

## **SUBMISSION TO THE CALLINAN ENQUIRY ON EQUINE INFLUENZA**

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I have been employed by the above company in the capacity of General Manager since September 1996 and have had regular contact with the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) during the term of my employment. Areas covered with AQIS include all matters pertinent to the import and export of horses and the export of livestock (cattle, sheep, goats, buffalo and camelids). I have also had regular communication with Biosecurity Australia (BA) relating to changes in import/export protocol.

My overall observations of AQIS are:

AQIS Canberra:

- Poor and ineffective communication with State offices
- Regular staff rotations cause disruption to services
- Some positions filled with part-time staff, which causes disruption to services
- Staff permitted to take leave during a crisis (EI outbreak)
- Staff regularly unavailable due to meetings, rather than actively engaged on the job
- Work ethic totally guided by legislation
- Staff lacking initiative to recommend changes to legislation to improve work practices
- Endemic fear of repercussions should an incorrect decision be made, often resulting in no decision at all or passing the matter to another staff member or department for response
- Areas of responsibility not clearly defined
- Staff regularly do not respond in a timely manner to queries
- Accounts are issued on a per consignment basis and are individually payable within 30 days. Payment on a monthly statement would be preferable and more cost effective
- Whilst some individual staff members provide an excellent customer service, the majority of staff are dismissive and have a poor work ethic and understanding of the nature of commercial operations, which AQIS services

AQIS State offices:

- Inconsistent practices between state offices
- Under staffing, particularly Melbourne and Sydney
- In Melbourne, the former Chief Veterinary Officer was not replaced on his retirement, so AQIS staff must continually defer to Canberra, thus delaying a response to the customer
- Suggestions for better work practices dismissed by AQIS Canberra
- Given time constraints and understaffing, State AQIS Offices provide a satisfactory level of customer service

AQIS Post Arrival Quarantine Stations

- Areas of responsibility not clearly defined
- Cost structure is assessed on the number of horses per the individual importer's consignment, rather than on the number of horses in the station at any one time

- Quarantine intake times unfairly advantage one importer over another

Eastern Creek:

- Regular change in management has caused poor communication and disruption to the service provider
- Current manager regularly unavailable due to meetings
- AQIS veterinarian takes blood samples from horses for national serum bank storage

Spotswood:

- Private veterinarian takes blood samples from horses for national serum bank storage

AQIS Airside Melbourne

- Non-veterinarian staff inspect and clear horses on arrival
- Poorly trained staff members
- Subsequent to the Equine Influenza outbreak, an unprofessional attitude of staff members
- Subsequent to the Equine Influenza outbreak, an over reaction and poorly thought response for risk management of quarantine horses
- Procedure changes for off load of animals continually changed during offloads

Biosecurity Australia:

- Understaffed
- Slow to respond to risk analysis
- Little understanding of the nature of commercial operations
- Will not accept email as a form of communication in respect to requests for investigations
- Minimal cooperation post EI outbreak

The first news I had regarding the outbreak of equine influenza was from Sydney Horse Transport, advising of an unconfirmed report that all truck movements were halted due to a suspect case of equine influenza.

During the equine influenza outbreak, I liaised with horse owners, Australia-wide State Department of Primary Industries, AQIS Canberra and State Offices, road freight transport companies, practising veterinarians, testing laboratories and the Australian Horse Industry Council.

My observations during the disease outbreak include:

AQIS and BA:

- Poor communication from AQIS Canberra to State offices. NSW AQIS had no knowledge of any EI outbreak. Victorian AQIS had no knowledge that horses were detained indefinitely in Spotswood Quarantine Station
- AQIS Canberra took approx 48 hours to confirm EI outbreak to my employer
- AQIS staff members did not appear to have any training in the control or management of an emergency disease outbreak.
- Areas of AQIS responsibility and DPI responsibility not clearly defined.
- AQIS Canberra and BA did not work effectively together to assist exporters with the resumption of horse exports and hindered resumption of trade to the Philippines.

- On the resumption of the import of horses BA and AQIS were slow to respond and have still not finalised conditions for the import of horses from Japan

Departments of Primary Industry (DPI):

- Did not communicate effectively with the equine industry, local DPI offices and AQIS
- Were ill-prepared and understaffed to manage and control an emergency disease outbreak
- Did not employ adequately trained staff to respond the publics' enquiries
- Inconsistent response from DPI staff members
- Did not work well together to keep terminology used consistent between the states for ease of public understanding of movement permits
- Bowed to pressure from revenue raising sector of the industry
- At times appeared to work against each other
- Ill defined areas of responsibility between the DPIs and AQIS
- Had poor understanding of the extent of interstate and local horse movements

Australian Horse Industry Council:

- Undervalued, under funded and under resourced

**Exposure recommendations**

Any recommendations made can only be of a temporary nature, pending a decision from AQIS and BA on the future of quarantine in Australia. The most practical, efficient and cost effective solution for all concerned is to delay recommendations until AQIS and BA have made their decision in respect to quarantine.

To this end, I support the recommendation for AQIS to make a decision within three months of the closing of the enquiry. (Quarantine Stations 23.).

In respect to the recommendations, I have immediate concerns with the following points:

**Inspector General of Horse Importation-External Auditor**

Subject to the final AQIS/BA decision in respect to management of quarantine the recommended role of an IG will require revision. Industry must be consulted in all respects to the appointment and duties involved.

**Pre export quarantine**

19 (f) will over seas testing laboratories be able to meet the requirement and how will this be implemented and audited?

19(h) Allows no scope for change in vaccine name or supply difficulties

**Airport Facilities**

21. Who will be responsible for the supply of a holding facility at Melbourne Airport and who will bear the cost?

Some airline services arrive only into Melbourne and the recommendation would preclude imports from countries that have no airfreight service into Melbourne.

**Quarantine Stations**

22 and 23. I agree with the exposure recommendations that post arrival quarantine should not be privatised. However, this requires a commitment from AQIS/BA to either build new facilities or buy back the existing facilities at Eastern Creek and Spotswood.



24. I am extremely concerned with the statement that [... limited the spread of equine influenza when introduced into that quarantine station in August 2007.] My employer never received advice from AQIS or other party that any horse on the station was infected with EI. The test results received by my employer were all negative for EI.

Further, my employer was advised by Dr Ainslie Brown, AQIS Canberra by email on 29 February that Thirdly, the testing results currently being presented in the Inquiry and elsewhere are the product of a retrospective investigation using samples not available at the time and tested against a strain of virus (Sydney 07) not only not available but unidentified.

Irrespective, all imported horses on the same consignment travel together on an aircraft, through which air regularly circulates. Should any horse be carrying an undetected infection at the time of arrival, it is not inconceivable that all horses on the consignment would have been exposed to the infection during the flight and during the PEQ. The separation of horses of the same inbound consignment therefore appears to be unnecessary. (Airport Facilities 20)

25. Quarantine intakes may include horses from Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, USA, UAE, UK and EU. The recommendation to limit the number of countries from which horses are imported at any one quarantine intake and to impose a degree of separation between groups of horses from different countries will effectively reduce and limit the number of animals that may be imported at any one time. This will presumably increase the costs to the horse owner.

Further, post arrival quarantine stations would be under utilised, thus necessitating an increased cost to compensate for lost revenue in budget estimates.

Shuttle stallion bookings may be compromised, as with the import of pregnant mares that must be imported no more than seven months pregnant. Returning race horses may also be compromised.

Presumably to accommodate the recommendation, reconstruction of both quarantine stations will be required. Who will pay for this?

25 (f) Impractical to apply swipe card access unless new facilities are built.

### **Charges**

Industry must be consulted before any change to the cost structure is implemented.

An increase in cost will preclude the import of horses for owners relocating to Australia and will also reduce the number of imports for the hobby/small breeder sector. The recommendation to increase the cost to the thoroughbred sector may also reduce the number of stallions imported.

The recommended higher charge for a thoroughbred stallion is discriminatory and may contravene fair trading legislation.

### **Powers of GVH and IG**

41(b) Recommendation is not practical and apparently does not consider post arrival procedure at quarantine stations to be adequate