



# SCONE EQUINE HOSPITAL

*Dedicated expert care.*

13<sup>th</sup> April, 2016

## **Submission to the Queensland Parliamentary Inquiry into Hendra virus (HeV) EquiVacc® vaccine and its use by veterinary surgeons in Queensland**

My name is David O'Meara and I am a practising equine veterinarian and this submission is representing Scone Equine Hospital. I am a co-owner of this large horse vet practice in the Upper Hunter Valley in NSW based in Scone, with smaller vet clinics in Tamworth, Denman, and also in Avenell in Victoria. Our business employs approximately 100 people in the business including vets, nurses, pharmacy and reception staff and administration support staff. Our practice is a large referral centre for the wider region and we regularly take cases for medical or surgical treatment on an elective but also often as an emergency case. We have registered specialists in equine medicine, surgery and reproduction and maintain a large veterinary hospital with advanced equine surgery and intensive care facilities. We are asked to take horses referred to us from many other vets and veterinary practices from both locally and from as far away as Queensland.

Our business relies heavily on the thoroughbred studs in our area for the majority of our caseload. Most of Australasia's successful thoroughbred stallions are in our practice area and as such there is a large volume of horse movement into and out of our region for horse owners to bring their mares to these stallions for the horse breeding season of spring and summer of each year. Pregnant mares are transported to the local area to foal safely with veterinary assistance on hand. These mares with young foals are then managed to visit a stallion at the appropriate time to hopefully become pregnant again. Non-pregnant mares are brought in usually by July so that they can be prepared to visit a stallion in the breeding season which starts on the first of September for thoroughbred horses.

Managing the risk of Hendra virus is an ongoing and taxing responsibility. The flying foxes that carry Hendra virus live in our region and there have been significant roost populations identified. A very large roost population of flying foxes lives in the centre of the town of Singleton which is 40 minutes from our practice. There is scientifically published information from 2015 that identified that Hendra virus has been detected in this group at a level comparable to that found in populations in the Cairns area of North Queensland. Although we have not had a confirmed case of Hendra in our area the flying foxes carrying Hendra virus and the large numbers of horses are here and we are continually vigilant to the possibility of positive cases occurring. The second potential source of Hendra cases is from the movement of horses from areas that have had cases occur in the past. As part of our risk management in regard to Hendra virus our priority and legal responsibility is to protect our staff, and also horse owners from any possibility of exposure to this potentially fatal zoonotic viral infection. We have policy and protocols in place to manage this but the result of this is that we have had to refuse admission of unvaccinated sick horses until they can be tested negative. We have had the situation more than once of the horse dying or being euthanased when it may have survived if it received emergency care at our vet hospital. Horses that are referred to us by other veterinarians on an urgent basis are often ill and because the clinical presentation of Hendra cases is often vague and nonspecific we cannot rule out Hendra without laboratory testing. We have also determined that as a business risk we cannot afford the possibility of being shut down for a prolonged quarantine period. This would be disastrous not only to our business if this was in



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the busiest time of year but would also jeopardise the ability to offer adequate veterinary care to the local area.

Our practice has to date administered approximately 2500 doses of the Hendra vaccine since it was released. It has been used in most categories of horses from young to very old and pregnant mares and working stallions. It is a very safe and effective vaccine and we have had an estimated rate of 10 instances of any adverse reaction, so a rate of 0.4%. All of these adverse reactions have been minor skin reactions which are possible with any vaccine injection.

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