



Australian Government

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

**Deputy Secretary and
Executive Director**
Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service

Mr G. Barry Smyth
President
Australian Horse Industry Council
PO Box 2132
GEELONG VIC 3220

Dear Mr Smyth

Thank you for your letter of 19 May 2008 to Mr Stephen Hunter requesting information about measures being established by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) to reduce the risk of exotic horse disease incursions. I have been appointed Deputy Secretary and Executive Director of AQIS during this time of transition and am therefore responding to your letter on behalf of the Department.

You would be aware that following the outbreak of equine influenza in August last year, Biosecurity Australia (BA) undertook a review of import policy for live horses. As a result of this review, a set of interim conditions was developed consisting of additional measures to better manage the risks associated with exotic horse diseases.

In December 2007, AQIS distributed new standard operating procedures based upon the interim conditions provided by BA. The new operating procedures were drafted in consultation with BA and reviewed by industry and regional AQIS officers responsible for the clearance and quarantine of imported horses. In line with the revised procedures, a formal training package was developed and delivered to regional staff. The formal training incorporated modules on legislation, occupational health and safety and disease awareness, as well as practical sessions on all activities associated with the clearance and quarantine of imported horses.

An audit of all activities associated with the new standard operating procedures was undertaken in both Melbourne and Sydney to verify compliance with the new procedures.

Since the outbreak in August, facilities at Eastern Creek Quarantine Station have been upgraded. A 24 hour security guard service has been put in place. Footbaths and portable showers have also been installed at the entrance to the horse facility.

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, The Hon. Tony Burke MP, released the Report of the Equine Influenza Inquiry and the Government's response in June 2008. The Government's response has been to accept all 38 recommendations. Work immediately commenced along the quarantine chain to implement the recommendations. For example, here in Australia, AQIS is

moving to provide portable showers at Kingsford Smith and Tullamarine airports, provide guards at Tullamarine airport, update work instructions and deliver further training to staff.

BA and AQIS have also begun to audit all pre-export quarantine (PEQ) facilities from which horses will come for the breeding and racing seasons. BA is assessing the risks and AQIS is auditing compliance. All PEQs will be inspected by BA and AQIS until we are satisfied that they are operating effectively. Import conditions have also been amended.

As reports are received from BA, further changes to PEQ requirements, airport and quarantine facilities, instructions and training for AQIS staff may occur. An Expert Group is also being established as part of the response and the interim Inspector-General of Horse Imports is to be appointed.

Dr Ann McDonald, the senior officer responsible for horse imports, is also establishing an AQIS-industry consultative committee to make sure industry is kept informed and involved in the progress to address disease risks associated with horse importation. You should expect to hear from her shortly regarding AHIC participation.

I trust this information has assisted in addressing your concerns.

Yours sincerely



Dr Cliff Samson

4 July 2008
