



[Redacted]
Nanango, Qld, 4615

Thursday, 21 April 2016

Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Mr Chairman,

Please find attached a submission from the Queensland Endurance Riders Association Inc to the Parliamentary Inquiry regarding Hendra virus (HeV) EquiVacc® Vaccine and its use by Veterinary Surgeons in Queensland.

We have attempted to cover the issues facing our sport as comprehensively as possible, and we hope that at the end of the enquiry, there will be a positive outcome for all industry stakeholders.

Kind Regards,

[Redacted]
Gerard Bou
President
Queensland Endurance Riders Association Inc.

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Queensland Endurance



Riders Association Inc

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY SUBMISSION FROM THE QLD ENDURANCE RIDERS ASSOCIATION INC

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

Queensland Endurance Riders Association Inc.

Nanango, Qld, 4615

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is no equine discipline that relies on the services of the veterinary community as much as Endurance riding. Veterinarians act as judges in our sport, but most importantly they are there to ensure the welfare of our horses. Many veterinarians are withdrawing services to our sport unless Hendra vaccination is mandated. We cannot run our events without a dedicated team of veterinarians. There are many unknowns with regards to Hendra virus and who would be responsible in the event of an outbreak or suspect case at an endurance ride. It is a complicated issue with ride organisers, officials and the veterinary team involved in the running of events. This document explains the economic, logistical and social impacts of the EquiVacc Hendra Vaccine on our sport. We would like the opportunity to explain the complexities of this issue to the Committee in person, as the short term and long term viability of our sport, which has existed for over 50 years, is now in question.

INTRODUCTION

Australia is one of the world's most-established and dedicated endurance riding nations, a proud heritage of long-distance riding - borne out of harsh beginnings in a country of vast empty spaces. The first competitive endurance ride in Australia was held in the Hawkesbury valley, west of Sydney, supervised by Professor Hutchins who ran the Camden Veterinary Hospital. It came to be called the QUILTY, after Tom Quilty, a Kimberly cattle man, who supported the idea and who donated the money for a Gold Cup. There was a lot of opposition to the first endurance ride in Australia but in spite of all obstacles, the first ride began at 1:14 a.m. on the 1st of October, 1966.

The Queensland Endurance Riders Association (QERA) was formed soon after this first event. QERA is the state governing body for the Queensland Division of the Australian Endurance Riding Association. The Queensland Division covers all of Queensland plus the Northern Rivers district of NSW.

Endurance is primarily a 'grass roots' sport, but our members do have the opportunity to progress through the rigorous qualification process to represent Australia at the World Equestrian Games and at World Championship events. Endurance riding is one of the few equestrian sports that accommodates everyone, young or old, man or woman. It is one of the few sports where men and women compete against each other as equals. Individual events are run by endurance clubs, or ride organisers, who affiliate with the Queensland Endurance Riders Association Inc, and operate under the national rules. There are usually around 40 to 50 individual endurance events on the Qld calendar in any given year, from Far North Queensland to Northern New South Wales.

Endurance rides are organised and run by endurance clubs, which are each their own legal entity, and are not a division of the Queensland Endurance Riders Association. They sign an agreement with QERA that the event they run will be under our rules, and pay an affiliation fee which covers insurance. A fee is paid to QERA for each and every entry in their event.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF ENDURANCE RIDES

Endurance is an amateur competitive sport where competitors follow a designated course, usually in forestry or bushland. To be called an endurance ride, a minimum distance of 80km must be completed. At an endurance event, there are other support rides such as 40km training rides, 20km introductory rides, and sometimes 5km tiny-tots rides for young children. Championship endurance rides are 160km that must be completed within a 24-hour period. Endurance rides can cover as much as 400km in the marathon events. Endurance rides are split in to legs of approximately 40km, horses are examined by vets prior to start, and at the end of each leg. Horses must pass a final vet check to successfully complete an endurance, training or introductory ride. Riders camp in close proximity to their horses, sometimes for days at a time. People sleep in their horse floats and eat meals in close proximity to their horses. Endurance riders enjoy a strong bond with their horses, and treat them as valued members of their family.

Every endurance ride is governed by a strict set of rules and our veterinary care standards are the highest of any sport. Each and every endurance ride held in Australia requires the services of multiple vets and in turn the services of equine hospital facilities should the need arise. At a national championship event we may have up to 20 vets in attendance and each horse is given a thorough veterinary inspection before, during and after the ride. Endurance horses may be seen by the vet team up to 8 times at any single event in a 24 hour period.

When a horse presents for an inspection, it is first seen by a TPR Steward who records the horses' Temperature, Pulse and Respiration. Once these parameters are recorded, the horse proceeds to the veterinary team, who examine the horse for physical injuries, skin recoil, capillary and jugular refill rates to determine hydration of the horse as well as checking the gums, gut sounds and they palpitate the back and girth area to ensure there is no soreness. Finally, the handler is asked to trot the horse 40m away from the veterinarian and back to examine

the horse for any sign of lameness. If the horse passes the vet inspection it is deemed either “fit to start” or “fit to continue”. To successfully complete an endurance ride, a horse must be, in the opinion of the veterinary team, “fit to continue”, even after completing 160km in a championship event.

RISK AND RESPONSIBILITY

INSURANCE

Our national insurer, Newmarket Grandwest (policy is under-written by Lloyds Insurance) is unable to give us a definitive answer as to whether we have insurance cover for the consequences of a confirmed Hendra virus case at an endurance event. Whilst QERA has insurance cover for prosecutions under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011, it is unclear as to whether this cover is extended to our volunteer officials and organising committees. As yet, we are unable to obtain a ruling from our insurance company as to whether we are covered for prosecution under the Biosecurity Act 2014 which comes in to effect on the 1st of July 2016.

VETERINARIAN RESPONSIBILITIES

Under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011, our events are deemed to be the workplace of the veterinarians. A veterinarian would be held responsible under the Act from the moment a horse is suspected of having Hendra virus if an exclusion test reveals that the horse is positive. This would include the actions that have been taken to control areas that could have been contaminated by the infected horse, such as its yard, communal strapping areas, communal water points and the identification of other horses and people it had contacted. A vet would also be responsible for the isolation and management of the horse until Biosecurity Queensland took control.

This places our veterinarians in a very difficult situation.

ASSOCIATION AND ORGANISING COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

The Queensland Endurance Riders Association is an employer and has responsibilities under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011. QERA generally does not run any events, its role is strictly administration of the sport in Queensland and the Northern Rivers.

There is some conjecture as to whether our organising clubs are exempt from the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 or not. Our organising committees are run by volunteers, and endurance events are within the definition of the purpose statements in the organising committees’ constitutions. Our organising clubs are incorporated associations that are separate legal entities to QERA, and are generally non-profit organisations as defined in the dissolution clauses in their constitutions.

Section 5, paragraph 7 of the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 states:

“A volunteer association does not conduct a business or undertaking for the purposes of this Act.”

Section 5, paragraph 8 states:

“In this section, volunteer association means a group of volunteers working together for 1 or more community purposes where none of the volunteers, whether alone or jointly with any other volunteers, employs any person to carry out work for the volunteer association.”

The above paragraphs imply that our organising clubs are volunteer associations, however it is not defined in the legislation as to what a “community purpose” is. Is an amateur sporting event a community purpose or an undertaking? Workplace Health and Safety Queensland cannot give us a definitive answer as to whether our events are a community purpose or an undertaking, or because we need an admin office at every event for collating ride results, and data entry, they become a PCBU under the Act. Our organising committees have a

duty of care to their volunteers under common law. This uncertainty could be removed if “community purpose” was clearly defined in the Work Health and Safety Act 2011.

We strongly recommend that “community purpose” be clearly defined in the relevant legislation.

MEMBER / COMPETITOR RESPONSIBILITIES

A horse health declaration is to be completed for each and every horse attending an endurance event. A horse’s temperature is recorded either for the immediate 3 days or 10 days prior to arriving and an event depending on its Hendra vaccination status. The owner or person responsible must also sign the declaration stating that the horse has not shown any sign of illness leading up to the event.

VOLUNTEER AND VOLUNTEER OFFICIALS’ RESPONSIBILITY

Many of our volunteer officials are concerned about being prosecuted by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland should there be a Hendra virus case at one of our events. Workplace Health and Safety Queensland cannot give us a definitive answer as to whether they are workers and are liable under the Act or not.

IMPACT FROM VETERINARIANS APPLYING A POLICY NOT TO TREAT UNVACCINATED HORSES

VETERINARIANS AT OUR EVENTS

No other equestrian sport relies on the services of veterinarians more than Endurance. Veterinarians are an integral part of endurance riding. Our rules require a minimum of two vets for the first 60 horses, and an additional veterinarian for every additional 30 horses across all rides being conducted at an event. It is not unusual for an endurance event to have 150 entries across all rides. We have one vet in charge of the vetting team, the Head Veterinarian. We have a designated treatment veterinarian, and we have “line” veterinarians, who conduct the examinations as detailed in the previous section of this submission. All veterinarians act as line vets unless the treatment vet is required in the vet hospital area.

Sometimes things go wrong and horses are compromised and will require veterinary treatment, such as Intra-Venus fluids. An emergency triage area is set up where the treatment vet can provide emergency veterinary treatment to the horse. In most cases, horses respond very well to treatment and make a full recovery. At some events, there will be multiple horses requiring invasive treatment in the hospital area. Horses may have IV fluids administered, and if it is a case of colic, the horse may need naso-gastric tubing to relieve built up gas pressure in its stomach.

In recent years we have found it very difficult to attract veterinarians to our sport, for fear of the issues relating to Hendra virus and a gathering of horses at an event. Queensland endurance takes event management and biosecurity very seriously and have been developing and refining protocols over a number of years. A positive Hendra case means an automatic full investigation by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, and ultimately the veterinarian is responsible. As event organisers, we can take measures to lower the risk, such as horse health declarations, biosecurity management plans and risk management plans, but these are merely administrative controls, and do nothing to transfer the responsibility of a positive Hendra case to the event organisers from the veterinarian. Our veterinarians feel that if there was a positive case at an endurance event, that they are ultimately responsible for the health and safety of all horses, competitors, support crew and spectators.

We have lost many of our most experienced endurance veterinarians, and they will not return until Hendra vaccination is mandated at endurance events.

Hendra virus is a very dangerous disease and our veterinarians face possible risks from treating horses at endurance rides. We have endurance vets that have dealt with the virus first hand in their practices though thankfully never at an endurance event. Endurance vetting is very "hands on" and vets may be at times exposed to circumstances that they feel uncomfortable with when Hendra virus is a possibility.

Our National Rule Book (S1 General Rules) can be accessed via clicking the following link. Details of a Veterinarian's responsibility starts on page 47. <http://aera.asn.au/national-rules/>

HORSE WELFARE IMPLICATIONS

A *serious* horse welfare issue has been identified. There are times when a horse is seriously compromised, or a pre-existing condition manifests itself at an event and a horse becomes critically ill. These horses need urgent referral to a fully equipped equine hospital facility. When a horse is in this situation, it requires immediate treatment.

Many equine hospital facilities will not take unvaccinated horses, those that do will complete a full risk assessment, and may require a Hendra virus exclusion test prior to admitting the horse for treatment. In the time it takes for the exclusion test results, the horse may die.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

In 2015 QERA had an overall membership of 651 persons. There were 48 events with a total of 2838 entries. 772 individual horses were entered in endurance rides in 2015.

Like most equestrian disciplines there are significant economic impacts as horse ownership and competition is an expensive undertaking, as well as creating employment for many personnel. From analysis undertaken the cost to train and compete on one horse for the endurance season is estimated to be \$6,000.

| Annual average of 36 weeks in training – attend 6 events | |
|---|------------------|
| Feed & Supplements \$50 per week | \$1800.00 |
| Farrier (shoeing) 8 times at \$130 | \$1040.00 |
| Event travel – fuel and maintenance – 6 trips at \$250 | \$1500.00 |
| Routine vet expenses per horse per annum | \$ 400.00 |
| Tack and equipment per annum | \$1000.00 |
| Equine therapeutic services | \$ 260.00 |
| Total Annual Cost | \$6000.00 |

772 individual horses attended endurance events in Queensland in 2015, this equates to a spend of \$4.6m per annum into the Queensland economy. There are significant employment and flow-on benefits to the wider economy. Equestrian activities provide employment for veterinarians, farriers, feed merchants, farmers, horse trainers, horse transport businesses, fencing contractors, saddlery suppliers, and suppliers of equine services such as dentistry, chiropractic and horse massage to name a few.

It should be noted that most of our members have horses other than the ones they train and take to endurance events.

FINANCIAL IMPACT ON OUR MEMBERS

Most of our members cite cost as the primary factor for not vaccinating their horses, although there are some that are concerned about adverse reactions and a reduction of the athletic ability of their horses. Whilst many of our members only have a few horses, we have larger teams that bring 10 or more horses to an event. These larger teams make up approximately 40% of our participants at events. Current figures show that fewer than 30% of horses participating in endurance events are fully vaccinated against the Hendra virus.

In the first year of vaccination, horses need three individual injections, the first two priming shots 3 weeks apart, and after the second priming shot a 6-month booster. The cost of vaccinating a horse based on figures being quoted to us from our membership is anywhere from \$100 to \$200 per injection per horse, that is \$300 to \$600 per horse in its first year. For individuals that have one or two horses the cost is not insignificant. For larger teams or members that draw their horses from a large herd, the cost is substantial. The owner of a larger team that regularly takes between 8 and 16 horses to many events has advised us that he has a herd of 40 horses they draw from. Their cost would be between \$12000 and \$24000 in the first year to fully vaccinate their herd, and then \$4000 to \$8000 every 6 months.

Based on 772 individual horses attending endurance rides during 2015, it would cost between \$230,000 and \$460,000 in the first year to vaccinate all horses that attended our events, with an ongoing per annum cost of between \$150,000 and \$300,000 for the two required boosters.

FINANCIAL IMPACT ON OUR ASSOCIATION

The Queensland Endurance Riders Association uses a “user pays” principle to raise operating funds. A ride entry levy of \$28.00 is charged on entries in rides, this is payable to QERA by ride organising committees. Based on 2838 entries in 2015, this represents approximately \$80,000 in income for our organisation. A significant proportion (almost all) of this is spent on insurance and the administration of our sport, both fixed costs.

Many of our members are concerned that they may not be able to continue in the sport if vaccination is mandated, and QERA's revenue will be significantly reduced. It is very difficult to estimate how many members and entrants we would lose, but using a conservative estimate of 30%, our revenue would be down by \$24,000 in ride entry levies, meaning the Queensland Endurance Riders Association may not remain financially viable.

SOCIAL AND HUMAN HEALTH IMPACT

QERA acknowledges that old biosecurity methodologies did need to change to keep pace with evolving Australian and international awareness and practice, and to secure a more integrated, community based biosecurity structure. QERA also agrees that these developments will by their very nature have broader impacts on associated activities, as it has to Workplace Health and Safety protocols.

However, QERA also strongly believes that the wider social implications associated with human health, social recreation, social engagement and involvement, sporting activities and organisation and sports development must also be considered as primary areas of concern if they unduly suffer from an overbearing legislation that rules in isolation, blind to the negative and needless outcomes it produces.

The Queensland government annually budgets many millions of dollars to promote healthy activity, get off the couch mentalities, and the integration of physical activity into everyday life. This effort will be wasted if legislation then makes these activities more remote because of the overburden of expense necessary for individuals to participate in sporting activities. In this regard QERA strongly believes that the Queensland government must ameliorate the cost of Hendra vaccinations by subsidising them.

This subsidy would go a long way to stopping the flow of people away from equine activities in general, and the sport of endurance riding in particular, and would contribute enormously to maintaining a more physically active, healthy lifestyle for a great number of equine activity participants.

CONCLUSION

QERA acknowledges that the Hendra vaccination issue is complex. We understand that our veterinarians are in a very difficult position. If our association is placed in a position where we have to mandate vaccination, we feel that our sport may never fully recover. Currently for the first time we have 5 rides on this year's calendar that are for vaccinated horses only. This has caused tremendous upheaval to our organisation and has polarised and divided our membership. We have this year already seen many past members not rejoin our association until they get further direction on the Hendra vaccination and its possible mandating in Qld endurance rides. This is not just a Qld problem with our Association being a part of the larger Australian Endurance Riders Association that will also be impacted both socially and financially by membership decline. We feel that we are in a unique position when it comes to Hendra virus and our use of veterinarians. Hendra virus has impacted our sport like no other and we have been formulating strategies for some years to deal with its impacts. The situation has been brought to a head in these past months and we would very much like the opportunity to appear before the Inquiry in person to discuss the issues facing our sport in more detail.