

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

**Management Committee
Brookfield Horse and Pony Club Inc**

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Brookfield, Q, 4069

21st April 2016

To the Chairman, the Hon GA Butcher MP, and the committee members of the Agriculture and Environment Committee

Dear Sirs,

The Brookfield Horse and Pony Club Inc (BHPC) was founded in 1957 and has operated continuously since then. It is affiliated with the Pony Clubs Association of Queensland (PCAQ) and operates within its objectives, which are –

- (a) To encourage young people to ride and to learn to enjoy all kinds of sport connected with horses and riding;
- (b) To provide instruction in riding and horsemanship, and to instil in members the proper love and care of their animals;
- (c) To promote the highest ideals of horsemanship, citizenship and loyalty, thereby cultivating strength of character and self-discipline.

In support of these objectives, BHPC wishes to make a submission to this Inquiry relating to its experience with the use of the Hendra vaccine by its members for their horses.

This submission will address the terms of reference for this inquiry of which BHPC has experience, namely -

- the incidence and impact of adverse reactions by horses following vaccination; and
- who bears the risks of HeV infection and who incurs the costs and receives the benefits from each risk mitigation option.

The incidence and impact of adverse reactions by horses following vaccination

Background

As is the case with the office bearers and management committee members of all Queensland pony clubs, the health, safety and welfare of our members and our horses are paramount considerations at all times. To this end, when it became clear that there was a solution to the significant problem of possible Hendra virus infection in our horses (Brookfield and its surrounding suburbs has a large bat population), the management committee at the time, after consultation with the members, inserted an additional by-law into the pony club's by-laws -

"HORSE AND MEMBER HEALTH

Hendra virus vaccination

1. Any horse attending any BHPC sponsored event -
 - (a) at the Brookfield Showgrounds; or
 - (b) in the Rita O'Hanlon arena; or
 - (c) in the Brookfield Equestrian Reserve (the Cemetery Paddock),must be currently vaccinated against Hendra virus.
2. Proof of current vaccination with full immunity will be required.
3. This by-law takes effect at midnight Saturday 25 May 2013.

BHPC sponsored event includes a clinic, muster, gymkhana, or camp of any sort conducted by BHPC, or by other personnel with BHPC involvement.

proof of current vaccination with full immunity means presentation of a current vaccination certificate to the Chief Instructor or an authorised BHPC member that shows that the current vaccination was completed at least 21 days before attendance at the BHPC sponsored event .

current vaccination certificate means a certificate or digital evidence of a certificate that is compliant with the vaccine manufacturer's advice about vaccination against Hendra virus."

To enforce this rule, a management committee member of BHPC keeps a current register of all BHPC horses and notifies the owners when a booster Hendra vaccine is required. Zoetis, the manufacturer of the Hendra vaccine, also notifies owners when a booster is required. It is to be noted that BHPC has always had a very good relationship with Dr Richard L'Estrange, our veterinary contact within Zoetis and has always been able to turn to him for advice on any particular case concerning the currency of the vaccine for a BHPC horse, or wider issues relating to Hendra vaccination.

As can be seen from the extract of our by-laws, this requirement has been in force since 25th May 2013 and the following points are to be noted –

- The necessity to properly vaccinate each horse before it comes to its first pony club muster has never prevented young families from coming to pony club. Families have accepted that it is, along with the requirement for proper pony club uniforms, including helmets (currently AS/NZS 3838 (AU)) and riding boots, club fees and PCAQ insurance, a necessary concomitant to a fulfilling time at the club.
- Everyone accepts without question the need for veterinary administration of the vaccine. The local veterinarians that BHPC members use always check a horse's temperature, its respiration and other vital signs and register the horse's microchip before giving the dose. For this the charge is on average (including the cost of the vaccine itself), \$90. Horse owners are quite capable of giving other intramuscular injections , for instance, strangles and tetanus vaccinations and procaine penicillin

injections, and do so, but we all accept veterinary involvement with the Hendra vaccination.

- On reading the extract from the by-laws above, one can see that it is only horses attending BHPC sponsored events at the club's home grounds that must be currently vaccinated against Hendra virus. However, BHPC sponsors an annual event held at a suburban equestrian centre and in 2015 this event was open only for horses that were currently Hendra vaccinated. The decision to do this in part stemmed from the responsibility that the management committee and instructors felt towards to all riders and horses in their care to maintain a safe environment for all participants and attending veterinarians. In 2015 the pony club had a major sponsor for this event and, even though it was anticipated that numbers of participants would be reduced because of this requirement, this sponsor, a major bank, supported the pony club in its decision and the event was held with little reduction in numbers and lots of praise from the competitors **and their families**. BHPC will institute the same rule again this year.

Adverse reactions

As a consequence of the number of horses vaccinated (currently about 100) on a continuing basis at BHPC since 2013, this club is well-placed to be able to offer views, not about the efficacy of the vaccine, but about its side-effects. In the years since BHPC required mandatory vaccination of pony club horses, communication with the administering veterinarians has shown that there has not been one case of serious effects on a BHPC pony club horse caused by vaccine administration. BHPC has a position within its management group designated for a horse welfare officer. Currently this position is held by an equine veterinarian. He is not aware of any reports from any families of possible side effects that can be attributed to the vaccine. Not one family has lodged a complaint relating to the requirement for vaccination, nor has any family withdrawn from club membership because of fears of adverse effects from vaccination on their horse or horses.

Who bears the risks of HeV infection and who incurs the costs and receives the benefits from each risk mitigation option?

(a) who bears the risk?

As mentioned earlier, in 2015 BHPC held an event at a suburban equestrian centre. The club declared that for this event, to which competitors came from a number of other pony clubs, all horses attending had to be currently vaccinated against Hendra virus. Apart from the reasoning given above for making this policy, BHPC also had to deal with any legal ramifications of an unvaccinated horse with Hendra being present at the event. The seriousness of this possibility, that is a risk very small in probability but potentially very serious in its consequences, was brought home to BHPC in an email the club received from the equestrian centre before the event, part of which is reproduced as follows –

"We will accept any policy Brookfield Pony Club adopts, however, please be aware that in the event of an outbreak of some description during your event, which may result in the lockdown and quarantine of our grounds, all associated responsibility will be that of Brookfield Pony Club. This will include all financial responsibility of any loss of income relating to the club or associated bookings/events that may be held on our grounds over the quarantine period."

[underlining added]

The only way BHPC could deal with such a requirement was to institute the vaccination policy, which it has done.

It is worth noting that PCAQ guidelines suggest the implementation of a Horse Health Declaration form, based on one developed by the Queensland Horse Industry Alliance, and BHPC has mandated the necessity for one in its by-laws –

"2. Horse Health Declarations

A properly completed Horse Health Declaration form must be provided for every horse

- (a) attending a BHPC muster; or
- (b) attending a BHPC sponsored event, before the horse can take part in the muster or event.

BHPC sponsored event includes a clinic, muster, gymkhana, or camp of any sort conducted by BHPC, or by other personnel with BHPC involvement."

At the suburban equestrian centre event, current Hendra certificates and Horse Health Declarations were compulsory.

The risk is twofold – to the club and to the individual horse owner.

The risk to the club from lack of a policy or rules requiring Hendra vaccination arises–

- (a) from negligence arising from a failure in its duty of care to its members, their families and third parties to maintain a safe environment.

New legislation, the Biosecurity Act 2014 (Qld), in force from July 2016, imposes on individuals and clubs a responsibility for a high standard of biosecurity in any pursuit involving biosecurity matter, (which includes horses as designated animals), and posing a biosecurity risk (which risk a pony club does pose because of, for example, the possibility of a Hendra virus infection). This 'general biosecurity obligation', defined in the Act, requires BHPC to take all reasonable and practicable steps to prevent or minimise that risk. While at no stage does this legislation require horses to be vaccinated against Hendra virus, and lack of vaccination is not a factor in any statutory offence, it could be inferred in any action based on negligence, that the optimum situation is that of vaccination.

- (b) from a devastating financial cost, including -

- costs of quarantine, which would be considerable; and
- income-replacement, if either its home grounds (Brookfield Showground, administered by the Brookfield Recreation Reserve Trust) or external grounds were unable to carry out their normal income-producing activities for any length of time.

These costs are not covered, or if covered, only to a very limited extent, by insurance.

The risk to the horse owner is also of major financial cost if the owner's horse presents with Hendra virus infection. Although there is possibly insurance cover available, its operation needs to be tested in the possible circumstances posed within the pony club context. The consequences for the owner of an infected horse of Hendra infection in animals and people, an event which could be prevented by vaccination, are potentially ruinous.

(b) who incurs the costs and receives the benefits from each risk mitigation option?

This risk of Hendra infection is offset by vaccination, the cost of which the horse owner or lessee bears, and which is safe and effective as evidenced by the BHPC experience and as set out in the literature from bodies, statutory and otherwise, which have the requisite knowledge in this area.

Both the cost of vaccination and the benefit from it are matters for the individual horse owner. A pony club can insist on vaccination, and the owner of an unvaccinated horse misses out on membership and its benefits. There is also a social benefit from vaccination, in knowing that one's horse cannot become infected and harm others. Additionally, there is an animal welfare benefit in that the owner is doing everything possible for the welfare of his or her horses.

While it is true that a comprehensive risk minimisation plan short of vaccination may be effective in mitigating a risk from Hendra virus, any plan containing a cumulative series of steps, or variety of actions for effect, and dependant on the actions of individuals to comply with these steps, is only as effective as its enforcement. Thus, vaccination, a plan without any steps or series of actions, and easily enforced, is the best possible mitigation.

Conclusion

As can be seen from these words above, Brookfield Horse and Pony Club Inc is extremely supportive of and thankful for the Hendra virus vaccination and thanks the Committee for its consideration of this submission.

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for and on behalf of the Brookfield Horse and Pony Club Inc
Management Committee.
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