

Submission to the Queensland Agriculture and Environment Committee

To be considered in

The Parliamentary Inquiry into Hendra Virus (HeV) Equivac Vaccine and its use by Veterinary Surgeons in Queensland

We live on a large cattle property near Dysart, Central Queensland. 300km north west of Rockhampton. Horses are used every day for mustering stock, general riding and competitions. We provide suitable mounts for stock contractors and the children have friends over regularly. All up we have 35 horses ranging from foals, broodmares, stallion and riding horses.

We are not that close to a known positive case, but there have been cases both north and south of us. Also, there are large flying fox colonies less than 20 km from our property and we regularly have them in trees around our house at night. As our property is on such a large scale it is impossible to have water and feed under cover, and with the extensive timber in the horse paddocks, we cannot stop the horses from grazing under the canopy when the virus could quite possibly infect a horse.

Many people handle our horses, including children, workers, vets, farriers, dentists, chiropractors as well as casual visitors. In our assessment of the risks, we decided for everyone's safety, we would vaccinate.

We had our first horses vaccinated in April 2013 when the vaccine became widely available in our area. Those animals have now had 6 doses of the vaccine. In July 2013 we had EVERY HORSE on Booroondarra vaccinated for the Hendra virus, those horses have now had 5 doses. 6 month old foals, broodmares, workhorses and stallion. Our valuable competition horses worth in excess of \$20,000 have also been vaccinated.

We have one purchased mare who has had 7 vaccinations. She has had a foal and now back into full training. No issues.

One mare we own was artificially inseminated on the Friday, then given her second HeV needle on the Saturday. She then had her 6 month booster while pregnant. She had a totally normal pregnancy and foaled with no issues.

Our stallion has successfully served mares each year since he was vaccinated. All foals are normal and healthy.

Foals have been vaccinated as soon as they are old enough with no problems or reactions.

Valuable competition horses have been vaccinated with no effects on their soundness. They have successfully stayed in training with no time off.

We have not had any changes in temperament as claimed by some. I don't believe that this is even a possible reaction caused by this vaccine or any vaccine for that matter.

In total we have done 171 vaccinations. Out of those we had 3 horses that had a small site reaction at the injection site. In saying that, I have also had site reactions with the 2 in 1 (Tetanus/Strangles vaccine and penicillin injections). I am in no way concerned about minor reactions as it is telling me that the vaccine is working by causing a response by the body.

I have spoken extensively about the vaccine with my vets. They have been very knowledgeable about the vaccine, its protection and possible side effects. They organised an information night which included input from Zoetis and also a lady who had lost 4 horses to the virus. One of those horses showed NO SYMPTOMS, but was tested positive. This really drove home the importance of the vaccine to me. The horse was positive for the HeV, but showed no symptoms. Could quite possibly have infected someone. In this case

also, you will hear the SAY NO people claim that there has be NO transfer of the virus between horses. Well how do they explain this situation? All horses were paddocked together, none were vaccinated, and all horses were infected.

I fully support the HeV vaccine.

I fully support the Veterinarians' stance to CHOOSE whether to treat unvaccinated horses.

With the litigious world we live in I don't believe they can afford to not have a policy. With the current situation with vets being prosecuted it also shows how vulnerable they are for caring enough to treat sick horses. They could quite possibly lose their business.

In regards to the listed terms of reference to this inquiry:

I believe that the development, trials and approval processes have been more than adequate. If we call these processes into question, we then have to look at the whole development and approval process for new products in Australia. The HeV vaccine is a small part of the Zoetis portfolio. It is specific to a single virus in a specific area of Australia. It is not the huge money making scheme as claimed. I have discussed this with my vet due to the large number of horses we have vaccinated, and there is little margin in it for them.

I don't agree with the vaccine being given to the owners to administer. If it is the vets that will be ultimately exposed, they need to know that the register is correct. Many owners will say the horse is vaccinated, just to get treatment. This has been said many times on the Say No to Hendra Facebook page. They are quite prepared to lie.

I have followed closely the claimed reactions and impacts of the vaccine. There are many CLAIMS made, but when the full story is revealed, the claimed reaction can be easily explained. I support the current reporting system in place. The authorities who have to investigate the reported reactions have done well to sift through the dirt to narrow down the legitimate reactions. I believe they have come up with an accurate record of genuine reactions. That list is typical of any vaccination. As with people, horses can react differently. Some minor, and a very few, major.

The vets are the ones who will bear the biggest risk when it comes to a positive Hendra virus case. Whether it is possible exposure to the virus, or the risk to their business. As it stands now, as soon as they step onto a place, they are totally responsible for the safety of all people there. They can tell owners to put on safety protection, but there are some very strong personalities that will refuse. If the case then tests positive, the vet is open to litigation. How can they be held responsible for others' actions?

I believe that the risks to a vet being exposed to a Hendra case are potentially huge. Death is huge. The symptoms of Hendra are so nonspecific. As mentioned, a horse had no 'typical' symptoms to Hendra, but was positive, so potentially could have infected someone. To take the RIGHT of someone's safety off them is unimaginable. The cry to have a CHOICE is fair enough, but the vets should have the equal right to choose whether to attend an unvaccinated horse.

In respect to a possible economic impact on the equine industry due to vets not attending unvaccinated horses, you will find that the vast majority of horses that have been vaccinated have had no reactions. These owners are completely happy with the vaccine as it stands now. These owners far outnumber the few that refuse to vaccinate, but it is that minority (the ones refusing) that is making the most noise. You will find that it is those that vaccinate, and are prepared to pay to protect their horses, make up the majority of the clients. It is the vets who are the animal experts, not the noisy rabble that posts accusations on Facebook. The majority of veterinary clients fully back the policies put in place by their vets.

Working with horses is dangerous. They are big animals that can prove to be very reactive when sick, or in unfamiliar environments. To expect vets to simply 'put on personal protective equipment (PPE)' is laughable at best. In the safety pyramid, PPE is the LAST line of protection. Anyone experienced with horses knows that trying to treat a sick horse wearing noisy blue overalls is extremely difficult, dangerous, if not impossible. How can anyone with no equine experience make a ruling to just put on PPE? It would be a massive miscarriage of justice to expect our vets to put themselves in danger. They should ultimately be the ones to make that decision.

In closing, the CSIRO has done thorough research into the safety and efficacy of this vaccine. The APVMA has approved the vaccine as safe and effective and it is now a registered product. There are tens of thousands of HAPPY horse owners using the vaccine with no issues whatsoever. Many of those have been vaccinating their horses from the beginning. Our vets, who are the ones with the most to lose, whether it be exposure to a deadly virus, or possible litigation and affecting their business, also deserve the simple right to choose whether to attend and treat unvaccinated horses. It is ultimately the horse owner who can choose to vaccinate or not, but the same respect should be afforded to vets as well. It is everyone's right to have a choice. If you don't vaccinate, you need to make arrangements to have your animals treated.

Regards

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