



THE WALER HORSE SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA INC.

ARBN 088 999 624

Motto: Australia's own

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SUBMISSION

to

The Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
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re

The Enquiry into the Horse Disease Response Levy Bill 2008

by

the Waler Horse Society of Australia Inc.

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Summary

The Waler Horse Society of Australia Inc. (WHSA) is the official breed society for the Waler horse – an Australian icon.

The WHSA considers that the Horse Disease Response Levy Bill 2008 is overly simplistic in its design and its introduction and passage through the House of Representatives has been overly hasty and has been grossly remiss in that no appropriate level of industry-wide consultation has occurred.

The WHSA considers that the Bill in its present form unjustly and unfairly discriminates against the not-for-profit segments of the Australian industry that are least able to afford any future levy payments that might set.

Recommendation: The WHSA recommends that the Levy Bill should be subjected to additional detailed scrutiny and consideration with a view to amending it so as to reflect a more measured and equitably distributed levy collection system for the Australian horse industry.

Preamble

The Waler horse developed from the original horses introduced with European settlement and they became the horse for settlers, explorers, the militia and others and they were a major force to get colonial Australia on the move.

Later, they were the famous mounts for the Australian Light Horse in WWI where they became world-famous for their stamina and endurance notably in the Battle of Beersheba.

The Waler horse was established as a distinct breed by the Waler Horse Society of Australia (WHSA) in 1986 following the collection of numbers of old bloodline horses from remnant herds on former remount breeding stations. These became the Foundation stock for the subsequent domestic breeding of Waler horses which is now producing 5th generation Walers.

The Waler is uniquely "Australia's Own" horse breed and they are an important part of Australian heritage.

The WHSA's primary objective is the preservation and promotion of the Waler horse which remains categorised as a rare breed and hence, technically, is endangered. The society has about 150 members scattered throughout the country and also has a number of Waler horse studs actively breeding and selling progeny.

WHSA Comments on The Horse Disease Response Levy Bill 2008

The WHSA wishes to register its strenuous opposition to the Bill in its present form. Our particular objections are as follows:

- *Section 4 - Imposition of levy:* The levy is to be only applicable to registered horses which is inequitable.
- *Section 5 - Rate of levy:* The fixing of the rate being subject to regulations is unacceptably open-ended whereas I understand contributions from other industries (plant and animal) are defined.
- *Section 6 - Payer of levy:* Owners of horses in small breed societies such as the WHSA will be disinclined to register their horses because of the for fear of being liable for an

undetermined levy. Furthermore, no indication is given of the method of informing an owner of a horse that a levy payment is due.

Horse Disease Response Levy Collection Bill 2008

- *Section 6 - Liability of horse registration bodies: (a)* This Section appears to be contradictory to Section 6 of The Horse Disease Response Levy Bill 2008 which clearly states that the "levy is payable by the owner of a horse."
- *Section 6 - Liability of horse registration bodies: (b)* if an owner makes a late payment of the levy, how then can the "registration body" be liable for a possible offence by an individual owner?
- *Section 7 – Collection of levy by horse registration bodies: (1)* this appears to be a self-defeating Section when a registration body may not register a horse unless the owner provides funds for payment of the levy which still appears to be of an unknown rate. Also, if the registered horse is sold on during the time a levy is being determined and the new owner is unknown to the registration body, how can the funds then be obtained by the registration body?
- *Section 7 – Collection of levy by horse registration bodies: (2)* Issue of a receipt to the owner of a horse by the registration body gives the owner of the horse no basis to know whether the registration body in fact makes or has made the payment to the Commonwealth. We would require the Commonwealth to issue a receipt for every levy payment.
- *Section 8 – When levy payment due:* There is no indication of what the time would be between setting the levy rate and the time payment is due and this is unacceptable.
- *Section 10 – Penalty for late payment:* Office holders in the committee of the WHSA operate in a voluntary capacity and a threat of any criminal prosecution for whatever reason would act as a serious disincentive for members to continue as office holders in which case the sustainability of the society and the Waler breed would be seriously threatened.
- *Section 14 – Powers to seek information or documents:* This and other previous requirements would inevitably involve significant administrative cost to the registration body for which the Commonwealth has offered no assistance.

General comments

- The Australian Horse "Industry" is one of the largest industries in Australia. It is also a very diverse industry. Its contribution to GDP is estimated at over \$6.3 billion (<http://www.rirdc.gov.au/reports/HOR/01-083sum.html>). Segments of the horse industry such as horse racing collectively generate \$3.9 billion. The ancillary segments such as animal husbandry, feed, training and transport contribute another \$3.1 billion. In contrast, a horse industry segment such as the WHSA generates a negligible or no direct contribution to GDP nor to the owners and breeders of Waler horses.
- Owning a horse is a very Australian tradition and one that should not be inhibited by government. Breeding and registration of horses in the various breed associations is also keenly undertaken in Australia but in the main, the respective members already have to make significant financial commitment to this activity through payment of riding equipment, association membership fees, horse registration fees, feed, transport and competition costs, veterinarian and the several other horse management costs such as worming, farriery care, vaccinations, gelding of colts etc. Being responsible for a levy of undefined amount for registered horses as well would most likely result in owners/breeders discontinuing the registration of their horses which, in the case of the Waler breed, would almost certainly lead to its demise.
- The Waler horse, with its iconic status in Australia's history and heritage where:

- it was vital in the exploration and development of Australia;
- they were one of our first exports as war horses or remounts for the British army in India;
- it was used as the horse for the Australian mounted infantry in 3 wars (Boer War, WWI and WWII),

makes it a breed that should not now or ever be saddled with any government levy that threatens its future sustainability.

- Targeting only the owners of registrable horses, for liability for payment of a Horse Disease Response Levy is grossly inequitable. While horse owners are concerned for the well-being of their horses in the event of an incursion of an exotic horse disease, they are by no means the only stakeholders in this objective. The Horse Disease Response Levy Bill fails completely in identifying and allocating financial responsibility for any other allied stakeholder in the Australian Horse Industry whose livelihood depends on it being dynamic and healthy.
- Consider the possible scenario of an incursion of more than one horse disease within a close period of time which, under this Bill, would require the imposition of a separate levy for each response. This would almost certainly become a crippling financial burden for many if not all of the small horse bodies such as the WHSA.
- We contend that there should be no imposition of a Horse Disease Response Levy upon horse owners after any future horse disease enters Australia where the Commonwealth can be shown to have failed in its implementation of quarantine protocols (such as in the case of the recent incursion of EI into Australia).