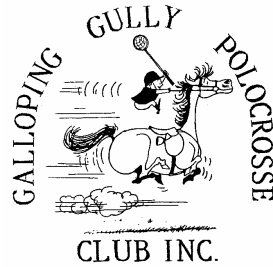


PRESIDENT

Lach Melbourne



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SECRETARY

Sally Hunter

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

23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2008

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

To the Committee,

I write on behalf of the Galloping Gully Polocrosse Club, located near Narrabri in North West NSW and I believe I represent all 5,000 polocrosse players in Australia and countless other recreational horse people in Australia in the points I make about the proposed Levy.

We would like to see a clear distinction made within the "horse industry" between those who are recreational and those who are professional. As recreational participants in the industry we generate no income from our involvement with horses and we therefore feel strongly that it is unjust and nonsensical that we should incur a Levy.

Polocrosse is a horse sport that has a range of benefits beyond the joy that playing it brings to the players.

In a time when governments are spending millions of dollars on programs that encourage:

- the maintenance and promotion of Australian heritage;
- active lifestyles to reduce the burden on the medical system;
- strong family units to reduce social problems;
- the survival of small communities to help the primary production industry;

we believe that the sport of polocrosse fully encourages all of these elements with NO cost to the government.

Polocrosse was invented by Australians and has been played since 1938; intertwined with our European settlement history. It continues to be intertwined with Australian heritage through its use of the Australian Stockhorse as the primary bloodlines. The continuation of polocrosse as a sport is in the national interest.

This is an extremely vigorous recreational pursuit that involves not only two days of competition most weekends during the season from April to August, it also requires training of your horse at least three times per week. Not to mention the activities of feeding, rugging, shoeing and grooming your horse. Players of polocrosse in our club are aged between four and seventy and are fit and healthy due to their active and healthy lifestyle without the need for marketing campaigns and funding programs.

Polocrosse carnivals are held primarily in small rural communities. Our carnival saw more than 50 teams attend, with six people in each team (300 players) and one or more family members attending (approximately 200 spectators). Events such as this play a significant role in the survival of small communities. Attendees to the carnival buy local supplies and the carnival hosts' source local products to hold the carnival. A club's carnival is usually their only income generation for the year. It is the sum of many small events and industries such as these that will ensure the survival of these small towns. Jeopardising the future of polocrosse adds another nail to the coffin of our small rural towns.

Polocrosse is unflatteringly described as "poor mans' polo". It is an inexpensive sport to play, attracting primarily working class families. Yearly registration costs \$255 and a weekend fee of \$15 is charged by the hosting club. Aside from these costs there are travel and living expenses, meaning a whole weekend of active, wholesome recreation could be enjoyed by a family of four for as little as \$100 (depending on a range of factors). The game can be played with only one horse, no special equipment is required and a horse can be transported using a horse float and a middle of the range vehicle.

Walking around a polocrosse carnival you will see families everywhere, babies through to grandparents spending time together. Our polocrosse club in the 2008 season had 29 adult playing members and 14 junior playing members, indicating the strength of the game in attracting young people. It is also an enjoyable spectator sport for other family members, with entire families camping together at carnivals. We have three generations of families attending our meetings.

The proposed Levy will increase the costs associated with playing polocrosse rendering it out of the reach of middle class families.

As we understand it a Levy would ensure the "horse industry's" ability to become a party to the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA). This would enable the "horse industry" to receive financial support from the government should a disease outbreak occur that caused the industry to be reduced or shut down.

Whilst we appreciate this approach and believe it is critical, along with improved quarantine practices, for the future sustainability of the "horse industry" we strongly disagree with the approach that the Levy be broad based and industry wide.

We believe the financial impost of a Levy should be placed squarely and singularly on those "horse industry" participants who:

1. Generate income from the industry i.e. professional industry members, not recreational
2. Create the risk of disease outbreaks through their international transportation of horses
3. Benefit financially the most, from exposing Australia to that increased risk
4. Would financially gain from the government support should an outbreak occur

The recreational horse people that we represent, and particularly the Galloping Gully Polocrosse Club members:

1. Do not generate income from the industry but significantly support industry services i.e. we put money into the industry but DO NOT take money out
2. Do not create any disease risks as we do not use international genetics and do not travel overseas with our sport
3. Do not benefit in any way from open borders for horses as we primarily use Australian bloodlines

4. Would not benefit from the financial support provided by the government should an outbreak occur, as seen during the August 2007 Equine Influenza Outbreak, where recreational horse people were inconvenienced by the shut down but not compensated.

It is therefore ridiculous that we, as recreational horse people, should incur a financial impost for something that we do not help to create, do no gain from and would ultimately receive no benefit from.

We simply ask that we can continue to play polocrosse and encourage others to play for the general wellbeing of the Australian community, without unreasonable financial imposts. We call on the Committee to seriously consider the involvement of the recreational horse person in a Levy system and request them to ensure that the Levy collection mechanism recognises the difference between a professional horse industry participant and a simple horse rider.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sally Hunter', with a large, sweeping flourish above the name.

Sally Hunter  
Secretary, Galloping Gully Polocrosse Club