

HORSE INDUSTRY CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING 32 MINUTES

15 May 2026

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Mickleham Quarantine Facility

Participants

Industry members and guests

Andrew Small (Racing NSW)	Debbie Mills (Australian Horse Industry Council)
Chris Burke (International Racehorse Transport)	Paul Eriksson (Racing Australia)
James Gilkerson (Australian Veterinary Association)*	Paige Mantynen (Racing Australia)*
Josh Murphy (New Zealand Bloodstock)	Anthony Keyburn (Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness)*
Kathleen Mullan (Harness Racing Australia Inc)	Matilda Morgan (NSW Department of Primary Industries)
Andrew Hore-Lacy (Thoroughbred Breeders Australia)	Josie M Holmes (Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action)
Meagan McGrath (Thoroughbred Breeders Australia)	Fiona Thompson (QLD Department of Primary Industries)*
Michelle James (Equestrian Australia)	
Ross Kendell (Horse Industry Consultant)	

Apologies

Cameron Croucher (Equine International Airfreight)

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Brant Smith (Biosecurity Animal Division)*	Chris McDonald (Sustainable Trade Funding Taskforce)*
Kristin Sykes (Animal and Biological Imports Branch)	Jennifer Davis (Agriculture Trade Strategy)*
Michelle Blowes (Animal and Biological Imports Branch)	Andrea Foreshaw (Agriculture Trade Strategy)*
Danni Davis (Animal and Biological Imports Branch)	Darryl Barbour (Sustainable Trade Funding)*
Emma McGrath (Animal and Biological Imports Branch)	Rossana Carr (Live Animal Export Branch)
Kaylene Jones (Animal and Biological Imports Branch)	Tim Naylor (Live Animal Export Branch)
Melissa Henson (Animal and Biological Imports Branch)	Courtney Turner (Live Animal Export Branch)
Rick Hawe (Biosecurity Operations Division)*	Stephen Malone (Post Entry Quarantine)
Annette Dougall (Epidemiology Surveillance and Laboratory)*	Jacob Nuttall (Mickleham Quarantine Facility)
Tania Ware (Animal Biosecurity Branch)	Wilma Baines (Mickleham Quarantine Facility)
Jessica Hoad (Animal Biosecurity Branch)	Natasha Halim (Mickleham Quarantine Facility)
Luke Osborne (Animal Strategy and Coordination Branch)	Katherine Moffat (Mickleham Quarantine Facility)
Joel Willis (Animal Strategy and Coordination Branch)	Leah Wells (Veterinary and Export Meat Branch)
Emma Horan (Animal Strategy and Coordination Branch)	Kerry Daly (Veterinary and Export Meat Branch)
Leanne Payne (Cost Recovery Biosecurity)*	Mikala Welsh (Veterinary and Export Meat Branch)*
Maria Loyman (Funding and Revenue)*	Vanessa King (Veterinary and Export Meat Branch)

**denotes attendance for part of meeting only*

Meeting started at 10:08am

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and provided an Acknowledgement of Country.

The Chair advised attendees that the meeting is recorded for minute taking purposes and will be deleted once the minutes are finalised. The Chair reminded the attendees about the confidentiality of all discussions at the meeting.

Brant Smith, First Assistant Secretary, Biosecurity Animal Division, provided an opening address, acknowledging the disruption and challenges caused by the current situation in the Middle East and noting the pressures this has placed on both industry and government. He advised that the department has established a dedicated taskforce comprised of individual streams contributing to broader whole-of-government responses, including modelling impacts and supporting supply chain resilience. Brant emphasised the continued importance of balancing biosecurity integrity with the efficient movement of animals and animal products.

Brant also acknowledged the increasing cost pressures faced across industry and government, including fuel and operational costs. Industry are encouraged to raise any information gaps or concerns. Brant noted the value of the HICC forum as a longstanding mechanism for industry engagement and thanked attendees for their continued participation and contributions.

2. Minutes and Action items from past meetings

The Chair noted that **Meeting 31 minutes** were finalised and circulated to members on 3 July 2025 and published on the department's website.

The Chair provided updates on the following outstanding action items from prior meetings.

Meeting 25- 8 November 2021

Action item	Update
ACTION ITEM 9: Dr Wong to update on progress of draft policy for laboratories performing official testing for animal diseases. The current draft reflects different requirements for testing imported animals, domestic animals and domestic animals intended for export and trade purposes. There is also a focus on the approval of laboratories for performing official testing. Work is ongoing through Animal Health Committee with input from the department.	CLOSED. No significant updates since last meeting. The National Policy for Laboratories Testing for Animal Diseases Task Group has reconvened and are working through the scope and Terms of Reference. The department will provide an update to HICC when there is progress on this action item.

Meeting 29 – 7 December 2023

Action item	Update
ACTION ITEM 5: ABB will provide an update on ACDP's piroplasmosis testing milestone report when available in 2024.	CLOSED. ACDP will provide an update at Agenda Item 4.

Meeting 30- 23 May 2024

Action item	Update
ACTION ITEM 1: ABB will pursue improved import conditions for equine herpes virus and equine influenza with China via Post.	CLOSED. Other market access issues have taken priority. Industry's market access priorities will be discussed at Agenda Item 5.

Meeting 31 – 1 May 2025

Action item	Update
ACTION ITEM 1: Rick Hawe to provide photographs to meeting attendees showing construction progress at Western Sydney Airport.	CLOSED. Photographs were not circulated but Rick will give an update on WSA construction progress at Agenda Item 3.
ACTION ITEM 2: ABIB will follow up with ACDP to determine if IFAT and cELISA can be made available for use prior to PCR readiness.	CLOSED: PCR is part of the test validation required for accreditation. Availability of IFAT and cELISA for horse exports is therefore dependant on the completion of the PCR.
ACTION ITEM 3: ABIB to publish actual horse import statistics to the departments website and notify attendees when this has occurred.	CLOSED: Horse import data has been published to the department website and HICC attendees were notified and provided with the hyperlink on 3 July 2025.
ACTION ITEM 4: Ben Wilson to provide updated cost information per cost centre, and therefore commodity, at the next HICC meeting once further work on this has been completed.	CLOSED: Stephen Malone is acting for Ben Wilson. He will provide an update at Agenda Item 7 with Jacob Nuttall who has stepped into Judie Wong's position whilst she is on leave.

3. Western Sydney Airport update

Rick Hawe, Biosecurity Operations Division, provided an update on the development of Western Sydney Airport (WSA), including progress toward commencement of operations and livestock handling facilities.

Rick advised that cargo operations are expected to commence at the airport from the end of July 2026, with passenger flights to follow between October and November 2026. Although still uncertain, it is likely that cargo services will include both domestic and international movements from commencement. Operational planning indicates a phased approach by operators, with some expected to commence domestic services initially while others have indicated intent to operate international cargo services from commencement. Development of the airport and associated biosecurity arrangements is progressing steadily, with further updates to be provided as commercial and infrastructure decisions are finalised.

Construction of the cargo precinct is largely complete, including cargo terminal operator (CTO) facilities, hardstand infrastructure, taxiways and security fencing, with only minor works relating to airside security requirements remaining prior to operational readiness.

Companion animal movements are planned to commence from day one, subject to regulatory approvals. Work is progressing with CTOs to ensure facilities meet requirements under the Biosecurity Act and Customs legislation, with approvals and construction activities advancing within tight timeframes.

At this stage, there is still no commitment for livestock import or export operations at WSA from commencement. There have been discussions about building an interim livestock handling facility, followed by development of a permanent facility in the future. The department has provided technical guidance on planning and design requirements and remains ready to support future development.

Industry raised a number of observations and concerns regarding the current design and planning of Western Sydney Airport, particularly in relation to biosecurity and commercial viability. It was noted that biosecurity was not sufficiently considered in the initial design of the cargo facilities, including limitations in infrastructure to effectively manage biosecurity risks or incidents. Concerns were raised that awareness among cargo terminal operators regarding the movement of live animals remains limited and has not been adequately factored into operational planning.

Industry also noted that from a commercial perspective, uncertainty around future animal import and export volumes is a key challenge, with no firm airline commitments in place at this stage. This creates difficulty in establishing a viable business model for dedicated animal handling facilities, particularly where volumes may be fragmented across multiple operators. Comparisons were made to international models where centralised, dedicated animal facilities support commercial viability and biosecurity outcomes.

4. Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP) update

Anthony Keyburn, Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP), presented on the development of diagnostic testing capability for equine piroplasmiasis (EP) in Australia.

Anthony outlined that EP is an exotic, notifiable, tick-borne disease affecting horses, with global presence across Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Development of diagnostic capability within Australia has been prioritised to support Australia's export industry and biosecurity preparedness, including in the context of potential risks associated with increased horse movements, such as for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

ACDP has progressed work to establish both serological and molecular testing capability. Existing capability includes validated ELISA and IFAT serological tests, with recent work focused on developing PCR-based molecular assays to strengthen detection capability. Due to the complexity of the disease and variability between strains, multiple testing methods are required to ensure robust detection, with different assays providing complementary sensitivity across genotypes.

Testing has identified preferred PCR assays for the detection of both *Theileria equi* and *Babesia caballi*, noting that genetic variation between strains presents ongoing challenges for assay design. While real-time PCR approaches were explored, these were not considered sufficiently robust for diagnostic purposes at this stage, and conventional PCR methods will be retained.

The proposed diagnostic approach requires a combination of six tests (two ELISA, two IFAT and two PCR), with all tests required to return negative results for an animal to be considered free of disease. This reflects the complexity of EP and the limitations of individual testing methods when used in isolation.

ACDP is finalising validation work and preparing submission for National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) accreditation, expected to occur mid-2026. Timeframes for accreditation remain dependent on the review process, with indicative expectations of several months following submission.

Discussion with industry highlighted the importance of turnaround times for export testing, noting that current laboratory timeframes may not align with operational requirements for horse export pathways. Industry also highlighted the requirement for tighter turnaround times for testing during post arrival quarantine. ACDP acknowledged these constraints and noted that testing timeframes may be refined based on demand, volume

and operational needs. Ongoing engagement with industry and international reference laboratories will continue to ensure testing capability remains fit for purpose.

5. Animal Biosecurity Branch updates

Tania Ware, Animal Biosecurity Branch, provided an update on import and export country negotiations. The branch continues to manage ongoing business-as-usual activities, including advisory work with the Animal and Biological Imports Branch and an increased volume of requests relating to equine reproductive material.

A number of market access matters were highlighted as key priorities including engagement with the United States regarding changes to the model health certificate for horse exports, with implementation scheduled for 15 June 2026. Some requirements—particularly relating to contagious equine metritis—present challenges and remain under discussion.

Significant work has also been undertaken to address changes to Thailand's import protocol, which introduced extensive requirements with limited notice. These changes included pre-export containment in vector-proof facilities, testing for diseases from which Australia has country freedom, and certification requirements outside departmental remit. The department has engaged with the Thai Department of Livestock Development to seek amendments, including recognition of DIVA testing for Hendra-vaccinated horses, and is awaiting further response.

Progress on improving market access conditions with China has been limited due to competing priorities, although trade remains open under existing arrangements.

Work with South Africa remains ongoing, with no agreed protocol currently in place. The department is aware that industry is looking for a quick resolution and provided a response in February with a request to assess alternate conditions. Requirements in the protocol included 30 days pre-export quarantine in a vector proof facility, and testing for diseases that Australia currently has country freedom from. During discussion, industry noted that delays in progressing discussions with South Africa are impacting trade.

Tania also provided a brief overview of an audit of Australia's horse export system by New Zealand's Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) which was completed earlier this year. While the final audit report is yet to be received, initial feedback indicated no concerns, with a positive outcome expected. Appreciation was expressed to industry representatives for their support and participation in the audit process.

During discussion, it was also noted that the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) supports removal of certain testing requirements for diseases where horses are incidental hosts, reinforcing the department's position in current negotiations.

6. Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games

Joel Willis, Animal Strategy and Coordination Branch, presented on the department's planning and engagement for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Australian Government retains responsibility for setting import policy and a dedicated coordination capability has been established within the department to manage animal biosecurity Olympic games-related planning, complementing existing biosecurity and policy expertise. Work to date has focused on early-stage planning, stakeholder engagement and cross-government coordination, including with the Brisbane 2032 Organising Committee, Department of Infrastructure, the Queensland Government and key international bodies such as the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) and WOAH. Preliminary engagement with industry stakeholders and site visits to relevant facilities have also been undertaken to support early planning and awareness.

Current planning assumptions indicate the potential importation of approximately 250–320 horses for the Games, in addition to assistance animals and significant volumes of associated equipment and imported feed. Final decisions regarding sports, disciplines, venues and logistics have not yet been confirmed, creating a number of dependencies for planning. The Toowoomba Showgrounds has been identified as a potential equestrian venue, with initial design and infrastructure planning underway, although this remains subject to confirmation and further validation processes.

The Games present a number of unique biosecurity challenges, including the high volume and concentrated movement of animals, equipment and personnel over a short period, and the need to integrate biosecurity, competition and event requirements within a single site. Opportunities are being explored to develop tailored risk-based approaches, including event site-based quarantine arrangements and alternative biosecurity measures that provide an equivalent level of protection to current import requirements.

Existing import and quarantine requirements for horses were outlined by Michelle Blowes as a baseline for risk management, including pre-export quarantine, disease testing and post-arrival quarantine arrangements. These requirements are expected to provide a benchmark however, alternative arrangements may be considered for the Games where supported by appropriate risk assessments and equivalent risk mitigation outcomes noting the time-limited and location specific nature of the event. Further work is required to develop detailed biosecurity policies for the Games, including import conditions, quarantine arrangements and operational procedures.

Discussion focussed on a number of considerations for future planning, including the importance of aligning early infrastructure design with biosecurity requirements, the need for early engagement with international stakeholders, and issues relating to disease management, traceability and vaccination for endemic disease.

7. Cost Recovery update

Leanne Payne, Finance Division, referenced the paper, *'Biosecurity cost recovery arrangement for horses'* that was circulated to attendees prior to the meeting.

The PEQ horse arrangement is currently in deficit, with this trend expected to continue to the end of the financial year. Lower revenue has been driven by reduced import volumes, with current forecasts indicating approximately 133 fewer horses compared to the previous financial year.

For 2026–27, most fees and charges are proposed to increase by 3.8%, in line with the Consumer Price Index. In addition, a legislative amendment is proposed to remove the under-utilised husbandry overstay fee, with any additional services to be recovered through fee-for-service arrangements.

Broader review activities are also underway, including a portfolio charging review (across the portfolio) and a full review of our regulatory charges (within DAFF). These processes will inform future pricing adjustments, with revised fees and charges anticipated for implementation from 1 July 2027 following consultation with industry.

Discussion focussed on industry concerns regarding the complexity of cost recovery arrangements, declining import volumes, and the potential for accumulated deficits to result in significant future fee increases. The importance of transparency, predictability, and more responsive pricing mechanisms was emphasised. Departmental representatives acknowledged these concerns and noted that ongoing consultation and review processes aim to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of cost recovery arrangements.

Wilma Baines, MQF, gave an update on the introduction of new cost centres for MQF. Separate cost centres have been established for key commodity areas, including horses, cats and dogs, and avian species. This represents a shift from a broader, aggregated costing model and is intended to improve transparency and enable more accurate allocation of costs across operations.

The new structure is beginning to provide more detailed data on operational costs, including employee and operating expenses, and is supporting improved analysis of resource allocation across the facility. Early observations indicate some variation in cost profiles compared to previous years, reflecting changes in import volumes and staffing allocation across compounds.

The enhanced cost centre approach is expected to support more accurate cost recovery modelling over time, reduce the risk of cross-subsidisation between commodities, and inform future financial and operational decision-making at MQF. Ongoing monitoring and refinement of cost allocations will continue as more data becomes available.

Industry noted the need for cost recovery to be more agile and responsive to ensure that it does not result in significant under recovery, which can result in large price rises that are unsustainable for importers.

8. Trade Strategy Taskforce

Chris McDonald, Trade Strategy Task Force, gave a presentation on the work of the Sustainable Trade Funding Taskforce, in relation to the implementation of new export cost recovery arrangements and broader funding reforms across export systems.

Chris noted that the Australian Government has committed to a phased return to full cost recovery across 7 export arrangements, following a period where a gap has existed between the cost of delivering services and the revenue recovered through fees and charges. This transition is being supported by temporary government supplementation while new funding and costing models are developed and implemented.

In recognition of current global pressures, including the impacts of conflict in the Middle East, the government recently decided to defer the changes to export fees and charges by 12 months. As a result, there will be no fee increases in 2026–27, with the transition to full cost recovery compressed into a shorter timeframe from 1 July 2027.

Some export functions, particularly those relating to animal welfare (such as the independent observer program), have been removed from cost recovery and will instead be funded by government. Additional reforms are underway in the live animal export space, including preparation for the cessation of live sheep exports by sea, which will require further adjustment to cost recovery arrangements.

An overview of consultation undertaken earlier in the year was provided, including engagement with industry stakeholders and feedback received. Key themes raised by industry during consultation included concerns regarding the decision-making process, calls for greater transparency around cost structures, and requests for independent review of departmental cost bases. Feedback also highlighted concerns about the potential impacts of fee increases on industry viability and market behaviour. In response, the department has made some adjustments where possible, including providing additional detail on pricing structures and considering opportunities to refine fee-based charging approaches. Some requested changes are currently constrained by system limitations and data availability, but these will be considered as part of ongoing reform.

9. Other business

Michelle Blowes provided a brief update on the 7.12 Approved Arrangement conditions. Michelle advised that a draft of the updated requirements has been developed and is nearing finalisation. The revised document has been restructured to improve clarity, usability and flow, with sections now organised more logically across key areas such as personnel and accreditation, pre-arrival requirements, site access, quarantine operations, and standard operating procedures.

It was noted that the updates are primarily administrative in nature and do not introduce significant changes to existing requirements. Instead, the focus has been on clarifying expectations, removing duplication, and improving consistency in how requirements and supporting evidence are presented. Existing core biosecurity requirements, including separation distances, fencing, supervision and monitoring obligations, remain unchanged. Additional clarification has been included in areas that were previously ambiguous

Michelle advised that the draft document would be circulated to key industry stakeholders for review and feedback soon. Following a second round of formal consultation, the finalised conditions will be published on the department's website.

10. Close and next meeting details

The chair thanked everyone for their attendance and noted that next HICC meeting is planned for May 2027.

Meeting closed at 12:38pm.

SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS

Action item 1: ABIB will circulate the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games presentation to members.

Action Item 2: Cost Recovery Biosecurity will provide additional information to members on the portfolio charging review process.

Action Item 3: The department will provide further detail to importers on how overstay costs will be recovered under the proposed fee-for-service model.

Action Item 4: ABIB will circulate the draft Class 7.12 Approved Arrangement conditions to interested and key stakeholders for review.