

HORSE INDUSTRY CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING 29 MINUTES

7 December 2023 9:30am to 11:30am AEDT

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Canberra ACT 2601

Participants

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Amy Little (Chair)

Animal and Biological Imports Branch

Michelle Blowes

Animal and Biological Imports Branch

Danni Davis

Animal and Biological Imports Branch

Kym Russell

Animal and Biological Imports Branch

Emma McGrath

Animal and Biological Imports Branch

Kaylene Jones

Animal and Biological Imports Branch

Jessica Hoad

Animal and Biological Imports Branch

Tania Ware Animal Biosecurity Branch
Kate Usher Animal Biosecurity Branch
Sam Hamilton Animal Biosecurity Branch

Rachel Iglesias* Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer

Joffrid Mackett Live Animal Exports
Timothy Naylor Live Animal Exports

Leah Wells Veterinary and Export Meat Branch Jonathon Early Veterinary and Export Meat Branch Mikala Welsh Veterinary and Export Meat Branch Zi Lim Veterinary and Export Meat Branch Clare O'Shannessy Veterinary and Export Meat Branch Catherine James Veterinary and Export Meat Branch Rick Hawe* **Biosecurity Operations Division** Ben Wilson Mickleham Quarantine Facility Melissa Henson Mickleham Quarantine Facility Judie Wong Mickleham Quarantine Facility Jan Xi Mickleham Quarantine Facility

Dave Chandler Finance Division
Shaun Garlin* Finance Division

Industry members and guests

Andrew Kelly Harness Racing Australia

Chris Burke International Racehorse Transport/First Point Animal Services

Grace Forbes Racing Victoria

James Gilkerson Australian Veterinary Association

Jane Bennett New South Wales Department of Primary Industries

Jeffrey Wilkinson Equine Veterinarians Australia

Karen Day Racing Australia

Kathleen Mullan Harness Racing Australia

Paul Eriksson Racing Australia

Sarah Kelly (proxy) Thoroughbred Breeders Australia

^{*}denotes attendance during minimum agenda items only

Apologies

Andrew Small Racing New South Wales
Cameron Bell Agriculture Victoria

Cameron Croucher Equine International Airfreight

Fiona Thompson Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland

Josh Murphy New Zealand Bloodstock
Josie Holmes Agriculture Victoria
Paul Bloodworth Racing Victoria

Peter Finnin Animal Biosecurity Branch
Ross Kendell Horse Industry Consultant

Meeting commenced at 9:35am.

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair provided acknowledgement of country, welcomed attendees, noted apologies and reminded of the Horse Industry Consultative Committee (HICC) terms of reference and confidentiality requirements.

The Chair noted that between 2019-2020 they were employed by International Racehorse Transport (IRT) which has been noted formally within the department as a potential conflict of interest. This potential conflict of interest is successfully managed through standard Australian Public Service processes including that they are removed from day-to-day decision making that concern consignments of imported horses. It was noted that industry experience is invaluable for public servants to gain a broader perspective on how government can best work with industry. The Chair was happy to discuss any concerns with members or provide their manager contact details for members to discuss directly.

2. Action items from past meetings

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Action Item 1: Animal and Biological Imports Branch (ABIB) to provide draft Approved Arrangement (AA) Class 7.12 requirement updates to industry for feedback. Closed - provided to importers for feedback in August 2023.

Action Item 2: ABIB to consult with industry on proposed changes to tick examination requirements in post-arrival quarantine (PAQ). Closed - tick search checklist provided to importers for comment in August 2023 and published in November 2023.

Action Item 3: ABIB to provide a department contact to horse transport agents for Western Sydney Airport (WSA) consultation purposes. Closed - provided to importers May 2023.

Action Item 4: ABIB to provide draft changes to First Point of Entry (FPOE) standards to industry for feedback when available. Closed - provided to importers August 2023. Note: broader consultation may occur later.

Action Items 5-7: Update at Item 7.

Action Items 8-9: Update at Item 8.

Action Item 10: Agriculture Victoria to provide information to ABIB on Japanese Encephalitis (JE) surveillance results in Victorian horses when available. Closed - ABIB received info from Agriculture Victoria November 2023. As discussed at last HICC meeting, Victoria tested horses for serological evidence of exposure to JE. Whilst 13 out of 90 horses were considered "possible cases", all horses were polymerase chain reaction (PCR) negative i.e., there was no evidence of the viral antigen and hence no confirmed cases of JE. The serological information was used to inform mosquito trapping activities in Victoria. Public reporting is via National Animal Health Information System (NAHIS) as per nationally agreed information sharing standards. Only negative or confirmed cases can be reported in NAHIS and no confirmed cases have been reported. Serology is not a reliable indicator of detection as cross reactivity to other flaviviruses (e.g. Murray Valley Encephalitis/Kunjin virus/West Nile Virus) can also cause a positive or inconclusive test result (refer to the Australian Centre for

Disease Preparedness (ACDP) Japanese Encephalitis Virus Diagnostic <u>Testing Factsheet</u> which confirms cross reactions occur). Industry asked if Agriculture Victoria were checking if the horse had previously been vaccinated in the event of a positive antibody test. ABIB advised as the use of the data was to inform mosquito trapping, and not going to be published, they had chosen to rely on owner interview about vaccination status and did not consider it necessary to verify with industry or the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Industry offered to provide data on imported horses which have been vaccinated against JE for import/export purposes to Agriculture Victoria, to inform their data collection more accurately. ABIB agreed to pass this offer on again but noted that following interviews with owners, further follow up may not be considered necessary.

Action Item 11: Update at Item 10.

Action Item 12: HICC Secretariat to provide the finance paper and slides from the Finance Division presentation to HICC. Closed – provided to HICC May 23.

Action Item 13: Finance Division to provide outcome after the Minister has decided on biosecurity cost recovery and cleared the information for release. Closed – Charging guidelines provided June 2023 and published online.

Meeting 26

Action Item 2: The department will provide an update to HICC members about the JE import conditions for import of horses to the United Kingdom from Australia when negotiations are complete. Update at Item 7.

Meeting 25

Action Item 9: Dr Wong to update HICC on progress of draft policy for laboratories performing official testing for animal diseases. The current draft reflects different requirements for testing imported animals, domestic animals and animals intended for export and trade purposes. There is also a focus on the approval of laboratories for performing official testing. Work is ongoing through Animal Health Committee with input from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the department).

3. Consultation on reducing frequency of HICC meetings (paper)

There is general feedback from industry that holding HICC meetings once a year is sufficient. For the last few years, HICC meetings have been held twice yearly in addition to special and out-of-session meetings held as needed. It is proposed to reduce meeting frequency to annually to be held in May or June each year, in addition to special and out-of-session meetings when required.

The HICC Secretariat provided members with an update on reducing the frequency of HICC meetings and a copy of the HICC Terms of Reference (TOR). The current TOR allow for at least one and up to three HICC meetings per year but requires that members attend in person once per year. ABIB will update the TOR so that attendance either virtually or in person is acceptable at the annual meeting. No objections were raised and HICC agreed to reduce meeting frequency to annually rather than twice yearly.

4. Audits update (domestic and overseas)

At the last HICC meeting, it was reported that there were delays in auditing offshore horse pre-export quarantine (PEQ) facilities due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. ABIB has now audited half of the offshore PEQs and will aim to complete audit of all remaining PEQ facilities in 2024.

Considerable work has gone into approval of alternative disinfectants for use in PEQ as some PEQ facilities had concerns about the corrosive nature of Virkon. Newer generation disinfectants have been developed in recent years which Animal Biosecurity Branch (ABB) have recently assessed as suitable under specific conditions. PEQ Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) have been updated to reflect these additional approved disinfectants.

Industry asked whether these alternative PEQ disinfectants could be used onshore, due to concerns about damage to trucks and equipment in addition to work, health and safety issues around using Virkon. ABIB will provide a list of approved PEQ disinfectants, however noted that these have been assessed for offshore use, which is the first line of biosecurity defence. Investigation into onshore alternatives to Virkon is underway, however onshore biosecurity is the last line of defence against disease incursion, so a more conservative approach is taken in approving onshore disinfectants.

Domestic AAs and Mickleham Quarantine Facility (MQF) continue to be audited by ABIB annually. Horse clearance audits of one New Zealand (NZ) and one Northern Hemisphere arrival are undertaken annually, and each region is audited once every two years. A Brisbane NZ clearance audit and a Sydney Northern Hemisphere clearance audit have been undertaken in 2023.

ACTION ITEM 1: ABIB will provide industry with a list of PEQ approved disinfectants.

ACTION ITEM 2: ABIB to investigate onshore alternatives to Virkon and advise if any new disinfectants can be used.

5. MQF expansion plans

MQF Operations have been working with importers around their 5-to-10-year horse import forecasts to put forward a proposal to expand the MQF horse facility. MQF is assessing whether it would be practical to build smaller compounds that could be used for different commodities (e.g. horses and alpacas) rather than building new, large horse-specific compound/s.

Industry asked for a timeframe for building a smaller 10-15 horse compound and was advised that this would take approximately 3-4 years. Ideally any new horse compound would be built on current MQF land. Repurposing the largely unused MQF ruminant compound to hold 9-12 horses is being investigated and would be quicker than a new build. Industry noted that they would be happy with the option of repurposing the ruminant compound for horse post-arrival quarantine (PAQ).

6. WSA update

Rick Hawe introduced himself as department lead on planning and design of WSA, including the cargo precinct, which is currently out to tender for a builder to start mid to late January 2024. There will be a dedicated building on site for biosecurity officers, which will be within the precinct and close to cargo terminal operators. The department has provided WSA with design principles approved by the department's Animal and Plant Divisions, along with the FPOE standards, including those for building livestock handling facilities. The department has highlighted that the livestock facility needs airside access and should be near the department building. The department has also given advice on contemporary livestock handling facilities and recommends WSA visit the Melbourne animal clearance facility, to further inform the WSA detailed design phase.

More detailed design will occur once a builder is appointed, which will include assessment of how to segregate, confine and manage biosecurity waste using suitable treatment facilities. Under the FPOE standards, a treatment/washdown facility needs to be provided, and WSA may build this facility and operate it themselves or contract a third party for operations. The land around WSA is pastureland which is near the Blue Mountains and agricultural hubs, so is susceptible to biosecurity pest and disease establishment should breaches occur and enter natural environment.

The department has conveyed that there will be international animal movements through WSA and recommended building suitable infrastructure now rather than retrofit. Industry agreed that WSA not

having a curfew would attract cargo operators, so freight, including horses, will be redirected to WSA quickly. WSA readiness and activation testing is planned from October 2025 and cargo operations will commence July 2026. Domestic and international travel is planned to commence September/October 2026.

7. ABB updates

Equine viral arteritis (EVA) surveillance and country freedom from EVA

Industry have previously asked if Australia is EVA free or not. Clarifying this status could assist in reducing the amount of EVA testing needed for import or exports of horses. ABB has provided the following update on this matter.

National EVA surveillance data is published in Animal Health Surveillance Quarterly (AHSQ) reports. There has been limited research or active surveillance for EVA in the last 10 years. Absence of evidence of EVA using passive surveillance data from horses tested for export is not sufficient to confirm absence of disease in Australia. Some active surveillance for EVA was conducted earlier in 2023 during a spate of Victorian horse mortalities and EVA was ruled out in these cases. Reporting in the AHSQ has shown that in 2022, 1.3% of tests were positive on serology but this does not equate to clinical disease. ABB is concerned that the reporting of positive EVA test results in AHSQ may mislead trading partners regarding Australia's disease status since follow up testing to confirm if these are true positives or false positives, is not linked to the reporting of the initial positive result. ABB will work with Animal Health Policy Branch to clarify reporting methods to give a clear indication if any true positive test results are obtained. The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) offered ABB serum samples from various research projects (e.g. strangles and equine herpes virus) over recent years if useful for testing.

Industry reiterated that EVA test variability (different results received for the same horse at different labs) and occurrence of false positives or non-negative results are a major issue for horse exports from Australia. This issue can cost industry hundreds of thousands of dollars annually because if a shipment is delayed due to false positive or non-negative test results, part or all of airline flight bookings are non-refundable. Industry perception is that since Australia has a strict EVA import policy and clinical cases have not been detected, country freedom should be pursued. However, there have been no attempts made to eradicate EVA and subsequently declare country freedom, so horse exporters do not obtain any benefit from the strict import conditions.

ABB advised that Australia does not have virulent strain/s of EVA present because our import conditions are robust, and need to remain so, to maintain this benefit. They also noted that other animal diseases are currently a higher priority for review and resources are not currently allocated to progress changes to EVA import conditions.

Declaring EVA freedom would be a collaborative effort between federal and state governments. The AVA stated that Australia has had evidence of EVA in the past but no evidence recently except the occasional odd serological result, and Australia would benefit from structured testing rather than passive surveillance. ABB will examine what would be required for Australia to self-declare freedom from EVA in accordance with the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). Industry referred to NZ's EVA freedom and that NZ has introduced the horse levy (NZ\$100 per horse that is imported/exported) that is used for these types of projects. ABB noted that Australia is in a very different position to NZ when it comes to eradication of EVA, where an industry backed control scheme began in 1990 and led to eradication and self-declaration of EVA freedom.

EVA test variability between NSW and VIC laboratories

ABB discussed EVA testing with each state laboratory and found that the virus neutralisation test is a complex test that is highly sensitive and therefore will incur some false positives or non-negative results. It was acknowledged by ABB that it is frustrating for industry that there is variability in the results between the laboratories, but both laboratories are National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) accredited and ABB are satisfied that the tests are being conducted correctly.

EVA PCR testing

Semen PCR testing for EVA has become more widely accepted as an alternative or adjunct to virus isolation (VI) testing. Since the department's risk review in 2013, there has been more research and validation of EVA PCR testing protocols. PCR testing for EVA is included in the WOAH Manual. ABB will investigate whether EVA PCR testing on semen can be included in import conditions in future. This option is already included in horse export protocols for major trading partners.

EVA vaccine shortage

The United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland have notified their stakeholders that Artevac vaccine will not available until September 2024 at the earliest. Stocks ran out in the UK in March 2023. The shortage may impact shuttle stallions next breeding season. The department has previously provided permit variations for horses that have had four consecutive Artevac vaccinations and when it has been no more than 400 days since their last vaccination to be eligible for import, but they will likely exceed the 400-day timeframe by next year.

Industry is looking at using the EVA test mare condition and semen testing instead of vaccination for 2024. Industry noted the number of shuttle stallions is decreasing. Quality stallions are now too valuable to travel, and mares are being shuttled to stallions instead.

Piroplasmosis testing

The Australian piroplasmosis testing project was contracted with ACDP to provide enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) and indirect immunofluorescence antibody test (IFAT) testing for piroplasmosis in Australia, for export and import purposes. ACDP will provide the next milestone report in April 2024 for ELISA and IFAT piroplasmosis accreditation. It was noted that NZ can currently only perform ELISA onshore, and since they require both ELISA and IFAT testing for their export of horses, they often export all samples for piroplasmosis testing to overseas laboratories.

Disease freedom declarations for imported NZ horses en route to another destination

ABB is finalising disease freedom declarations for horses from NZ to the USA via Australia. ABB is also working on the NZ-AUS-Hong Kong route currently.

UK JE import conditions

ABB have had limited engagement with the UK on amending the JE conditions for import into the UK. Instead, effort will be focussed on requesting that the JE Chapter of the WOAH Terrestrial Animal Health Code be revised. The revision of all equine encephalitis chapters including JE is on the 2024 WOAH work program, and Australia will pursue JE conditions for horses be removed as horses are a dead-end host for the disease agent.

ACTION ITEM 3: ABB will investigate suitability of PCR testing for EVA for horse imports/exports.

ACTION ITEM 4: ABB to examine what would be required to be recognised as an EVA free country.

ACTION ITEM 5: ABB will provide an update on ACDP's piroplasmosis testing milestone report when available in 2024.

ACTION ITEM 6: ABB will provide an update on disease freedom declarations for imported NZ horses en route to another destination.

8. Japanese Encephalitis update

The Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer (OCVO) provided an update on JE in Australia. The last confirmed case in pigs was reported in November 2022 with exposure estimated in July 2022. The last human cases were reported in December 2022 and the human health emergency response ended in June 2023. The animal health responses by state governments ended between May 2022 to July 2022.

The HICC Secretariat provided members with an update on Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) JE vaccine permit applications. In March 2022 there was a special HICC JE meeting held, where the department indicated that it would apply to the APVMA for an Emergency Use Permit (EUP) for the JE vaccine as part of the emergency response. Since then, the department has collected some information from a JE vaccine manufacturer in Japan, but had not submitted an application. The APVMA defines Emergency Use as: use of a product or constituent in the genuine belief that the use is required because of an emergency or impending emergency. As there is no longer an emergency human or animal disease response in Australia, the JE vaccine no longer fulfils the legislative requirement for a EUP, so work on the EUP application has ceased.

The AVA advised that the best time to vaccinate against a vector-borne disease is in the absence of an outbreak, rather than waiting for a future outbreak and then applying for an EUP. They were concerned about missing the opportunity to have an EUP in place so that if an outbreak occurs, it can be acted on more rapidly. ABIB advised that JE no longer meets the definition of emergency so an EUP cannot be pursued, however industry is able to pursue a commercial arrangement with a vaccine manufacturer and seek to obtain APVMA permits for minor use, or full registration, to assist with their preparedness. The department will assist where possible, including providing APVMA contact information to industry.

A Minor Use Permit (MUP) is issued by the APVMA to legalise use of a product in a situation where no registered products exist, and full registration of a product might not produce sufficient economic return. This may fit the scenario of limited use of JE vaccine for horse exports.

There are no valid APVMA MUPs held to use the JE vaccination in Australia. In March 2022, the department advised that it would apply for an MUP alongside the application for a EUP. However, it has subsequently been determined the department is not an appropriate applicant for an MUP for a vaccine for export use.

The department clarified that there are two permits that industry needs for use of the JE vaccine to prepare horses for export: an Australian biosecurity import permit from the department and a MUP from the APVMA. It was highlighted that it is not possible use a single application for an Australian import permit and an APVMA permit, as the two agencies issuing the permits work under different pieces of legislation. The department has offered to assist with the MUP application process where possible. Live Animal Exports Branch (LAEB) advised that multiple exporters have successfully negotiated MUPs with the AVPMA for products that are not registered in Australia. The department will continue to assess JE vaccine import permit applications under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* for restricted end use for preparing horses for export. For all new JE vaccine permit applications, the department will request evidence of an APVMA permit from the applicant or from the APVMA if the applicant does not provide this information.

A horse transport agent asked if they can continue vaccinating horses for export against JE in the interim before they have been granted an AVPMA MUP. LAEB will investigate and provide guidance to industry.

ACTION ITEM 7: ABIB will provide assistance to transport agents to purse an MUP for the JE vaccine for export horses.

ACTION ITEM 8: ABIB to investigate whether it is possible to provide information already collected for the EUP application for the JE vaccine for horses to the APVMA to support transport agents' APVMA MUP application(s).

ACTION ITEM 9: LAEB will investigate and provide guidance to horse transport agents out of session about vaccinating horses being prepared for export against JE, while the transport agents' AVPMA MUP application(s) may be pending.

9. Cost Recovery and Charging guidelines update

The HICC Secretariat provided members with Finance Division's update on Biosecurity Cost Recovery Arrangement for horses. The Finance Division provided an overview of the MQF horse stream in the financial year (FY) 2023/2024 to October 2023. Based on the revised effort drivers for FY 2023/2024, the horse stream is showing that current prices are meeting actual costs for the year to date. Employee expenses are greater than budget due to staffing increases to manage higher horse volumes. At the beginning of the financial year, importation of 750 horses into MQF was expected, and revenue is up due to increased volumes. There has been an overall increase in horses through MQF each year since COVID-19.

An annual fees and charges review cycle will now be undertaken to ensure fees and charges align with the actual cost to deliver biosecurity activities. Industry will be provided with the opportunity to better inform the modelling of cost recovery. Fees and charges for biosecurity and imported food regulatory activities are currently being reviewed in preparation for FY 2024/2025. Industry is invited to provide updated projections of horse numbers for FY 2024/2025.

The draft 2024/2025 Cost Recovery Implementation Statement (CRIS) will be the basis for external consultation on proposed price changes. External consultation is expected to commence in March 2024. The final CRIS is estimated to be approved by the Finance Minister approximately April 2024. The CRIS will be published on the department's website before fees and charges commence on 1 July 2024.

Industry advised that horse numbers through MQF are not likely to exceed 750/800 head per year. One industry member advised that in January/February 2024, they will need to ship approximately 100 horses through NZ to Australia, rather than directly to Australia, because MQF is already booked at full capacity during this peak demand period. Other times of year are less popular and demand for bookings will be lower.

Industry asked how a surplus is managed and whether prices can go down under the CRIS. Finance Division advised that prices are set to cost recover through fees or charges and by committing to an annual cycle we can model the prices for each financial year with more relevant/current data. In essence with better informed modelling, prices can move either up or down. Industry advised the same service delivery in NZ is cheaper than in Australia, and asked how the department determines fair and equitable cost to industry for services provided. Finance Division offered an out of session meeting with industry to discuss horse import charges in detail.

Industry advised that the lead time for importing a horse is at least 6 to 12 weeks, and fee increases by the department that occur during that period are transferred to customers which does not reflect well on industry. Industry needs more than 3 months' notice of fee increases. Finance Division advised that the implementation of annual review cycles will improve the issue with smaller increases

expected with annual review. They will do their best to have updated figures to industry with as much notice as possible. However, several months of notice may not be achieved on the first annual review cycle. The draft CRIS will be submitted to the Minister mid-February for approval prior to industry consultation. After the Minister has endorsed the draft CRIS, industry consultation can start as early as possible (planning for early March 2024). It is anticipated that as our annual cycle is embedded the consultation period may be earlier and the notice period may begin to extend.

ACTION ITEM 10: Finance Division to meet with horse importers out of session to discuss horse importation charges in detail.

ACTION ITEM 11: Finance Division to consult with industry on the first annual CRIS cycle, due around March 2024.

10. Update on export checklist/s

The Veterinary and Export Meat Branch (VEMB) provided an update on export checklist development to improve regional consistency for horse export processes. A checklist for horse exports to Hong Kong was developed in collaboration with industry and is currently being trialled by the regions. Horse transport agents will liaise with their teams and provide VEMB information on which country is their next priority.

ACTION ITEM 12: Horse transport agents to provide input on their next priority market for development of further horse export checklists to VEMB.

11. Other business

The <u>International Equine Infectious Disease Conference</u> is being held in France 30 September – 4 October 2024.

Industry requested consolidation of HICC related information into a single email per meeting if possible. ABIB acknowledged meeting papers have been sent separately to provide industry with as much preparation time as possible, however, some papers are inevitably provided late. ABIB will continue to endeavour to provide papers in advance of meetings.

Updates to *Notice to Industry (NTI) 17: Sampling requirements for Equine Influenza testing* are being drafted to provide additional instructions regarding viral transport media (VTM). The two laboratories providing VTM and conducting testing for EI are ACDP and EMAI. Work instructions for MQF officers have been updated with information provided by ACDP. Advice from EMAI is still pending and, and the updated NTI 17 will be published after it is received and incorporated.

ACTION ITEM 13: ABIB to notify industry when updates to *NTI 17: Sampling requirements for Equine Influenza testing* are published.

12. Close and next meeting

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting, advising that minutes would be circulated to HICC for comment in the coming weeks. The next meeting is due in May 2024 and a range of date options will be provided.

Meeting finished at 11:25am.

SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS

Meeting 29

ACTION ITEM 1: ABIB will provide industry with a list of PEQ approved disinfectants.

ACTION ITEM 2: ABIB to investigate onshore alternatives to Virkon and advise if any new disinfectants can be used.

ACTION ITEM 3: ABB will investigate suitability of PCR testing for EVA for horse imports/exports.

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