



Chivale

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Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Submission to the Inquiry into the Horse Disease Response Levy Bill 2008

References: A. Horse Disease Response Levy Bill 2008
B. Horse Disease Response Levy Collection Bill 2008
C. Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement 2001 (Revised 2006)
D. Report of the Equine Influenza Inquiry April 2008

I am a breeder of performance and pleasure horses and the owner of a horse stud registered with the Australian Pony Stud Book Society and the Welsh Pony and Cob Society of Australia.

I wish to submit the following concerns for the Inquiry to consider when discussing the imposition of a horse disease response levy under the acts (refs A and B).

The imposition of a levy on the first registration of a horse with a horse registration body promotes the inequitable position of the burden of such a levy being borne by the owners of registered horses only.

Within Australia the number of unregistered horses is greater than that of registered horses.

Horse owners who register their stock do so to meet competition and commercial breeding industry requirements. Horse owners who do not use their horses for competition requiring registration or regulated commercial breeding purposes have no requirement for horse registration.

Dealing with a horse disease outbreak, like the recent equine influenza case, requires the management of all horses in an affected area, not just the registered stock. The inequity of imposing a financial burden on the owners of registered stock only, to pay for the measures taken to combat a disease outbreak, is apparent.

There is also the risk of driving some current horse breeders away from consistent horse registration, depending on their market requirements, therefore reducing the income of existing horse registration bodies. At this time of recovery from last year's equine influenza outbreak and the continuing drought conditions in many parts of the country, horse owners and breeders will be reconsidering the viability of registering all of their stock when to do so would cost more in future.

Compulsory registration of all horses, either with a horse registration body or a local or state government authority, could make the situation more equitable, as is currently in place for other

stock animals and domestic pets such as dogs. This approach could also benefit the containment and control of any future horse disease outbreak.

The Agreement at ref C is yet to include the horse industry as such. Before it does so, the nature of any representation of horse owners needs to be qualified as there are a number of different sectors to be considered. Unlike other commercial stock animals, the horse is in the unique position of being widely represented in commercial, sporting, leisure and domestic areas.

The exclusion of any horse owners' group from the Agreement, likely as that is, should not then exclude them from equal care and attention in a time of need by those government organisations funded by the public purse and formed for the purpose of containing and controlling animal disease outbreaks. Equally, the owners of registered stock should not be expected to bear all the agreed costs of disease management across the entire Australian herd.

The report of the 2007 equine influenza outbreak (ref D) indicated the source of the disease's introduction into this country and implicated government agencies and personnel on the government payroll as being responsible. The Australian taxpayer already funds the organisations in place to provide protection against the introduction of exotic diseases. If future disease outbreaks are also a result of the breakdown of processes and safeguards put in place by these organisations, then it must be asked whether a single animal industry should be required to assist in the financial cost of the subsequent management of such an incident.

In summary, the imposition of a horse disease response levy is not an equitable, across the board solution and may well affect the future business of current horse registration bodies. If this bill is to be fair, it should follow the introduction of uniform registration requirements across the whole horse community.

I humbly submit these concerns for your consideration.



Chris Mathias