

## **TRNT Stewards Report – Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

**Panel:** D Hensler (Chairman), R Hamilton (Senior Steward), R Shiers (Deputy)  
**Venue:** Darwin Turf Club Stewards' Room

Stewards today conducted an inquiry into the analyst's findings of the blood samples collected from the gelding PATRIOTIC KING after competing in and winning at the Darwin Turf Club race meeting on 28 November 2025. The certificates of analysis for the blood samples detected the presence of nicotine and the metabolite cotinine.

The Australian Racing Forensic Laboratory (ARFL) issued the first certificate for this finding and the confirmation analysis was performed by Racing Analytical Services (RASL) who issued the second certificate confirming the presence of the reported substances.

Evidence was tendered by trainer Mr Gary Clarke, ARFL General Manager Mr J Keledjian and RWWA Industry Veterinarian Dr Judith Medd.

Evidence before the panel established that during a stable inspection and interview with Stewards on 23 January 2026 regarding these findings, Mr Clarke was aware of recent nicotine positives relating to thoroughbreds racing in Darwin and had taken basic measures in his stable to try to mitigate the risk of his thoroughbreds being exposed to any form of nicotine contamination.

As he could offer no obvious explanation for the situation, he put forward a possibility that the gelding may have been exposed to a potential contamination by way of ingesting the foliage from an unidentified tree that was growing adjacent to the geldings' box. The Stewards observed that PATRIOTIC KING foraged in his box and was the only thoroughbred in the stable barn that had access to the foliage.

A botanist report identified the tree as *sterculia quadrifida* or locally referred to as a peanut tree due to the taste of edible seeds that are produced in pods. The report outlined this species is not known to produce nicotine compounds.

Stewards collected a sample of leaves from this tree at the stable inspection, which was sent to the ARFL for testing. The analytical report detected the presence of nicotine within these leaves. At a stable visit on 10 February 2026, the Stewards collected a further sample of leaves from the tree, which was again sent to the ARFL for testing. The analytical report again detected the presence of nicotine.

The Stewards were satisfied, having replicated the process, that the collection and testing of the leaves was in accordance with required protocols and accordingly that the results of the analysis were consistent and reliable.

As part of the investigation a review of the CCTV footage in the race day stalls from 28 November 2025 did not identify any evidence of the gelding being exposed to any form of nicotine after arrival on course.

Stewards, in reflection of the absolute liability provisions that apply, issued a charge under AR240(2) which Mr Clarke subsequently pleaded guilty to.

The specifics of the charge being:

- He is a thoroughbred trainer licensed by TRNT
- At the relevant time he was the trainer of PATRIOTIC KING
- On 28 November 2025, the gelding was brought to the Darwin Turf Club race meeting held at Fannie Bay racecourse for the purpose of participating in race 3, the Ladbrokes Top 2/3/4 Betting Handicap run over 1200m
- Upon analysis the prohibited substances nicotine and cotinine were detected in the post race blood samples collected from the gelding
- Nicotine and the metabolite cotinine are listed as a prohibited list B substances, pursuant to the Australian Rules of Racing

The Stewards decided to issue no penalty against Mr Clarke for the breach of AR240(2) for the following reasons:

- After considering all the evidence, the Stewards were satisfied to the requisite standard that on the balance of probabilities the low detected level of nicotine and the metabolite cotinine was caused by the gelding ingesting foliage from the *sterculia quadrifida* tree growing at the stables some time prior to competing on race day
- That the analytical evidence was conclusive that nicotine was present in the leaf samples collected from this tree
- There was clear evidence that the gelding had access to the foliage and there was no other more likely explanation for the substance's presence
- Local and interstate precedents in positive swab cases that involved environmental and other forms of contamination

The tree will be removed to mitigate the risk of any further occurrence.

Mr Clarke put forward a submission on behalf of the managing part owner relating to the retention of prizemoney given the circumstances of this case. After due consideration, the Stewards disqualified PATRIOTIC KING from the abovementioned race acting under the provisions of AR240(1), and the results will be amended accordingly with commensurate implications to stake money.

Australian Rules of Racing referred to in this report:

### ***Division 2 – Prohibited substance in a sample taken from a horse***

#### ***AR 240 Prohibited substance in sample taken from horse at race meeting***

*(1) Subject to subrule (3), if a horse is brought to a racecourse and a prohibited substance on Prohibited List A and/or Prohibited List B is detected in a sample taken from the horse prior to or following its running in any race, the horse must be disqualified from any race in which it started on that day.*

*(2) Subject to subrule (3), if a horse is brought to a racecourse for the purpose of participating in a race and a prohibited substance on Prohibited List A and/or Prohibited List B is detected in a sample taken from the horse prior to or following its running in any race, the trainer and any other person who was in charge of the horse at any relevant time breaches these Australian Rules.*