

22 April 2016

The Agriculture and Environment Committee Hendra Vaccine Inquiry
C/- Mr Rob Hansen
Parliament House
Brisbane
Queensland 4000
Phone: 07 3553 6660

By email: robert.hansen@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Hansen,

RE: Veterinarian Submission to Hendra virus Vaccine Inquiry

My name is Dr Philippa Johnston, and I am an equine veterinarian located at Tenterfield, NSW, also servicing the bordering Queensland area. I have been in veterinary practice for 10+ years. I wish to address the following Terms of Reference in the Qld Parliament's Hendra virus Vaccine Inquiry:

- The incidence and impact of adverse reactions by horses following vaccination and the reporting of adverse reactions and economic impacts of the Hendra vaccine.

We are one of the top 10 clinics in overall number of Hendra vaccinations administered. We have done over 700 horses and administered over 2200 doses. We have had less than 10 horses where owners report true adverse reactions, ranging from mild swelling to generalised stiffness and reluctance to move. All of these horses have responded well to anti-inflammatory therapy and none have had recurrent reactions when anti-inflammatory therapy is administered at vaccination.

We spend a lot of time educating our clients about the vaccine, they communicate with us very effectively if there are ever any adverse reactions. I personally own over 25 horses, all of whom are Hendra vaccinated, and we have never had any reactions in our herd.

In my opinion, overall there are very few reactions that we have witnessed, the vaccine appears to be very safe. In terms of the efficacy and reliability – the zoetis data has been very conclusive in supporting this.

In terms of the economic impact of the vaccine – I do believe that, in the whole scheme of owning a horse, the vaccine is a minimal cost, and honestly, it is my personal choice to own the number of horses I currently own, and therefore I am financially liable for keeping them healthy and protected.

- Who bears the risks of HeV infection .

It can be very easy to make a judgement when you are the one sitting up in the members box. Ultimately, unless you have been the one waiting apprehensively for Hendra results to come back (because you have a high level of possible exposure), I believe you are inexperienced to make any comment on whether or not horses should be vaccinated. The fear you experience is beyond any comprehension.

As a horse owner, I believe I have a responsibility to protect everyone who works with my horses. As a veterinarian, I believe I have a responsibility to do all I can to help that animal. As a business owner, I believe I have a responsibility to protect everyone that is in my staff and all my clients. If horses are not vaccinated, there can be a huge conflict of responsibilities.

- Impacts on the equine industry arising from veterinarians applying a policy not to treat unvaccinated horses.

This, in itself, is devastating for the animal. We had a case presented not long ago, where an unvaccinated horse presented with vague 'colic' signs and due to clinic protocol, I was unable to treat this animal intensively until the Hendra exclusion test was returned. This is a real emotional battle for vets – we do our job because we love animals, and to be limited in what you can do for an animal is heart wrenching. In the end it is the horse that suffers.

- The impact of Workplace Health and Safety actions on the decision by veterinarians not to attend unvaccinated horses and results of previous Workplace Health and Safety HeV investigations where there have been human infections.

I would be outright lying if I said I had never made the mistakes that the prosecuted vets have made – the only difference has been, that my Hendra test cases have turned out to be negative. I feel that a lot of my decisions regarding equine treatment are now based on what I think would be the best decision from a workplace health and safety viewpoint, not necessarily how high Hendra virus is on my list of differentials. And I believe the animal suffers in that area.

Yours sincerely,

PJohnston

Philippa Johnston BVSc Hons 1

Tenterfield Veterinary Clinic

██████████ Tenterfield

████████████████████

██████████