection of State Assets and Funds

Concern: What happens to money and assets currently held by state branches?

Our Response: The EA Board has committed to ensuring that all funds raised in a particular state will remain in that state for the benefit of members in that state. An appropriate structure will be established to ensure that these funds are protected and entrusted to the state. How these are managed will be determined by each state's Representatives.

Possible Representative Structures: The white paper proposes creating "**Trust Funds**" for state assets, managed by:

- "**Trustees**" elected from current state branch boards (maximum 3 people)
- "**Investment committees**" to ensure proper use of historical funds
- Some form of **state council or advisory group**

Local Representation and Connection

Concern: Will we lose local knowledge and grassroots connections?

Our Response: We value the importance of local knowledge and expertise as it forms a vital connection with our stakeholders and members. The challenge is to create a structure that optimises resources while preserving these connections. There is no intention to centralise event delivery - local delivery requires that there will always be some staff to support it. We're committed to having staff where they're needed to deliver the sport effectively.

Employment and Staff Roles

Concern: What happens to current state branch staff?

Our Response: We understand this is a significant concern for dedicated staff who deliver essential services to our sport. When we say "key functions will still exist," we mean the actual work that needs to be done for our sport won't disappear - it will just be delivered differently.

Functions That Must Continue:

- Member services (registrations, renewals, queries)
- Event management and competition oversight
- Club support and liaison
- Coach and official education delivery

EQUESTRIAN AUSTRALIA GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES
THE SUPPORT OF ITS PROGRAM PARTNERS



- Finance, administration, and compliance
- Marketing, communications, and facility management
- Government relations and safety implementation

How Delivery Would Change: Instead of 8 separate state organizations each doing their own version of these functions, there would be shared services for functions that can be centralized (like IT and membership processing) and local delivery for functions that must be done locally (like club liaison and facility management).

Examples:

- **Member Services:** One national system supported by local staff who understand regional needs
- **Event Management:** Local event delivery supported by discipline committees with consistent standards
- **Club Support:** Local liaison roles continuing with better resources through discipline funding

Our Commitment: The mix of roles will be different, but we need skilled people to run our sport. There will likely be positions for staff who wish to transition, including new opportunities in sponsorship, grants management, and discipline coordination. We're committed to having staff where they're needed, with proper consultation before any changes.

Democratic Process and Voting Rights

Concern: How do we ensure member voices are heard in decision-making?

Our Response: Under proposed future constitutional changes, we aim to grant every member, regardless of their type, equal voting rights. Every member, regardless of their location in Australia, would have equal rights. This addresses the current situation where state branches have additional voting powers under Clause 40, which can block constitutional changes even if the majority of individual members support that change.

What This Means for Different Member Types

For Competitive Riders

- Clearer pathways from grassroots to elite level
- More resources directed to discipline-specific programs and squads
- Better value for membership fees with clearer benefits

For Recreational Members

- Simplified membership categories that reflect your level of participation

EQUESTRIAN AUSTRALIA GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES
THE SUPPORT OF ITS PROGRAM PARTNERS



- Improved IT systems for easier registration and communication
- More local programs funded through discipline committees

For Coaches and Officials

- Enhanced education and development programs
- Clearer accreditation pathways
- Better support through discipline-specific resources

For Clubs and Organising Committees

- More direct funding for events and activities
- Streamlined processes for event sanctioning, insurance, and membership through unified national systems instead of dealing with multiple state systems
- Enhanced support from discipline committees including equipment grants, coaching clinics, official training, and access to national sponsorship benefits

Implementation Approach

Phased and Careful Process

Any changes would happen in carefully planned stages:

Stage One - Shared Services (ongoing or partly complete)

- Integrity: Complete
- Safety: Complete
- IT Technology Platform: New platform underway
- Finance and Marketing: Still to be agreed with State Branches

Stage Two - National Discipline Committee Structure

- Expressions of interest for new committee members
- Drafting of structures and charters
- Development of State Discipline Committee structure
- Development of staffing structure

EQUESTRIAN AUSTRALIA GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES
THE SUPPORT OF ITS PROGRAM PARTNERS



Stage Three - New Membership Categories

- Design of new categories and fees
- Legal and constitutional changes
- Member consultation and voting process

Your Questions Answered

Q: Why can't we simply implement shared services without modifying the governance structure?

A: Every duplicated service is money and resources not reaching the grassroots and. In addition, we currently have different structures in each state, all of which deliver different services. Moving to shared services requires shifting skills and resources so that member needs are consistently and efficiently met. The governance structure affects how decisions are made and resources allocated.

Q: Will smaller states and disciplines be looked after?

A: Especially for states with smaller membership populations, members will be able to access a broader range of services and efficiencies by being part of a more streamlined organisation. Once we establish National Discipline Committees with budgets and clear accountabilities, these will be tasked with providing service and support to local committees and clubs, through State Discipline Committees wherever they may be. We are mindful that smaller or more remote areas, as well as disciplines with fewer participants, need specific attention.

Q: How will this affect my day-to-day experience as a member?

A: For most members, the day-to-day experience is expected to improve, the aim is to have faster response times to queries, consistent services regardless of location, improved IT system, more direct communication, and more resources allocated to programs and events. Your local club and competition experience should remain largely the same, but with better support and funding.

Q: What about our relationship with Pony Club and other equestrian organisations?

A: These relationships would continue and potentially be strengthened through a more unified approach to equestrian sport nationally. A streamlined structure could provide clearer pathways between different equestrian organisations.

What Happens Next

Immediate Steps

1. **Financial Analysis:** The EA Finance, Risk and Audit Committee are working on a detailed funding model to understand the financial implications of any potential changes.

EQUESTRIAN AUSTRALIA GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES
THE SUPPORT OF ITS PROGRAM PARTNERS



2. **More Information:** Additional details will be released over the next few months as analysis and consultation continue.
3. **No Predetermined Outcomes:** No structural changes will proceed without proper financial analysis, member consultation, and appropriate governance processes.

How You Can Stay Informed and Involved

- **Visit:** earestructure.com.au for detailed information and documentation
- **Provide Feedback:** Email feedback@equestrian.org.au- all emails will be collated and form part of the FAQs
- **Participate:** Attend consultation sessions where available
- **Engage:** Join respectful dialogue within your equestrian community

Our Commitment to You

Whether you support, oppose, or have questions about these proposals, your voice matters. This conversation is far from over, and every perspective contributes to shaping the future of our sport.

We're committed to:

- Transparent communication about all aspects being considered
- Proper consultation processes before any decisions are made
- Protecting the interests of all members regardless of location or discipline
- Preserving the local connections that make our community strong
- Following appropriate governance processes for any changes

Whatever path we take forward, it will be one we walk together, preserving the local connections and expertise that make our equestrian community special while building a structure that can sustainably support our sport's growth and success.

Key Documents and Resources

For More Information:

- Full 2023 White Paper: Available at earestructure.com.au
- Strategic Working Group Report: Available at earestructure.com.au
- FAQ Section: Regularly updated at earestructure.com.au

EQUESTRIAN AUSTRALIA GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES
THE SUPPORT OF ITS PROGRAM PARTNERS



- Contact: feedback@equestrian.org.au - all emails will be collated and form part of the FAQs

State Branch Information:

- Your local state branch websites contain historical context and their perspectives
- State branch boards continue to represent member interests during this process
- Regular updates will be provided through state communications

This communication represents the current status of discussions and analysis. No final decisions have been made, and member consultation will continue to be central to any future processes.

Contact Information:

- Website: <https://www.earestructure.com.au>
- Email: feedback@equestrian.org.au - all emails will be collated and form part of the FAQs
- Phone: Check your state branch website for local contacts

EQUESTRIAN AUSTRALIA GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES
THE SUPPORT OF ITS PROGRAM PARTNERS

