



CALIFORNIA HORSE RACING BOARD

PRESS RELEASE

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SUMMARY OF CHRB ACTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS 1-14-2026

The California Horse Racing Board conducted a meeting Wednesday, January 14, at the Cannabis Control Appeals Panel Hearing Room in Sacramento. Chairman Greg Ferraro chaired the meeting, joined by Vice Chair Oscar Gonzales and Commissioners Damascus Castellanos, Brenda Washington Davis, Thomas Hudnut, and Peter Stern.

The audio of this entire Board meeting is available on the CHRB Website (www.chrb.ca.gov) under the [Webcast](#) link, accessed through the Media Room tab. In brief:

- A combination of Northern California racing interests stood behind a proposal for 2026 race dates at three fairs, but due to what was described as an “11th-hour pivot,” the Board decided to put the matter over to a newly scheduled meeting in February to give the commissioners and CHRB executives and attorneys time to analyze the revised proposal.

CHRB wrote in the Board package before the meeting that several legal and procedural issues with the original proposal needed to be resolved, and their concerns were hammered home by the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) in a letter to George Schmitt, the principal in Bernal Park Racing, regarding the Bernal plan to run meets at three northern fairs.

“After a thorough review, we have determined that the current statutory framework does not provide authority for CDFA to approve the proposed structure,” wrote CDFA Secretary Karen Ross. “Food and Agriculture Code 4058 envisions entities formed by fairs or similar public organizations, and existing provisions do not contemplate

private entities leasing racetrack facilities for the purpose of conducting live horse racing meetings. Additionally, existing statutes impose restrictions that would prevent implementation of the proposal as submitted.”

This letter was dated January 13 and received by the CHRB late Tuesday, less than 24 hours before Wednesday’s CHRB meeting and not in time to include in either the public or commissioners’ packages, though the commissioners were provided late Tuesday with the CDFA letter and two related documents. Those documents have since been uploaded. The northern interests quickly pivoted at the meeting and revised the proposal to indicate that the three fairs – Alameda County, Humboldt County, and Tehama District – would be the applicants, not Bernal, though Bernal would help run the meets under contract. Schmitt and others urged the commissioner to allocate 12 weeks of dates (four each) to the three fairs, two each for racing and two each for simulcast wagering.

Executive Director Scott Chaney, said “staff cannot recommend these date allocations because we have not had even close to adequate time to evaluate this (new) proposal.” He added, “I don’t know what the plan is. (Therefore, approval) is not the way in which a regulatory body should act.”

Commissioner Davis stated, “We need to have something in front of us that says this is the plan. The plan in our Board packet right now has changed. We are not in a position to know what the plan is other than what came in last night. We appreciate that we have an overview, but we don’t have the level of detail that we are looking for to make a decision about race allocations.”

When this discussion touched on the reliability of information coming from proponents in the past, Chairman Ferraro misspoke when he made a reference to the late John Harris, who had partnered with Schmitt in a proposal for dates last year. The reference should have been to the Big Fresno Fair.

Chairman Ferraro voiced a motion that the Board schedule a February meeting (precise date and location to be determined) “at which time we will make some sort of decision” on the sole issue of northern race dates. Commissioner Castellanos urged the three fairs to “step up to the plate” and each submit the required documentation ahead of that meeting.

- Representatives of Los Alamitos Race Course outlined a number of initiatives they are taking to promote the safety of horses and riders, and chief among them is a plan to prohibit intra-articular (IA) injections in quarter horses within 30 days of trial races. This prohibition goes further than CHRB rules, which only focus on corticosteroid injections. The Los Alamitos plan is to prohibit all injections within those timeframes and conditions: “The intra-articular injection of any product, into any intra-articular space, is prohibited within 30 days of a Trial race.” Additionally, other initiatives apply to Trial and Quarter-Horse stakes races: “Other than for diagnostic anesthesia, the intra-articular administration of any substance into a high motion joint (fetlock/carpus) shall require documented diagnostic imaging be performed within the preceding seven (7) days of the procedure. The diagnostic procedure shall include a detailed imaging report with clinical findings that MUST be submitted by the attending veterinarian to the Official Vet within 48 hours of performing those diagnostics.”

Chairman Ferraro said these actions are being taken “because of a high incidence of breakdowns (at Los Alamitos) in the last couple of years. Commissioner Davis said to the representatives, “Thank you for taking this matter very seriously.”

- The Board approved a request to amend the previously approved modified distributions of market access fees from Advanced Deposit Wagering conducted by thoroughbred associations and fairs in the central and southern zones. Asked later for more details on this matter, Bill Nader, president of California Thoroughbred Owners, explained, “In the rare instance when blended takeout is less than 15% in any calendar month, there is consensus agreement among industry stakeholders that while statutory deductions to industry-related funds are still required, contractual deductions are no longer required to help protect track commissions and the horsemen’s purse account from negative distributions due to the lower takeout.”
- The Board authorized Oaks Local Craft Kitchen and Bar in Thousand Oaks to offer wagering on horse races as a mini-satellite under a new name, The Paddock Sports Bar and Horse Racing. The facility is being remodeled and could re-open later this month.
- Extensive public comments, mostly dealing with the northern dates issue, can be heard on the audio file posted on the CHRB website.
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