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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

Re: Inquiry into the Australian horse industry and an emergency animal disease response agreement

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Its 6300 members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, including cattle and sheep, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

Members of AVA and of Equine Veterinarians Australia (EVA), a Special Interest Group within the AVA corporate entity, are deeply conscious of the threat to Australian horses from emergency animal diseases (EADs). We are concerned to ensure that measures are in place to address the risks of introduction into Australia from overseas, of emergence in Australia and of potential delays in responding when they occur. Equine influenza demonstrated the value of early responses. The proposed levy is an important part of the measures needed to address EADs.

The attached submission addresses several of the terms of reference of the Inquiry.

I would be available with appropriate members to address the Committee in person if this would be of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Dr G Barry Smyth
President

Inquiry into the Australian horse industry and an emergency animal disease response agreement

Submission from the Australian Veterinary Association

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Its 6300 members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. The AVA and Equine Veterinarians Australia, a Special Interest Group within the AVA corporate entity with over 900 members, offer this submission to the Inquiry.

The submission addresses several of the terms of reference of the inquiry:

- a) *The implications to the Australian horse industry of committing to an Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA);*

The AVA **strongly** supports efforts to have the horse industry become a signatory of the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA). A horse industry levy is necessary to for funding of eradication of horse Emergency Animal Diseases (EADs). Industry levies and membership of EADRA have provided the financial basis for successful emergency animal disease (EAD) eradication programs for the other farm animal industries. They complement the AUSVETPLAN, the pre-planning process for the handling of EADs. EADRA enables all sectors to meet their obligations and to provide assurance of the availability of funds.

AUSVETPLAN was employed in the eradication of equine influenza (EI) in 2007-8 but in the absence of a shared funding agreement the Commonwealth and the States met the eradication costs of more than \$350m.

Governments have made it clear that they will not fund future eradication programs alone. This has led to calls for vaccination against EI to be allowed in advance of an outbreak as a means of protecting vulnerable industries. Vaccination for diseases that do not occur in Australia is not currently allowed, for good reasons.

AVA understands all inquiries that have examined issues related to vaccination against EI indicate that it is an expensive option and would forever change the way the Australian horse industry operates.

There is no scientific justification for vaccinating against a disease that does not exist in Australia. There is great concern about the economic impact of such a decision on horse owners. Estimates are that ongoing vaccination against EI would add several hundred dollars annually to the costs of keeping a horse. It would also have international trade implications for the horse industry and completely disrupt the trade advantages currently enjoyed by Australian horses because enhanced pre-export quarantine requirements and additional testing protocols would be imposed. Vaccination against EI would considerably complicate any attempts at eradication of any future incursion of EI into Australia. Importantly, the majority of horse owners in all sectors of the industry, except the thoroughbred industry, do not want to see EI vaccination introduced in the absence of any EI virus in Australia.

AVA notes that there has been considerable attention paid to enhanced quarantine procedures and protocols since 2007. These should reduce the risk of any future incursion of EI. AVA considers that enhanced quarantine can be supported by having on hand supplies of a suitable vaccine to be used on an emergency basis if there were to be another EI

outbreak. AVA encourages the horse industry to work with vaccine manufacturers and the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) to ensure that this process is completed promptly. It is now three years since EI escaped from quarantine and no emergency EI vaccine supplies are in place.

AVA makes the following points regarding vaccination:

1. EI entered Australia from Japan in August 2007 in stallions that were already vaccinated against EI.
2. EI vaccines induce an immune response in treated horses.
3. EI vaccines do not prevent vaccinated horses from becoming infected with EI virus.
4. EI vaccines do not prevent EI virus from replicating in vaccinated horses.
5. EI vaccines do not prevent vaccinated horses from shedding and spreading live EI virus.
6. EI virus is constantly changing its composition and there is no guarantee that a vaccine will be effective against field strains of EI.
7. Vaccines against EI induce immunity for a relatively short period and need to be given at least twice annually.
8. To be effective in suppressing spread of EI, at least 80% of the horse herd needs to have sufficiently high levels of immunity at all times. This is very difficult to achieve in practice.
9. To be certain of the EI status of a vaccinated horse herd, there needs to be a regular sampling program in place to test for presence of circulating EI virus and levels of immunity. This would be an expensive undertaking for horse owners.
10. Vaccination masks sub-clinical infection and would delay detection of an incursion and make control or eradication difficult.
11. Because EI has been successfully eradicated from Australia, there is no scientific basis for continued use of a vaccine against EI.
12. Evidence from countries where EI is endemic is very clear that vaccinating against EI would not prevent EI virus from infecting horses or preventing spread of EI virus among both vaccinated and unvaccinated horses. Race meetings in infected and vaccinating countries still experience difficulties with race meetings. While few meetings are cancelled many horses are unable to participate due to EI infection and illness.
13. The proposition that horses vaccinated against EI would be able to move without restriction in any future outbreak of EI is flawed. Given that such horses harbour and spread EI virus, it is highly unlikely that the remainder of the industry would allow such a situation to exist.
14. The presence of a partially vaccinated sector of the horse industry would considerably complicate any eradication attempts if there were another incursion of EI. The majority of horse industry participants have indicated that they are prepared to undergo another eradication campaign if there is a future outbreak of EI in Australia.

15. The vast majority of participants in the Australian horse industry are not in favour of allowing use of EI vaccine in the absence of disease. The exception is a small coterie of Thoroughbred sector interests.

16. AVA notes that there is no vaccination permitted in any other domestic animal populations in Australia in the absence of disease. Examples include Foot and Mouth Disease in our cloven hoofed animals and Rabies in our carnivores.

b) Options for equitable contributions by horse owners to a levy scheme to meet their obligations under EADRA in the event of an emergency animal disease outbreak in horses;

The AVA notes that various sectors of the horse industry are putting forward options for the levy. These include levies on horse shoes, solid feeds, transaction levies based on attendance at events and other means of including all sectors of the horse industries. The AVA does not seek to comment on the form of the levy but does believe that any levy must be universal and equitable to all sectors.

The AVA believes that the Government must institute a process for settling of the levy matter. This could be a national summit or other mechanism. The AVA asks that such a process be inclusive and transparent.

c) Criteria by which the cost burden of a levy would be shared between Commonwealth, state and territory governments, horse industry groups and owners;

This is a matter for those who will have to contribute funds.

d) Quarantine and biosecurity threats to Australia's horse industry.

There are many EADs that could threaten Australia. Equine influenza is but one of them. Some serious diseases are spread by fomites and others by insects. Some horse diseases have high mortality in horses, some affect other species and some, like West Nile virus and Japanese encephalitis, are zoonoses. Other diseases for which there are AUSVETPLAN chapters include:

African horse sickness
Rift Valley fever
Contagious equine metritis
Equine encephalitis (Eastern and Western)
Glanders
Equine influenza
Vesicular stomatitis

e) Any other matters

No comments