



## **HORSE INDUSTRY CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES**

#### **Out-of-session meeting Japanese Encephalitis**

**25 March 2022**

**11:00am to 12:00pm**

**Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment**

**Teleconference**

**18 Marcus Clarke Street, Canberra ACT 2601**

#### **Attendees:**

##### **Internal**

Wayne Terpstra (Chair) (ABIB)

Michelle Blowes (ABIB)

Kerry Daly (ABB)

Danni Davis (ABIB)

Dan Edson (OCVO)

Peter Finnin (ABB)

Nicole Heberle (VEMG)

Kaylene Jones (ABIB)

Claudia Lin (VEMG)

Amy Little (AHPB)

Acacia Pyner (LAE)

Kym Russell (ABIB)

Emma McGrath (ABIB)

Clare O'Shannessy (VEMG)

Tania Ware (ABB)

##### **Industry Members and Guests**

Jane Bennett (NSW DPI)

Chris Burke (International Racehorse Transport/First Point Animal Services)

Cameron Croucher (Equine International Airfreight)

Karen Day (Racing Australia)

Patricia Ellis (Australian Horse Industry Council)

Meredith Flash (Australian Horse Industry Council)

Grace Forbes (Racing Victoria)

James Gilkerson (Australian Veterinary Association)

Josie Holmes (VIC DPI)

Judith Medd (Harness Racing Australia)

Diana Miller (Primary Industries and Regions SA)  
Josh Murphy (New Zealand Bloodstock)  
Toby Koenig (Racing NSW)  
Martin Lenz (Queensland Racing Integrity Commission)  
Rachel Ratini (Equestrian Australia)  
Tom Reilly (Thoroughbred Breeders Australia)  
Ross Kendell (Horse Industry Consultant)  
Fiona Thompson (DAF Qld)  
Jeffrey Wilkinson (Equine Veterinarians Australia)

## **Apologies**

Paul Bloodworth (Racing Victoria)  
Patrick Cass (LAE)  
Myles Foreman (Racing Australia)  
Andrew Kelly (Harness Racing Australia)  
Sam Nugent (Australian Veterinary Association)  
Tamara Nolan (PEQ Operations)  
Brendan Schembri (PEQ Operations)  
Andrew Small (Racing NSW)  
Colin Reynolds (PEQ Operations)  
Zoe Wells (Racing Victoria)

## **1. Welcome**

The Chair provided an acknowledgement of country and thanked members for attending this out-of-session meeting of the Horse Industry Consultative Committee (HICC). Rachel Ratini, the new HICC member representing Equestrian Australia was welcomed.

Attendees were reminded that HICC meetings are normally restricted to members or one person who may be nominated in their place if that member is unable to attend. For these out-of-session Japanese Encephalitis meetings, additional guests and observers have been invited from industry and state and territory governments. 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 provide industry an update on the international trade impacts of Japanese Encephalitis Virus (JEV) detections in piggeries in Australia, and the use of vaccination against JEV in horses.

## **2. CCEAD update**

Dr Little was introduced as the departmental representative for the Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Disease (CCEAD), which is comprised of Chief Veterinary Officers (CVOs) from Commonwealth and state and territory governments, along with industry members from impacted industries. Dr Little provided a brief update on the current situation in Australia and advised there are increasing JEV awareness campaigns for both human and animal health. A website link to a media release from The Hon David Littleproud MP, Minister for Agriculture and Northern Australia about funding for the JEV response was provided:

<https://minister.awe.gov.au/littleproud/media-releases/controlling-spread-japanese-encephalitis-virus>.

CCEAD has produced movement guidelines for pigs and their reproductive materials, and how infected premises are resolved, which includes guidance for any horse premises that may become infected. Guidance on vector management for piggeries has been published on the Farm Biosecurity website, and guidelines for horses are in progress. So far, there are no movement restrictions on horses.

The National Animal Health Surveillance Plan is nearly finalised and is linked with broader work the Department of Health is doing on the human health side as part of the National JEV Plan. One key to the surveillance strategy will be to determine the extent of the spread, as well as the appropriate medium to long term surveillance. Surveillance activities will help determine whether the virus overwinters and may become seasonally epidemic, or disappears altogether as the weather changes between La Niña and El Niño. Several surveillance sub-groups have been formed under CCEAD, looking at risk factors for on-farm transmission, feral pigs, domestic pigs and horses.

The National Equine Working Group is led by Agriculture Victoria and consists of a diverse range of stakeholders. The working group have included social media and webinars in their communications, to ensure vets and horse owners are informed about JEV.

Interest in vaccinating horses has been confirmed, and the CCEAD has agreed that the Australian CVO, Dr Mark Schipp, will be the proponent for an emergency use permit application to the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) for an inactivated JEV vaccine for use in domestic horses. Two candidate vaccines have been identified, both manufactured in Japan.

It was noted that the pig industry had also asked for the importation of a pig vaccine. This requires a more complicated assessment as pigs require an initial dose with a live attenuated JEV vaccine followed by a booster with an inactivated vaccine. While the identified candidate inactivated vaccines can be used in both pigs and horses the vaccine applications and assessments will be handled separately to avoid conflation.

Dr Gilkerson questioned whether it was known if the live-attenuated pig vaccine could replicate to a sufficient level to reinfect mosquitoes. It was noted that for other live-attenuated vaccines, such as for African horse sickness, it had been demonstrated that horses vaccinated mid-season could result in the large-scale spread of vaccine strains. Dr Little and Dr Edson noted that the assessments had not been commenced for the pig vaccines, but the potential spread of vaccine strains would be considered as this is a critical aspect of any biosecurity risk assessment for an imported vaccine. Dr Finnin added that the department is already working closely with the APVMA on ensuring sufficient information is provided about safety and efficacy.

### **3. Market access update**

Dr Ware advised that Animal Biosecurity Branch (ABB) has reviewed import conditions for export markets with JEV conditions and that most concern is due to JEV freedom in a set radius around premises of origin. New Zealand is the main market of concern, as they take 56% of Australia's export horse trade. ABB had a productive meeting with the New Zealand Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) on 21 March 2022 where they were advised the Import Health Standards for horses from Australia will likely be updated to remove JEV conditions. No timeline was provided for finalising the update, but MPI are prioritising the work due to the importance of the trade to the horse industry. ABB also previously discussed vaccination of horses for export to New Zealand as a measure that could be put in place. A sample certificate was provided including vaccination as an option. If exporters need an alternative to the current conditions which require JEV freedom in a 100km radius around the premises of origin, before the IHS has been updated, ABB could ask New Zealand for a variation to allow the trade.

Mr Burke advised that they'd been told on Wednesday that it would take at least two weeks for New Zealand to update the IHS. Mr Burke was aware that it would take additional time for the department to process once updated wording was provided. Dr Ware advised that ABB had drafted a pre-emptive export health certificate to minimise the time required to agree an updated certificate. Mr Terpstra (Chair) advised that the department will inform HICC as soon as formal advice is provided that the new arrangement is active.

Dr Forbes asked if there was any requirement for their industry participants to be quarantining horses for three weeks prior to export, as several had advised they were doing this to ensure horses would be eligible for export. Dr Ware advised that the current requirement is for JEV freedom in a radius of 100km of premises horses were kept for the 21 days prior to export, but there is no requirement for quarantine. Dr Finnin added that any horse that was inside that radius would need to be moved outside of it for 21 days to become eligible for export to New Zealand. Dr Finnin's understanding is that there will be obligations for the person in charge of the horse to report any clinical signs consistent with JEV to MPI until 21 days after arrival in New Zealand.

Mr Burke advised that International Racehorse Transport (IRT) is pre-emptively moving horses outside the radius of cases of JEV and horses for export in the coming weeks would likely be eligible for export under the existing conditions. IRT had also heard that there was early talk of New Zealand imposing post arrival quarantine conditions for horses from Australia, but that it was no longer being considered.

Dr Gilkerson asked whether the JEV freedom radius would include cases of JEV detected in other animals or humans. Dr Finnin advised that any premises where an animal tests positive to JEV would be considered infected, so horses would need to be kept more than 100km from any animal case. This would not include detections in mosquitoes or humans. Dr Ware is keeping in close contact with state and territory veterinarians issuing premises of origin declarations, to ensure communication about the requirements remains clear. Dr Holmes advised that the Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP) has definitions for confirmed JEV cases.

Dr Ware advised that the required notification to the Animal Health Organisation (OIE) had been made, and that other horse export markets with JEV conditions include the United Kingdom and Macau. The United Kingdom already includes conditions for vaccination, and the Australian CVO recently had a routine meeting with the UK CVO, and advised we are very open to discussions on JEV requirements. The department is aware that shuttle stallions from the United Kingdom are due to arrive in August and that there will be race meetings in the UK where Australian horses will travel to compete. The existing conditions for export to Macau can be met, and Macau has not contacted the department about JEV. Agricultural Posts overseas have been notified and told where to direct enquiries if a country approaches them about horse trade and JEV.

Dr Ware also advised that the department had received a question about moving horses to the airport and passing through an area inside the 100km radius for JEV. New Zealand had advised they were comfortable if reasonable measures were in place, like vector screening and vents shut on trailers to exclude mosquitoes. It would be useful if exporters could provide the department with information on how they could provide assurances to certifying officers on methods for moving horses through affected zones en route to the airport.

Mr Croucher asked if any contact had been made by the Philippines. Dr Ware advised they had been notified through official channels but no contact had been made by the Philippines to date.

**ACTION ITEM 1:** Exporters to provide Live Animal Exports and certifying officers in Veterinary and Export Meat Branch information on procedures for moving horses to the airport, if passing within 100km of premises that have reported a case of JEV in an animal.

**ACTION ITEM 2:** The department will inform HICC as soon as formal advice is provided that the new import health standard (IHS) for New Zealand is active.

#### **4. Vaccination for horses**

Dr Edson from the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer (OCVO) advised that CCEAD had requested the Commonwealth to apply for an emergency use permit from the APVMA for a JEV vaccine for horses, with Australian CVO Dr Mark Schipp as the proponent. Dr Edson is representing Dr Schipp in the application and has requested technical information from the Japanese manufacturers for the two candidate vaccines, working through Agricultural Post contacts in Tokyo. Japan's Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry provided a contact from their pharmaceutical affairs review and management section, and the department hopes this will fast track the provision of the technical dossiers on candidate vaccine safety, efficacy and chemistry. These are required for the APVMA's assessment of the emergency use permit application.

The department will also need to apply for import permits for the two candidate vaccines and has discussed the application process with the Animal and Biological Imports Branch (ABIB). ABIB advised that completion of the department's *'Inactivated veterinary vaccines: Summary of information required for biosecurity risk assessment'* document by the two Japanese vaccine manufacturers would help streamline their assessment of the two import permit applications.

The emergency use permit application cannot be lodged until the full dossiers on safety, efficacy and chemicals have been provided to the APVMA by the Japanese vaccine manufacturers. There are also technical issues to work through with the state and territory governments and industry, such as the proposed permit duration (e.g. 1, 2, 5, 10 years or ongoing), and the parameters for vaccine use in the domestic horse population. Working groups, such as the existing JEV Response Equine Working Group identified earlier as a sub-group under CCEAD, will be approached to seek agreement on the parameters for use. Other issues to work through include the supply chain for vaccine importation, storage, distribution, and use. The APVMA may also identify additional controls or conditions of use in their approval of the emergency use permit.

Dr Gilkerson asked how long it might be before the vaccines could arrive in Australia, and what will happen with vaccines for use in export horses. Dr Edson advised that it takes an average 26 days (range of 14 - 193 days) for the APVMA to assess emergency use permit applications once they are lodged, and the department is hopeful the assessment will be completed in a timely manner. The APVMA is aware of the urgency of the situation and will work with the department once the required information has been provided. It is not clear how long the manufacturers may take to provide the information. Mr Terpstra (Chair) advised that the import permit assessment, which is distinct from the APVMA emergency use permit application, can likely be done in parallel and in a similar timeframe once all information is provided. This is in part dependent on the vaccine manufacturers providing the department with the specific information required for a biosecurity risk assessment of inactivated veterinary vaccines, and could take additional time if the required information is not provided in that format.

Dr Gilkerson asked if this information has already been provided, given there is already a vaccine in use for exporting horses from Australia. Mr Terpstra advised that unfortunately gaps had been identified in the existing approval, and that work was underway to address those gaps at the same time. Dr Edson added that the vaccines currently used for export do not have APVMA approval of their active constituent (inactivated JEV) and are therefore not registered for use in Australia, but they do have an import permit. Dr Finnin advised that the previous work done on that vaccine would make for an easier turnaround, but the second candidate vaccine had no prior assessment.

Mr Burke advised that there can be difficulties in obtaining the required information because the APVMA needs one set of information, while ABIB requires a different set. Overseas manufacturers are averse to putting multiple dossiers together for small markets, providing their intellectual property, and for Japan there is also a language barrier. Dr Edson advised that the department is aware of these issues, and that a translator had been identified at Post in Tokyo. The department is also approaching Japan's CVO to try to expedite the process and make it as smooth as possible. Mr Terpstra added that ABIB is aware manufacturers may prefer to provide separate dossiers around elements of their manufacturing process, to provide additional assurance of protection of their intellectual property.

Dr Blowes asked if Dr Edson could clarify the differences in the assessment and use for vaccines approved for use in horses for export as opposed to use in the domestic market. Dr Edson clarified that the department would be applying for a minor use permit for vaccine use in export horses, and an emergency use permit for vaccine use in domestic horses as part of the broader JEV response, as advised by the APVMA. Dr Edson reiterated that the department would consult with state and territory CVOs as well as industry participants in defining the parameters for domestic use of the vaccine. Dr Finnin added that the emergency use permit can have any validity period set, but that for ongoing animal health management, a commercial arrangement will need to be found, for example, an Australian company looking to partner with the manufacturers in Japan to import the vaccine in the longer term. This would require a separate and much more detailed process with the APVMA, including approval of a new active constituent (inactivated JEV) and registration of specific vaccines. The emergency use permit is designed to get the vaccine to Australia for immediate use in accordance with defined parameters as part of the emergency response

to JEV. In the longer term, the importation, storage and distribution of JEV vaccines for horses would require a commercial solution.

Mr Burke stated that vaccination against JEV is already an import requirement for horses from some markets, and for horses that are exported for competition before returning to Australia. As such, the states should be made aware there are already many horses in Australia that have been vaccinated against JEV. Mr Burke would like the validity of conditions around JEV vaccination for import tabled at the next formal HICC meeting. Dr Blowes stated that there could be a different level of biosecurity risk relating to other diseases that could be transmitted through the JEV vaccine for horses that are leaving the country compared with those permanently resident, and agreed that the import conditions for JEV will need review.

Mr Burke expressed concerns that positive cases could be conflated if testing doesn't differentiate vaccinated from infected animals. Dr Finnin advised that other flaviviruses and alphaviruses can also complicate interpretation, but the ACDP has clear guidelines on how to interpret serological testing for horses.

Dr Wilkinson asked if the application for the vaccines had already been lodged with the APVMA. Dr Edson advised that applicants are given only 7 days to provide all required information to the APVMA after submitting the online form, so it is important to collate all the information in the background first. The vaccine manufacturers have not yet indicated how long it may take to provide the required information, but once that has been provided, the application will be lodged online as quickly as possible. The APVMA are aware of the urgency and are waiting to assess the application as soon as it arrives.

## 5. Other business

Dr Lenz asked the current definition of a positive case in a horse. Dr Finnin advised serial serological testing demonstrating a rising titre, or demonstration of virus, which would usually be tested on samples taken post mortem.

Dr Gilkerson noted that for sampling an acutely febrile horse with neuro signs, we are now focussed on JEV, but Hendra should still be the primary differential diagnosis. From a workplace health and safety perspective, it is important to rule out Hendra first, before taking post mortem samples for JEV. Dr Little advised that during discussions with states and territories at CCEAD, there was agreement to continue providing existing advice for veterinarians on the state and territory government websites, to advise that post mortem examination should not be performed where a horse displayed neurological signs, unless/until Hendra virus had been excluded. This could result in missing JEV sampling opportunities, but it was important for personnel safety.

## 6. Close meeting and next meeting

The Chair closed the meeting and advised committee members that the department will aim for another out-of-session follow up in three weeks if there is new information to share. If there are any major updates to provide earlier, the meeting may be brought forward.

The next formal HICC meeting is notionally to be set for May, but due to the Australian Government entering caretaker mode in the lead up to elections, it might be wise to postpone until the election has passed. As such, the meeting may be set for June 2022. The HICC Secretariat will send out proposed dates closer to this time.

## Summary of action items

**ACTION ITEM 1:** Exporters to provide Live Animal Exports and certifying officers in Veterinary and Export Meat Branch information on procedures for moving horses to the airport, if passing within 100km of premises that have reported a case of JEV in an animal.

**ACTION ITEM 2:** The department will inform HICC as soon as formal advice is provided that the new import health standard (IHS) for New Zealand is active.