

Western Australian Horse Council

LESMURDIE WA 6076  
24<sup>th</sup> July 2010

Ms Jeanette Radcliffe  
Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
**CANBERRA ACT 2600**

Dear Ms Radcliffe

**INQUIRY INTO THE AUSTRALIAN HORSE INDUSTRY AND AN EMERGENCY ANIMAL RESPONSE AGREEMENT**

The Western Australian Horse Council is a member of the Australian Horse Industry Council and during the 2007 Equine Influenza outbreak represented the non-racing sector of the equine industry in the Western Australian response to the outbreak.

As an organisation representing the broad interests of all horse owners, including those involved in the racing industry, the Council appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Australian Horse Industry and an Animal Emergency Response Agreement.

The WAHC supports the need for the all sectors of the Australian equine industry to be signatories with government to an Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA).

Western Australia was extremely fortunate that the 2007 outbreak of EI did not breach the state's border security due to the excellent work of the local Department of Agriculture. The outbreak did however highlight the potential traumatic impact of such an event as horror stories fed through from the Eastern States.

The WAHC not only supports the signing by all sectors of the Australian equine industry of an EADRA for the industry but also supports a levy mechanism which equitably shares the cost burden across all sectors of the industry both recreational and racing.

While making this point, the Council is aware that there are sectors of the equine industry which are of a view that the Australian Government would again fund the costs should there be a future outbreak to that which occurred in 2007.

This view ignores the fact that had the industry would have been financially ruined, particularly in the states of New South Wales and Queensland, without the Federal Government's response.

This positive response may have been due to the outbreak occurring because of failures at the AQIS run quarantine station at Eastern Creek and a sense of Federal responsibility for causing the problem.

It is imperative that the Federal Government ensures that its agencies which are responsible for animal (including equine) quarantine maintain the highest possible standards to prevent a repetition of the disasters of 2007.

All horse breeds need to import animals to maintain diversity in bloodlines, develop new breeds and improve competition levels so the country's borders need to remain open for imports, however there also needs to be high levels of bio-security control in place at all our quarantine centres.

Some years ago there were national discussions within the equine industry over a proposal for a levy on the equine industry. The proposal of a national levy on horseshoes withered in the face of an emotive attack on the concept from pony clubs.

At that time the existence of an EADRA seemed to be only some fanciful government proposal. The 2007 EI outbreak has, if nothing else, made a disease outbreak in the horse industry a reality and changed the dynamics of an EADRA.

The WAHC supports the broadest possible levy arrangement whether that be imposed upon horseshoes, horse feed, horse medication or a combination of these items.

The Council also supports a zero based levy arrangement whereby no money would be collected until an emergency actually occurs. Part of the horseshoe levy discussion related to what would happen to the levy monies while waiting for an outbreak to occur.

The WAHC believes that the Federal Government has the resources to cover the equine industry's share of the costs, under the EADRA, and to then impose a levy over whatever period is deemed appropriate to recover the equine industry's contribution to the outbreak.

It is the WA Horse Council's view that an equine industry EADRA should be a Category 3 agreement which provides for a 50/50 sharing of costs between Government and the equine industry.

While there will be costs involved in the equine industry committing to an EADRA it is our view that the benefits far outweigh these costs.

Such an agreement would provide guarantees of the Federal Government underwriting the costs of an outbreak to enable an immediate response while

providing an insurance policy for the equine industry which would also be committed to meeting its share of the costs involved.

Like the WAHC itself the vast majority of participants in the horse industry, both recreational and racing, are involved on a hobby basis. There are a number of professionals involved across the spectrum of the industry but these individuals are a small minority.

Because of the hobbyist nature of equine pursuits any levy should be broad based and while ideally only one form of levy would be preferred the complex and wide-spread nature of the industry may well mean more than one form of levy would prove more equitable.

Furthermore any levy ought to be as administratively simple as possible. Collection of a levy at the manufacturer or retailer level would be preferred as there seems little point in a levy being eaten up in administrative costs.

A horse shoe levy may not be popular among some sectors of the broader equine industry, particularly those which change shoes regularly, however all competition horse wear shoes and such a levy would be broader based than any other equine levy.

Such a levy would not apply to horses being used for breeding or non-competition pleasure riding however it is difficult to envisage any single levy that would apply equally across all sectors of the equine industry.

It is somewhat like a fuel tax that impacts more on some vehicle users than others and has minimal impact on an individual who does not own a motor vehicle.

Similarly a levy on horse feed, wormers or the like may not impact on all horse owners equally however it would apply to a large percentage and that appears to be the best that can be expected by the industry.

Horse registration does not appear to be a viable option for a levy in that while the racing industries and breed societies do register their animals there are far greater numbers of unregistered horses spread across every state in Australia.

Short of the introduction of a compulsory registration process by local government councils, including penalties for non-registration, along the lines of dog registration, a horse registration levy is a long way off reality.

One advantage of mandatory registration of horses would be the ability to create a database of horses, and their locations, which would be of assistance in the event of a disease outbreak.

As an industry horse owners need an EADRA as an insurance policy and like all insurance policies we all hope and pray that it is never needed.

The WA Horse Council fully endorses both an EADRA for the equine industry and the introduction of an equitable levy mechanism which would come into play to recover the industry's contribution to any future outbreak.

Yours sincerely

Diane Bennit  
Chairperson