



STATUS: FINAL
CLIENT: HOY/ESNZ/HDC
SUBJECT: CANCELLATION

HEADLINE: Horse of the Year Show 2026 Cancelled Amid Economic Pressures

The 2026 Horse of the Year Show has been cancelled after organisers were unable to secure the funding required to deliver the nation's premier equestrian event.

The announcement was made today (Wednesday) by the Horse of the Year (HOY) board, which said sustained increases in operational costs, combined with reduced commercial and trade revenue, had made the March 2026 show financially unviable.

The show costs around \$2.2 million to put on and is one of New Zealand's largest sporting celebrations. The annual gathering, held in Heretaunga Hastings, draws thousands of riders, supporters, spectators and tradespeople to the Tōmoana Showgrounds and contributes millions of dollars to the local economy. The decision has been described as a significant setback for the equestrian community and the region.

HOY Board chair Tim Aitken said his team had worked extensively to find a solution.

"This was an incredibly tough call, but we could not deliver the show to the standard expected of a national flagship event," Mr Aitken said. "We needed to make the decision before entries opened and before infrastructure, accommodation and other major commitments were locked in."

The cancellation follows a number of large-scale events around the country that have faced similar pressures, reflecting a challenging economic environment.

Established in 1953, the Horse of the Year Show is considered the pinnacle of New Zealand's equestrian calendar. It spans 14 disciplines and is where some of the sport's most prestigious national titles are won. The event is regarded as a rite of passage for many riders and a showcase of top-level equestrian talent from here and abroad.

More than 400 volunteers, international judges and riders from across New Zealand and Australia contribute to the week-long competition.

Rights holder Equestrian Sports New Zealand (ESNZ) remains committed to the long-term future of the event. Chief executive Julian Bowden said it was disappointing to be cancelling the show but expressed confidence in a 2027 return.

“This is a devastating blow for our equestrian community, from riders to sponsors and of course our trade partners,” Mr Bowden said. “We will work collaboratively with key stakeholders to bring the show back in 2027. That will include assessing whether changes to the format may be needed to deliver the Horse of the Year experience in a more financially viable way. The legacy of the Horse of the Year Show is central to our sport and has helped launch the careers of many of our leading athletes.”

The HOY board thanked the event staff and the many who had supported with the preparations for the 2026 show, acknowledging it would not be possible without such a supportive community.

Heretaunga Hastings has hosted the Horse of the Year Show for more than 20 years. The show was not held between 2021 and 2023 due to the impacts of COVID and Cyclone Gabrielle, but returned with a stellar event in 2024.

Hastings Mayor Wendy Schollum said the cancellation would be felt widely.

“We are saddened not to welcome the national equestrian community in March 2026,” she said. “The show delivers significant value to local businesses and the tourism economy, and provides enjoyment for our wider community. Hastings District Council remains a committed partner and we look forward to working with ESNZ to host the event again in 2027.”

Ends

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