

## Growing the Business of Farming



14 April 2008

The Hon Mr Justice Callinan AC  
 Commissioner for Commission of Inquiry into Equine Influenza  
 Postal Address  
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Dear Commissioner

### Re: Comment on Exposure Recommendations

The NSW Farmers Association (the 'Association') would like to make the following comments on the Exposure Recommendations posted on the inquiry website.

#### 1. **Establishment of the offices of Inspector General of Horse Importation (IG) and Government Veterinarian for Horse Importation (GVH)**

The Association agrees with these recommendations because it is obvious that the Commission has recognised the entrenched failings in the present structure and is endeavouring to improve the situation by providing quality leadership outside of the present system. The requirement for veterinarians with equine specialist skills to fill these positions is a necessary progression in light of the evidence given to the Commission.

The criticism by the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry ('DAFF') of the GVH position and lukewarm approval of the IG position is predictable. DAFF's reference to the relatively small number of horse imports related to other activities is irrelevant. Other livestock industries such as cattle, sheep and pigs have limited exposure to risk of exotic pests and diseases from live animal imports. Their risks stem from the importation of "meat, milk and eggs etc", which may contain exotic pests or pathogens.

However, shuttle stallions and racehorses visiting Australia for the Spring racing carnivals require special treatment. If they were both eliminated the risk of disease incursion would drop dramatically. The risks stem from the brief travel times to Australia, the self important attitudes of the owners and attendants of these horses and the fact that before transit they mix with a large number of potentially infected horses. To assume as DAFF does, that they can be accommodated within the present system has been proven to be incorrect.

The Association also agrees with the stipulation regarding freedom from public service employment which is probably of concern to DAFF.

As indicated in the Association's earlier submission, the Association is tendering a submission to the Beal Review into quarantine and biosecurity. In this, the Association proposes putting the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service ('AQIS') and Biosecurity Australia ('BA') into a separate statutory authority and out of DAFF because of trade influences (eg DAFF references to WTO rules in their reply to your exposure recommendations) and to get them out of the public service where quarantine officers don't necessarily have veterinary qualifications, can come from any other department such as Immigration etc, and move on to advance their employment opportunities, leaving quarantine behind. This arrangement does not entice quarantine professionals to work for AQIS and Biosecurity Australia.

The Association understands the restriction that Terms of Reference place upon the Commission and maybe if the Association's proposal (or rather the Nairn Review's proposal) is accepted, the Association cannot see the establishment of the positions of IG and GVH being a problem. In fact it may be possible for the office of the IG to be expanded to cover conditions for importation of animal and plant products.

## 2. General comments on other recommendations

In general, the Association is in agreement with the Commission's recommendations regarding increased funding, changes to work instructions, pre entry quarantine, airport facilities, quarantine stations and standard operating procedures. However, it is inevitable that DAFF will advise the Government to water them down as they pre-empted this with their comments on specificity. The Association's suggestion is for the Commission to stand firm otherwise DAFF will see to it that the recommendations are watered down until they are useless.

### 2.1 Boarding Charges

The Association agrees with the proposed method of calculation of charges, however the interim charges of \$165 /day for stallions and \$65 for other horses is flawed. Stallions pose a bigger risk than horses intended to reside here but race horses coming over to race in the Spring racing carnival pose the same risk as stallions and should attract the \$165 / day fee.

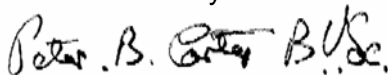
### 2.2 Fines

Quite clearly the lack of ability to enforce work practices was a major, if not the major reason for the escape of Equine Influenza out of Eastern Creek. DAFF's criticism on trade grounds is flawed. Unfortunately they appear to be more emersed in trade considerations than quarantine considerations. WTO rules allow importing countries to protect themselves from incursions of exotic pests and disease. Quite clearly your inquiry has identified a major flaw in the system and imposing a stiff fine should not be seen as anything more than an attempt to avoid an incursion, allowed under WTO rules.

DAFF's criticism of abstaining from contact with horses for 12 hours after contact with a quarantined equine is nonsense. The DAFF assertion that showering is sufficient is correct but the trap here is unless someone spies on the attendants to see that they do actually shower (not just turn the water on), and wash themselves properly, the system will break down. The 12 hour limit is the necessary safeguard.

This attempt by DAFF to water down sensible safeguards has been repeated many times over the last 10 or so years and has no doubt been responsible for a lot of incursions of exotic pests and diseases.

Yours sincerely



Peter Carter BVSc

**Chairman - Exotic Disease, Quarantine, Plant and Animal Health Committee**

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