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Callinan Enquiry on Equine influenza
PO Box 72
Queen Victorai Building
NSW 1230

Dear Mr Callinan,

I apologise for this late submission to your enquiry on Equine Influenza, and trust that it may not be too late to be considered.

As background, I am a veterinarian of 46 years experience, hold a PhD in reproductive physiology majoring in semen biochemistry and artificial insemination in ruminants. For most of my career I have been engaged in reproductive research in sheep and cattle, but in my early career in North Queensland I was actively engaged in equine clinical work and have practised sporadically in that species since.

Because of my experience and research expertise in artificial breeding, and my personal experience of working as a volunteer veterinarian with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries during the EI outbreak, I wish to offer the following comments to your enquiry.

1. Importation and use of foreign shuttle stallions in the Australian thoroughbred industry.

From the technical and veterinary information available to me, there seems little doubt that the introduction of the Equine Influenza disease into Australia resulted from a foreign infective/carrier shuttle stallion shedding the organism, with subsequent infection of other animals then occurring and the disease spreading widely.

I have no knowledge of the quarantine situation which may have allowed the disease to be released initially, a situation which your enquiry will establish, and make no comments on this matter.

However I wish to comment on the practice of importing foreign stallions for breeding purposes, on short term introductions of racehorses, thereby potentially exposing the Australian equine industry to further outbreaks of EI or other exotic equine diseases, and on suggestions for a mandatory and ongoing vaccination program.

The use of Artificial Insemination (AI) using either fresh, chilled or frozen semen has been accepted breeding technology in most farm animals for over 50 years. In the case of ruminants and pigs, the ban on importation of live animals, while, under strict conditions allowing importation of frozen semen, has enabled importation of supposedly superior genetic material, but has prevented the accidental importation of exotic infectious agents. These industries have therefore been largely protected from these threats.

In the case of the Australian equine industries, a large majority of the horse breed societies allow the registration of progeny derived from AI and/or in some cases embryo transfer (ET) and have mechanisms in

place to control use of the technology, thereby protecting the owners investments. To the best of my knowledge, breeders and owners belonging to these different horse breed societies, have no problems with this approach, which enables the use of internationally sourced frozen semen to increase the available gene pool for many breeds.

The question must then be asked "Why are we continuing to allow the importation of shuttle stallions within the thoroughbred industry with all its now demonstrated risks, not insisting on a total ban of live equine importations, and requiring that any foreign equine genetic material only be sourced through semen and embryo imports" ?

Why, if other livestock industries including other equine breed societies accept that genetic imports can only be via semen and embryos in order to protect against disease threats, should the thoroughbred industry be treated in any different manner?

I suspect the simplest answer is that the political power and the perceived? economic benefits of the commercial equine breeding and racing industry has meant that governments and others have had difficulty saying "no" to this incredibly influential industry group. However if one can use an even stronger term, the "greed" of this sector of the thoroughbred industry in continuing to resist the use of artificial breeding technology, and in continuing to insist on the availability of shuttle stallions is really all about maximising income from service fees, regardless of any adverse overall impacts on the economic livelihood of related industries and individuals.. These attitudes will have brought immense pressure to your enquiry, to government and to the forthcoming review of AQIS, in order to support the thoroughbred industry shortsighted and insular views.

I urge that your enquiry reject these arguments, and develop **recommendations to ban importation of shuttle stallions on the basis of minimising future disease threats to the entire Australian equine and associated livestock industries.**

Every other Australian livestock industry, and other sectors of the equine industry accept the need to protect the disease status of their operations through quarantine and legislation, yet are able to widen their genetic pool as outlined above. Equity, common sense, the principle of a fair go for all, protection of allied industries and the fact that technological capability for equine breeding is available to all, clearly indicates that the thoroughbred industry should be treated no differently to other industries and sectors. This means a ban on allowing the practice of shuttle stallions, and the thoroughbred industry accepting that AI is a legitimate breeding technology.

2. Importation of foreign racehorses

These animals, whether previously vaccinated or not against EI, also pose a considerable threat to the Australian equine industry. There seems to be a view amongst the thoroughbred racing fraternity that this sector of the equine industry should be treated differently to all other livestock (equine or otherwise) sectors because of the internationalisation of the racing industry. This attitude ignores the very real devastation that has occurred, as a result of the recent EI outbreak, to most other sectors of the Australian pleasure and performance horse (and the impact on the beef and sheep industries through restriction of horse movements for mustering) industries, their service sectors and others working with horses, resulting from movement restrictions to control the disease.

In my view, and as an equity issue for protection of the remainder of the equine industries, there is a very strong case for **totally banning short term introductions of foreign racehorses** originating from countries where EI is endemic. There is just no justification for one sector of the equine industry putting at risk other sectors of that industry, other livestock industries and the livelihoods of so many Australians, purely for the sake of gaming activities by a few.



3. Calls by the thoroughbred industry for mandatory vaccination against EI.

Press and media reports suggest that the thoroughbred and racing industries support an approach of mandatory vaccinations of thoroughbreds against EI. Should this be their actual position, then in effect they are saying that in respect of shuttle stallions and short term introduced racehorses, the *status quo* will continue, and we will be exposed at some later stage to a further outbreak of EI. The call also ignores the reality of horse movements between different sectors of the industry.

Others, with better equine disease knowledge than I have, will have commented on the rationale for these suggestions. However it seems to me that these suggestions are so self serving as to deserve immediate rejection. What about the views of other sectors of the equine industry of which there are many thousands of individuals owning horses, including performance and leisure horses, and work horses used in the beef and sheep industries. Should they be also expected to meet the financial costs of annual vaccinations of all Australian horses, which would be required if this recommendation is approved or adopted? Will the thoroughbred and racing industries meet the annual costs of vaccinations of all horses in Australia, in order that thoroughbred breeding with shuttle stallions, and the introduction of foreign race horses can continue?

I am sure that amongst the submissions the enquiry has received there will be many similar comments to those made here. However I believe the critical issue that your enquiry will have to determine is whether any recommendations made recognise the issues in relation to the entire Australian equine industry, (and related industries depending on horses). In my professional opinion, only responding to the interests of the thoroughbred and racing industries does not serve the best future interests of our nation.

I wish your enquiry sincere good wishes in reaching its conclusions.

Yours sincerely

Professor Keith Entwistle AM

BVSc, PhD, FASAP, QDAH