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Submission to Parliamentary Review of The Hendra Vaccine

I request that you consider the following:

COERCION OF HORSE OWNERS TO VACCINATE HORSES AGAINST THE HENDRA VIRUS BY

- Zoetis and others making unsubstantiated claims that unvaccinated horses pose a threat to the lives of humans
- Veterinary Practitioners refusing to examine or treat unvaccinated horses, claiming that unvaccinated horses pose a possible risk to the lives of themselves and their families and/or of prosecution from Workplace Health and Safety

Executive Summary

- only 7 humans have ever been infected by the Hendra virus
- all cases of human infection resulted from exposure to infected bodily fluids while treating or conducting post mortem examination without practising basic hygiene or wearing even basic personal protective equipment (disposable gloves and face mask)
- some Veterinary Practitioners will examine and treat unvaccinated horses on condition that they first vaccinate; despite the fact that the vaccine takes up to 21 days to provide protection from infection in a previously unvaccinated horse and several hours in a horse that has previously received the vaccine.
- any horse, vaccinated or not, that is demonstrating signs of possible Hendra infection must be subjected to a Hendra exclusion test to confirm/deny presence of the virus
- any horse suspected of or proven to be infected by the Hendra virus can be treated, but under strict quarantine and by following current biosecurity requirements
- the vaccine manufacturer states, in the vaccine package insert, that the vaccine should not be administered to aged, unwell or immunocompromised horses: a subset of the equine population most likely to require regular veterinary attention, yet who are denied examination or treatment

Conclusions

- the risk of a human becoming infected by the Hendra virus is being grossly over-exaggerated in an attempt to promote use of the Hendra vaccine
- Veterinary Practitioners who refuse to treat unvaccinated horses, claiming that they are a threat to their health, but will treat immediately post administration of the first dose of the vaccine either have no understanding of Immunology and are deluding themselves, or are wilfully coercing horse owners into administering the vaccine

- Veterinary Practitioners who refuse to examine or treat horses showing symptoms of possible Hendra infection, claiming that WHS and/or their insurers forbid them to, are misrepresenting current regulations
- Some Veterinary Practitioners are ignoring the vaccine manufacturer's instruction not to vaccinate aged, unwell or immunocompromised horses, and coercing the horses' owners to also do so by the threat of refusal to examine or treat the horses if they remain unvaccinated.

Suggestions

- That Parliament initiate a campaign to educate all interested parties and the general public about Hendra, and to dispel any misinformation about the danger the virus poses.
- That Parliament work with the Australian Veterinary Association and Equine Veterinary Association to ensure that they keep their Members apprised of correct information concerning the virus, the use of personal protective equipment, and their responsibilities to WHS and biosecurity.
- That Parliament ensure that current biosecurity, insurance and WHS regulations concerning the virus are documented and publicised using easily comprehensible wording and phrasing so that everyone (Veterinary Practitioners, Zoetis and horse owners) know precisely what is required of them.
- That Parliament do everything it can to stop the current misuse of the vaccine and the threat this is posing to the health and welfare of Australian horses.

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