

Research Director  
Agriculture and Environment Committee  
Parliament House  
George St  
Brisbane Qld 4000  
20/4/2016

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Enquiry: Hendra virus (HeV) EquiVacc® vaccine and its use by veterinary surgeons in Queensland

RSPCA Qld would like to make a submission to this enquiry. As the committee will be aware, RSPCA inspectors have powers under the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001* to investigate potential cases of neglect or cruelty and of course this includes cases involving horses. The majority of horses attended are skinny, in poor condition and may even be 'down'. The horses may also be showing other signs of illness. In virtually every case, our inspectors require a veterinarian to attend to examine the horse. The veterinarian provides advice about whether the horse can be treated, moved or transported, and whether it should be tested for HeV. The veterinarian may recommend euthanasia as the most humane option. If the person responsible for the horse is later charged with an offence, then that veterinarian examination is vital as evidence.

The number of horse cases seen by RSPCA Qld is not insignificant. From April 2015 to April this year our inspectors attended 3634 horse cases. This represents approximately 20% of the complaints RSPCA Qld inspectors investigate. The very nature of the cases we attend means that the chance the horses are vaccinated against Hendra virus is extremely low. Therefore we are usually asking veterinarians to examine an unvaccinated horse.

Due to concerns about Hendra virus and the significant risk with respect to workplace health and safety, it is sometimes difficult for RSPCA inspectors to find a veterinary surgeon who is willing to attend a horse if it is unvaccinated (the majority). If they do attend, they may be reluctant to examine the horse closely and take the blood sample necessary for Hendra testing. The inspector may need to make several calls before locating a veterinarian willing to examine the horse. Our inspectors are kept very busy with a heavy workload and these delays significantly impact their ability to attend to all their cases.

These delays also have significant welfare impacts as horses are not being examined and treated or euthanased in a timely manner. If the owner of the horse is identified and given a welfare directive by the inspector to have the horse examined and treated by a veterinarian, they also may find it difficult to find a veterinarian willing to attend the unvaccinated horse.

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RSPCA Qld fully acknowledges and appreciates the risk involved with Hendra virus, and understands the veterinarian perspective, however, our concerns lie with the welfare of the horses and the wish to see their welfare protected. The RSPCA asks for consideration to be given to how this welfare issue can be managed while still ensuring attending veterinarians, owners and RSPCA inspectors are protected from this fatal disease.

The cost of vaccination is one issue that could be considered. If horses are vaccinated then veterinarians are more likely to attend horses and provide the care they need.

We are pleased to have had this opportunity to express the RSPCA perspective on this issue.

Yours sincerely



Dr Mandy Paterson  
**Principal Scientist**  
**RSPCA Queensland**

