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EQUINE INFLUENZA FORUM

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**Lessons learnt from the
Equine Influenza outbreak in Queensland**

1. INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION UNDERPINS SUCCESS

- **Consultation and engagement with industry underpins the success of the program to date –because it assists with implementing tough policy.**
- **It is critical to open up lines of communication early with industry and to hold regular, structured briefings. The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries coordinated regular control group meetings, as well as numerous informal discussions with all involved parties.**
- **However if engagement is going to work you have to consult with the right people. Need to ensure that the people you have at the table have the appropriate authority to make decisions on the run, and who know the needs of their member base or sector.**
- **DPI&F – particularly our Biosecurity Queensland group - had an excellent working relationship with Andrew Kelly from Queensland Harness Racing.**
- **One of the reasons that this worked was because discussions were frank and open. When you're working to a deadline – to get ahead of the spread of a highly contagious disease - it's really important that all issues are on the table.**
- **If you want to get results, come to government with a solution, not just a problem.**

**2. ENGAGEMENT ONLY WORKS IF YOU'RE WORKING WITH THE WHOLE SECTOR,
NOT JUST SINGLE PARTS**

- **Early in the response, the Queensland Government invested a lot of time in consulting with the racing sector – both harness and thoroughbred, but it quickly became very clear in terms of the eradication program, that the real areas of concern was outside of the racing industry and in what is now referred to as the Performance and Pleasure Horse Industry.**
- **With limited formal structures, membership base or regulations, it was very difficult to communicate equitably with the performance & pleasure group, and to include them in the decision making process.**
- **The Queensland Government worked hard to assist the performance and pleasure horse industry. A crisis group was established to participate in round table discussions, and this process is continuing to evolve.**
- **Once that new voice existed, it was clear that there was a perception that the government had been favouring the racing sector. The needs of performance and pleasure horse industry were very different to the racing sector, including the economic impact on businesses that supported the industry, such as saddleries and farriers, and on the impact to the community and community groups.**
- **It was clear that one rule does not apply to all – and even within the racing sector – harness and thoroughbreds - there were significant differences in issues between groups. The experience of the response to the disease outbreak illustrated that there is a real need for the non-racing horse sector to come together with a representative body.**

3. KNOW YOUR INDUSTRY AND KNOW YOUR PROBLEM

- **Harness racing really knew their sector and it was important that our Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) and Chief Inspector of Stock both utilised this knowledge.**
- **But in the bigger picture, as touched on earlier, harness racing and thoroughbred were only a small part of the horse population in Queensland.**
- **We still do not have complete data on horse numbers and ownership in Queensland and this is a challenge that all sectors of the horse industry in Queensland need to tackle together.**

4. GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT IS DIFFICULT

- **Even though engagement with industry is critical at all times, DPI&F continually worked hard to get the balance right between minimising impact to industry, and the ultimate goal of containing and eradicating the disease.**
- **Sometimes we had the balance right, sometimes we didn't.**
- **To achieve our mission of eradication, it often meant that Biosecurity Queensland had to make tough calls such as implementing a standstill, that we knew would negatively impact industry, the community, and the businesses supported by it, but that would also contain the disease.**
- **However setting movement conditions especially was also a delicate balance between disease control and allowing industry to operate.**
- **A big lesson learnt was that tough policy decisions such as the standstill, movement restrictions and event protocols tended to be more accepted by industry if they understood the reasons why DPI&F had made that decision.**
- **Harness Racing Queensland were happy to implement and communicate tough movement restrictions, zoning changes, vaccination process and protocols if they understood the bigger picture, and why these decisions were being implemented.**

- **The tough standstill implemented at the start of the outbreak contained the disease to a small, very dense population in south east Queensland. The disease gradually spread to a large population of horses in a relatively small area.**
- **Although we still don't know the exact numbers of horses in the South East Queensland we currently estimate around 78,000 horses in the red zone. Most of these are now immune, either through vaccination or infection.**
- **Critical to disease management was that the vast majority of these horses were not racing horses, and that is where the disease was most difficult to control.**
- **It is important to understand the impact and role of vaccination in this response. While vaccination was important for business continuity for the Harness industry, where it really had an impact on disease eradication was in the performance and pleasure horse sector and the breeding industry. This is important to remember as we adjust our response plans for the future.**

5. HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOUR

Race card, Albion Park, 24 November 2007 included:

- **Ron Glanville Pace**
- **Allison Crook Pace**
- **John Roberts Trot**
- **Pat Kalinowski Pace**
- **Lloyd Reeve-Johnson Pace**

6. HAVE FAITH

- **DPI&F has a long history of successfully eradicating exotic diseases.**
- **At the peak of the disease, it was easy to talk doom and gloom and predict widespread endemic disease and lifelong vaccination policies.**
- **At the peak of the disease Queensland had over 2000 infected properties in Queensland. We now have none, and have kept it this way since Christmas.**
- **With the right expertise, policies and players at the table, we can and will eradicate EI from Australia. However we must learn from our EI experience.**
- **Government has learnt many lessons and I'm sure this is the case for industry. Collectively we will be in a much stronger position in the future if we heed these lessons.**