



Queensland Chamber of Agricultural Societies Inc.

HENDRA VIRUS - BIOSECURITY POLICY STATEMENT

Preamble

From 1994 to 2012 inclusive, there had been 62 sporadic confirmed cases of Hendra virus infection in horses. Most have been as a result of spill-over of infection from flying foxes (also called fruit bats) which are the natural hosts of this virus. These cases have all occurred in Queensland and north-east New South Wales. One dog in Queensland (2011) and one dog in NSW (2013) have tested positive to Hendra virus.

Hendra virus can and has caused fatalities in humans and horses. The Queensland Chamber of Agricultural Societies Inc. (QCAS) primary consideration is the health and safety of all people and animals at events hosted by QCAS affiliated Agricultural Show Societies and on grounds or in facilities that are managed by these associations. QCAS has established this policy with the safety of human life as the highest priority.

About Hendra virus

Transmission of the virus from an infected horse to one or more companion horses can occur, usually through very close contact. People have sometimes been infected with the virus from sick horses. Tragically four of the seven people infected during the period 1994 to 2012 have died and one reportedly has serious, ongoing health problems. Five of the seven were either veterinarians or were assisting veterinarians.

Prevention and Biosecurity

It is important for all horse owners to have good biosecurity measures in place regardless of where they are located.

The Royal National and Industrial Association (RNA) adopted Australian best practice in the fight against Hendra virus, with all horses attending or competing at the Royal Queensland Show from 2013 requiring mandatory Hendra virus vaccination.

The Royal Agricultural Society of Queensland (RASQ) have adopted a policy to ensure Event Organisers using their facilities are practicing best practice biosecurity policies and although they are not prepared at this time to enforce a mandatory vaccination policy they are actively encouraging all livestock owners that use the Showgrounds to investigate their associations risk management practices to reduce the risk for human and animals at their events.

The Queensland Horse Industry Alliance Inc. (QHIA) encourages event organisers to follow the Queensland Governments guidelines for holding an Equestrian event.

Equine Veterinarians Australia (EVA) advise that the Hendra virus vaccine is a safe and highly effective tool against infection. Developed in Australia by CSIRO, the vaccine provides the strongest possible protection against infection from Hendra virus.

Ensuring that unvaccinated horses do not attend events will prevent the occurrence of a Hendra virus outbreak at competitions. Horse associations have members, volunteers and employees and have a duty of care in health and safety to these people. The best and most sensible step that can be taken to uphold duty of care is to strongly encourage the members of horse organisations to have their horse vaccinated.

At its monthly meeting, on 20 August 2013, the Board of Equestrian Qld (EQ) reaffirmed its current position in relation to voluntary vaccination and will continue to ensure all information related to Hendra virus and the associated vaccine, is provided to members in a timely manner so they may discuss their particular circumstance with their private Vets.

On 30 July 2013 Equestrian NSW announced its policy regarding the Hendra Virus vaccination and requirements for all horses entering EA/FEI events in NSW where any horses stay overnight at the event venue i.e. Hendra Vaccinated Events (HVEs), to be vaccinated against Hendra Virus as of 1st January, 2014.

QCAS is in no doubt that should a case of Hendra virus be identified at an agricultural show significant consequences to event organisers and the associated venues would be expected.

Vaccination

The new Hendra virus vaccine safeguards the health and wellbeing of horses and their owners/handlers by breaking the cycle of transmission from flying foxes to horses and also from horses to humans.

The producer of the Hendra virus vaccine, Zoetis, has rationalised the cost of the vaccine during the initial vaccination phase. Zoetis has an efficient means of tracking vaccinations and event organisers are able to interrogate the Zoetis database for purposes of verifying vaccination status of entries.

Zoetis is advising that horses require an initial course of two doses given three to six weeks apart followed by a booster every six months.

The Zoetis vaccine has proven to be an extremely effective and safe vaccine.

Facility Tenure and Management

QCAS recognises that affiliated Agricultural and Show Societies do not always have control of access to their facilities other than during their scheduled events and that at times these facilities are common use with a number of equestrian associations, owners or trustees.

Management Committees are reminded that where a facility is designated *For Showground Use Only* by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines (DNRM) the Agricultural Society is the primary user of the facility and controls the facilities for the purposes of bio security.

Close liaison with the facility managers will be required to ensure all bio security measures are in place on a continuous basis.

In some cases it may be necessary for Agricultural and Show Societies to relinquish responsibility to facility managers, trustees or local government where an agreement on bio security cannot be agreed. In these cases Management Committee should seek written confirmation to this effect.

Position Statement

QCAS has a duty of care to provide Queensland's 128 affiliated Agricultural and Show Societies with guidelines and recommendations on the management of Hendra virus during their annual agricultural show and other events managed by the Society.

QCAS considers that each Agricultural and Show Society has a responsibility to its members, horses, event organisers and venues to implement a policy to protect equine and human health for the entire community by all available means.

Widespread vaccination would effectively prevent future human and equine fatalities.

Mandatory requirements and recommendations

QCAS **mandates** that:

- *Horse Health Declarations* be completed for all horses attending QCAS affiliated Agricultural Shows and other equestrian events organised and run by the Society (See Note 1).
- Affiliated Agricultural and Show Society Management Committee's implement a *Biosecurity Plan* for their annual show and any other horse related event or activity organised and run by the Society (See Note 1).
- Persons responsible for individual horses entering onto QCAS affiliated Agricultural and

Show Society managed facilities at any time complete a *Horse Health Declaration* (See Note 2).

- Completed *Horse Health Declarations* be held on record by the Societies Secretary for no less than 6 months.

QCAS **highly recommends** that:

- Affiliated Agricultural and Show Societies managing their own facility ensure that organisations utilising their facilities have a designated *Biosecurity Manager* and maintain a current *Biosecurity Plan* including the compulsory completion of *Horse Health Declarations* for the event or activity being conducted on the Societies grounds.
- Equestrian Competitors at Queensland Agricultural Shows vaccinate ALL their horses, competition or otherwise, if they are at risk. Risk factors include: living in a flying fox habitat area, humans having close contact with their horses and/or competing against horses from other areas or with unknown vaccination status.
- Horse owners to review disease protocols and take all steps to reduce infection risks. Reference should be made to the Biosecurity Queensland 'Information for Horse Owners Pack' which can be downloaded at www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au or by phone 132523.
- Management Committees ensure they establish appropriate protection based on available information for their area. Biosecurity Queensland, Animal Health Australia and local authorities should be consulted when developing this protection plan.

Note 1 A Biosecurity Plan template and Horse Health Declarations along with associated forms have been developed in consultation with Biosecurity Queensland and are available at www.queenslandshows.com.au for download.

Note 2 One horse is considered private use; two or more horses from different properties are considered a gathering. In both instances Horse Health Declarations are required if entering on QCAS affiliated Agricultural Society property.

Note 3 For information on the Hendra virus vaccine, visit www.health4horses.com.au

For more information contact:

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Ratified by the QCAS Board, 11 November 2013
