

Horses and dams – should you fence them off?

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Dams are a common feature on most horse properties. If well constructed and managed well they are a source of clean water, a haven for wildlife and a beautiful asset to a property. They can also be dangerous especially if they have deep mud in and around the entrance. The following story is from journalist Christa Elliott who reported on the situation.



Imagine how Rachel Reid felt when she went to feed her boyfriend's horse 'Alpha Boy', a thoroughbred racehorse and he was not there waiting for her. On Monday, 3rd August, 2009 he was nowhere to be seen. She could not work out where he was, as he usually waited near the laneway for his breakfast.

She hurried around searching until she came to the small gully running through his paddock when she spotted his nose just above the surface of the water! She first thought he was dead, but there was slight movement and she ran for a halter and lead rope to keep his head out of the water and urgently rang her boyfriend, Troy Gayler, who owned 'Alpha Boy', to come quickly.

Troy and Rachel worked tirelessly trying to get 'Alpha Boy' out of the boggy mud but to no avail. It appeared he had been there for many hours. He waited patiently to be rescued with his eyes closed from sheer exhaustion, shivering uncontrollably.

Don Hungerford (a horse owner) - on driving past, realised their plight and in no time along with Kevin Blacklaw, who was working on an adjoining 'Forest Pines' development, procured a water pump with the help of his workers to drain the water in the gully. He then called on a company crane also working nearby.



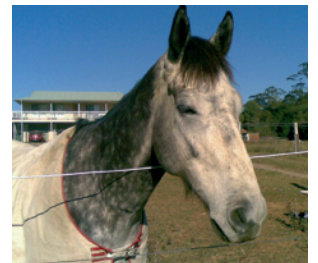
Incredibly Don Hungerford had had Alan Brown of Nambour make a heavy duty sling, based on the pictures of slings shown with the Australian Light Horse lifting their horses onto ships for transport to the war, to help horses in emergency situations. It had never been used.



With several helpers including George Banfield from Parsons Road, this sling was placed successfully under 'Alpha Boy's' belly and attached to the waiting crane, which, ever so carefully, manoeuvred 'Alpha Boy' up out of the boggy gully and onto dry ground. 'Alpha Boy' watched in wonderment as he was lifted out of the jaws of death and onto dry ground. Thanks to the great work and team effort of everyone concerned 'Alpha Boy' survived.

So how can you prevent this from happening to your horse or other livestock? Rachel and Troy are no different from most other horse owners out there. Unfenced dams are the norm on horse properties, but as Rachel and Troy will now testify dams and drainage ditches are best fenced off from livestock.

As well as for the safety of your horses and other animals (and children), there are many environmental and health benefits from fencing off waterways. By fencing off a waterway, the water will be cleaner (due to less mud which is created by the trampling of animals), vegetation can grow undisturbed – and this then shades the water which means less evaporation. The vegetation also provides habitat for wildlife some of which help to make yours and your horse's life more comfortable by eating pest insects such as mosquitoes. The cleaner water from a dam can be pumped to a holding tank and then reticulated to where it needs to go. If this tank is on high ground then it can simply gravity feed water troughs as necessary. This means that animals no longer need access to the waterway and therefore risk getting bogged and the waterway can do what it is meant to do – provide clean water.



Initially fencing with an electric fence will keep horses and cows from entering the waterway (but not sheep). Eventually it is a good idea to fence this area off permanently. Make sure permanent fencing still allows native wildlife to pass though. Sometimes it is possible to get funding to help with permanent fencing. Contact your local Landcare group for a start. Have a look at our web site www.equiculture.com.au for contacts for Landcare and other organisations (such as water catchments organisations) which can help.

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