



HORSE INDUSTRY CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Out-of-session meeting Japanese Encephalitis

4 March 2022

10:00am to 11:00am

Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

Teleconference

18 Marcus Clarke Street, Canberra ACT 2601

Attendees:

Internal

- Wayne Terpstra (**Chair**) (ABIB)
- Michelle Blowes (ABIB)
- Kym Russell (ABIB)
- Danielle Davis (ABIB)
- Kaylene Jones (ABIB)
- Peter Finnin (ABB)
- Kerry Daly (ABB)
- Jill Milan (ABB)
- Cherry Cheung (ABB)
- Amy Little (AHPB)
- Patrick Cass (LAE)
- Tamara Nolan (PEQ Operations)
- Colin Reynolds (PEQ Operations)
- Claudia Lin (Veterinary and Export Meat Group)
- Clare O'Shannessy (Veterinary and Export Meat Group)

Industry members

- James Gilkerson (Australian Veterinary Association)
- Toby Koenig (Racing NSW)
- Patricia Ellis (Australian Horse Industry Council)
- Meredith Flash (Australian Horse Industry Council)
- Jeffrey Wilkinson (Equine Veterinarians Australia)
- Cameron Croucher (Equine International Airfreight)
- Chris Burke (International Racehorse Transport / First Point Animal Services)
- Judith Medd (Harness Racing Australia)
- Josh Murphy (New Zealand Bloodstock)
- Karen Day (Racing Australia)

- Myles Foreman (Racing Australia)
- Graeme Cooke (VIC DPI)
- Josie Holmes (VIC DPI)
- Tom Reilly (Thoroughbred Breeders Australia)

Apologies

- Tania Ware (ABB)
- Ben Wilson (PEQ Operations)
- Leah Wells (Veterinary and Export Meat Group)
- Melanie Latter (Australian Veterinary Association)
- Sam Nugent (Australian Veterinary Association)
- Ross Kendell (Horse Industry Consultant)
- Andrew Small (Racing NSW)
- Andrew Hamilton (Equestrian Australia)
- Andrew Kelly (Harness Racing Australia)
- Cameron Brown (Harness Racing Australia)
- K Mullan (Harness Racing Australia)
- Jane Bennett (NSW DPI)
- Grace Forbes (Racing Victoria)
- Zoe Wells (Racing Victoria)
- Paul Bloodworth (Racing Victoria)

1. Welcome

The chair welcomed and thanked members for taking the time to attend this out-of-session meeting of the Horse Industry Consultative Committee (HICC).

HICC membership and attendance at meetings is normally restricted to members or one person who may be nominated in their place if the member is unable to attend. At this meeting there were also a number of additional attendees from state Government and industry. The HICC Terms of Reference were briefly detailed for the benefit of non-members including confidentiality until the minutes are agreed and published on the website.

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (the department) organised the meeting to inform industry of the detection of Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV) in pigs in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia and the implications for horse imports and exports.

2. Situation update

Dr Little introduced herself as a departmental representative of the Secretariat for the Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Disease (CCEAD) and provided an overview of Japanese Encephalitis virus followed by a brief report on the current situation in Australia.

Dr Little noted that JEV is a viral disease that is spread by mosquitoes. Waterbirds act as natural reservoirs for the virus, and mosquitos can spread the virus to people, horses, pigs and other animals. Pigs and some species of wild birds are amplifying hosts. People and horses are considered 'dead end' hosts - once infected, they do not play a role in transmitting the virus. In animals, signs of disease are most common in horses and pigs. Other animals can be infected, but typically, do not show signs of illness. These include cattle, sheep, goats, dogs, cats, bats, rodents, reptiles, amphibians, and birds.

Further information was provided about the current situation in Australia. This is the first time that the virus has been detected in southern Australia. Outbreaks of JEV have now been confirmed in piggeries in Queensland (1 infected piggery), New South Wales (8 infected piggeries), Victoria (3 infected piggeries), South Australia (1 infected piggery, 3 under investigation). There has been one confirmed human case, with others being investigated. Australia's Acting Chief Medical Officer has declared the unfolding situation in Australia concerning JEV a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance.

Dr Little detailed actions currently underway, noting that the department has issued emergency advice for veterinarians, pig and horse owners. Affected jurisdictions are using AUSVETPLAN to guide their response and are coordinating response plans with a focus on:

- Movement controls over pigs, their semen and embryos to minimise the spread of infection. Currently no movement restrictions are being applied for horses.
- Tracing and surveillance to determine the extent of infection.
- Epidemiological assessment to inform decisions on appropriate control measures and to establish the potential role of mosquito vectors and reservoir host species in the transmission of JEV in Australia.
- Mosquito management in selected areas (including trapping and sampling).
- Public awareness campaigns to encourage rapid reporting of suspected cases and facilitate cooperation from industry and the community.

3. Market access update

Dr Cass provided an update on certification for horse exports to markets that have conditions in their health certification relating to Japanese encephalitis virus. New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the Philippines all require freedom from JEV within a certain radius of the premises where horses resided for a period prior to export.

Dr Cass confirmed that premises freedom certification issued after 28/02/2022 remains valid. State and Territory authorities will need to reissue or reaffirm premises freedom information to certifying officers for certification issued before 28/02/2022.

Dr Ellis sought confirmation that private veterinarians will not be required to certify freedom for trade purposes. The department noted that JEV is nationally notifiable and state/territory notifiable which means that official veterinarians will complete all JEV certification.

There was discussion within the group around the export requirements. These depend on the specific health certificate that has been negotiated with the export market. New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the Philippines all require freedom within a radius of the premises where horses resided for a period prior to export. However, some trade is completed based on permit conditions when no veterinary health certificate has been agreed. The department requested exporters advise the department as soon as possible if JEV export conditions form part of the permit conditions for any upcoming exports.

Dr Ellis requested the definition of a case and the department advised that in terms of the CCEAD, a 'case' does not include horses because they are a dead-end host. The department explained that the definition applied in the current CCEAD is for the purposes of current emergency animal disease response only. In the context of horse exports, a 'case' is usually determined by the specific wording of the export condition but usually applies to all reported detections.

Mr Burke sought confirmation that the department has commenced negotiations with NZ and UK to remove the premises radius clause. The department acknowledged that the detection of JEV in Australian piggeries would likely have effects on export markets, particularly New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the Philippines and Macau. Dr Daly advised that the department is currently focussing on negotiations with export markets that require freedom for exports with a minimum radius. New Zealand is a major export market and has been contacted as a priority. A follow up meeting is scheduled with them in the next few days. The department will provide an update to horse transportation agents after this meeting.

Dr Daly noted that the United Kingdom's export certification also stipulates a minimum radius from a detected case of JEV. This radius is smaller than New Zealand's and there are fewer exports to the United Kingdom so this market has not been the immediate priority for negotiations. All export partners will be contacted to ensure they are aware of the detection and discussion with the United Kingdom will be initiated as soon as possible.

The group discussed the difficulty associated with conditions placed on animals that are dead-end hosts. The department noted that it is difficult to negotiate the removal of conditions with export markets for a disease that is OIE listed and whilst Australia's current animal health status is unclear.

ACTION ITEM 1: Animal Biosecurity Branch (ABB) to update horse transportation agents after meeting with New Zealand about market access for horse exports.

Addendum: after the out-of-session meeting, other horse industry members requested inclusion in this update. All HICC members will be provided with an update on market access for New Zealand horse exports.

4. Vaccination for horses

Dr Daly noted that vaccination of horses for JEV is required for some export markets and that there have been delays and vaccine shortages in the past. In Australia, the equine JEV vaccine is imported under a permit that limits its use to horses being prepared for export only. Dr Little informed the committee that AUSVETPLAN notes that industry may wish to voluntarily vaccinate high risk or high value horses in the event of an outbreak. If industry wishes to pursue this option, the department will need to explore this further with industry. The department highlighted that some of the issues around vaccination of Australian horses (not for export) include the vaccine approval process and the impact on vaccine supply for horses for export.

Dr Gilkerson questioned whether vaccination of domestic horses would help remove JEV conditions from exporting countries health certification. Dr Daly noted that though some countries gave the option for premises freedom or vaccination, other export markets do not currently allow vaccination. However, this would be a matter to be addressed with each exporting country, noting that vaccination is recommended by the OIE Code.

Dr Medd asked what the next steps for progressing the vaccination issue would be, noting that trade is very important for the Harness Racing Industry. Mr Terpstra advised that CCEAD and NMG would need to agree to initiate a departmental risk assessment to analyse the risks and impacts for use of a vaccine within the wider Australian horse population. Then if vaccination was approved for more widespread use in domestic horses, import permit applications and assessments for the vaccine would be required. Mr Terpstra undertook to report views of HICC to the CCEAD.

Horse exporters provided a brief update on current vaccine stocks for horses being exported. All had a current import permit for the vaccine and two of the three exporters held vaccine in stock.

5. HICC invitations – format

The department provided an update about the way HICC invitations are sent. Currently separate invitations are sent to each industry representative or organisation for privacy purposes. The department notes that HICC membership is known amongst its members and the emails addresses are publicly available. Moving forward, the department plans to send out invitations with email addresses visible to others in the committee.

ACTION ITEM 2: Industry participants to send an email to horses@awe.gov.au if they do not consent to their email address being made visible to other HICC members.

6. Other business

Dr Ellis enquired as to which department would progress changes to the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code regarding JEV, given horses are dead-end hosts and international trade is affected by outbreaks in other species. Mr Terpstra advised that the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer (OCVO) may assist industry with this request.

ACTION ITEM 3: Department to provide OCVO contact details to HICC members.

Industry members enquired about the testing process for JEV and the role of state government veterinarians and testing laboratories. Currently private veterinarians in Victoria are being asked to contact their state government veterinary authority with enquiries regarding suspected cases of JEV and how to sample for testing. The AUSVETPLAN requires laboratory confirmation of suspected cases but does not restrict this testing to the Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP). Testing for export purposes must be carried out by a NATA accredited laboratory

7. Close meeting and next meeting

The Chair closed the meeting and advised committee members that the department will aim for another update in around two weeks unless there are any major updates to provide before then.

Summary of action items

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