



NOTICE TO INDUSTRY 14

Policy on riding horses at the Mickleham Quarantine Facility

Introduction

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) requires all horses imported into Australia from approved countries other than New Zealand and New Caledonia to complete a minimum of 14 days post-arrival quarantine at the government's biosecurity facility in Mickleham, Victoria or at a privately run approved arrangement (AA) site.

During post-arrival quarantine, horses are isolated from the Australian horse population and monitored for any diseases of biosecurity concern to Australia, including equine influenza (EI). EI is a highly infectious disease of horses that spreads rapidly through direct contact between horses, contact between people and infected horses, and through contact with contaminated fomites (inanimate objects). The movement of people and objects out of the quarantine area during the quarantine period poses risk of introduction of EI to the Australian horse population. This is what occurred in Sydney in 2007 and resulted in Australia's only EI outbreak.

Biosecurity

The primary principle of biosecurity is to isolate the imported horses from any direct or indirect contact to the Australian horse population thereby reducing the risk of disease transmission to very low. This is achieved by maintaining a tight control over the movement of people and objects out of the quarantine facility while horses subject to biosecurity control are present. At the Mickleham Quarantine Facility (MQF), only those industry personnel essential for the husbandry of the horses are permitted entry to the facility e.g. grooms, veterinarians and occasionally farriers, who have completed an induction and training process.

In accordance with quarantine principles, the risk of an outbreak of an exotic equine disease such as EI in the Australian horse population increases with personnel movements out of the quarantine area, especially when those personnel are likely to have contact with Australian horses. Horse riders and equipment are not essential for

the daily husbandry of the horses therefore, in the interests of biosecurity, they are not permitted at MQF.

Facilities

MQF is designed to meet the basic needs of horses during quarantine. This includes the stable complex for animal housing and provides the opportunity for some daily maintenance exercise through the use of turn out yards, a paddock and a horse walker. MQF does not provide facilities to allow for training and riding of horses.

Occupational Health and Safety

Horses are large and dangerous animals. Each year in Australia, more deaths are associated with incidents with horses (mostly falls while riding) than with any other animal, including sharks, snakes and spiders (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-17/horse-more-likely-to-kill-you-than-bees-wasps-snakes-spiders/8188842>). Increasing contact between people and horses during quarantine, and particularly allowing riding of horses in quarantine, would increase the likelihood of a serious incident to staff or industry personnel within MQF.

Insurance and Liability

MQF was not built to facilitate the training and riding of horses in various disciplines i.e. dressage, jumping, race training. The current insurance policy protects personnel and horses from incidents relating to the maintenance of horse husbandry and welfare in the context of biosecurity control, and not for incidents relating to riding / training of horses.

Operational implications

Extra people and equipment moving into and out of MQF would necessitate additional departmental supervision. This would impact staff availability for other tasks and potentially increase costs for importers.

Summary

The duration of post-arrival quarantine for horses is short (14 days). MQF is designed to provide for the basic needs of horses under biosecurity control which includes the provision for natural exercise (turnout yard, paddock, horse walker). Given the biosecurity risks associated with the increased movements out of the compound, the human health risks associated with riding/training of horses, and the current insurance cover being specific for only basic horse husbandry during quarantine, DAFF considers horse riding during post-arrival quarantine is unnecessary, and does not plan to facilitate the building of horse riding/training facilities.

Alternative Option

AAs may be entered into with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) which allow operators to manage biosecurity risks using their own premises, facilities, equipment and people, with departmental compliance monitoring in the form of supervision of some procedures and auditing. The [7.12 Approved Arrangement conditions for imported horses](#) outline the requirements that must be met to register an AA with the department and provides the avenue by which horses that require consistent riding/training within quarantine may be imported. Information on how to apply for an AA site is available [here](#).