31 March 2022

**DECISION**

**HARNESS RACING VICTORIA**

**and**

**TAYLA FRENCH**

**Date of hearing:** 23 March 2022

**Panel:** Judge Graeme Hicks (Deputy Chairperson) and Mr Greg Childs.

**Appearances:** Ms Kylie Harrison appeared on behalf of the Stewards.
Mr Greg Sugars represented Ms French.

**Charge:** Australian Harness Racing Rule (“AHRR”) 163(1)(a)(iii) states:

1. A driver shall not -

(a) cause or contribute to any

(iii) interference.

**Particulars of charge:** Tayla French (Dallas Nikolay) pleaded guilty to a charge under AR163(1)(a)(iii) for causing interference, in that racing into the first turn she permitted her drive to cross in advance of Gigis Grinner, when insufficiently clear of that runner, resulting in Gigis Grinner contacting the inside sulky wheel of Dallas Nikolay and racing roughly. Flamin Steel, Mister Cole and Shecandoit, which were trailing, were all checked with Mister Cole and Shecandoit galloping and losing significant ground. The licence to drive in races of Ms French was suspended for 3 weeks to commence midnight 18 December 2021. In assessing penalty stewards considered the HRV Minimum Penalty Guidelines, the driver’s guilty plea, her recent clear record, however weighed this against the degree of culpability which was deemed to be mid to high level and the consequential affects of the carelessness on behalf of Ms French which were deemed to be significant.

**Plea:** Guilty

**DECISION**

Ms Taylor French, you have pleaded guilty to breaching rule 163(1)(a)(iii) in Race 10 at the harness race meeting held at Echuca on Thursday, 9 December 2021, in that you caused interference to other drivers in that race.

Racing into and around the first turn, you drove your horse, Dallas Nikolay, from the outside barrier and in doing so gained an advantage over the horse racing on your inside. That was Gigis Grinner, driven by Miss Monique Burnett. You then permitted your horse to shift in upon Ms Burnett’s horse when there was insufficient room to cross, thereby causing that horse to race roughly and as a consequence Flamin Steel, Mister Cole and Shecandoit were checked, with the latter two horses galloping. Four horses in total were affected by your drive.

We have heard submissions from Mr Sugars on your behalf and also from Ms Harrison on behalf of the Stewards as to an appropriate penalty.

We have watched footage of the race several times.

In arriving at an appropriate penalty, we have taken into account several factors, including your history in the harness racing industry, the number of drives that you have completed, and your good driving record. We have taken into account your plea of guilty at the first available opportunity and have considered the Harness Racing Victoria minimum penalty guidelines. These guidelines are not mandatory. They are guidelines only.

We have also taken into account Mr Sugars’ submission that Dallas Nikolay has not always been a clean gaited horse and that Ms French is a professional driver within the harness racing industry. She will be affected by any term of suspension. We have considered the penalties imposed in several cases for breaches of this Rule.

We assess your degree of culpability as being in the mid to high range. Four horses were affected by your drive and were not able to compete at their best.

In all the circumstances, we impose a penalty of three weeks suspension. The suspension shall start at midnight on Saturday, 26 March 2022.

Mark Howard
Registrar, Victorian Racing Tribunal