

Notice to Industry 14: Policy on riding horses during post-arrival quarantine in Australia

Introduction

The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources requires all horses imported into Australia from approved countries other than New Zealand and New Caledonia to complete a minimum of 14 days post-arrival quarantine at the government's biosecurity facility in Mickleham, Victoria. The horses are isolated from the Australian horse population and monitored for any diseases of biosecurity concern to Australia, including equine influenza (EI). EI is a highly infectious disease of horses that spreads rapidly through direct contact between horses, contact between people and infected horses, and through contact with contaminated fomites (inanimate objects). The movement of people and objects out of the quarantine area during the quarantine period poses significant risk of introduction of EI to the Australian horse population. This is what occurred in Sydney in 2007 and resulted in Australia's only EI outbreak.

Biosecurity

The primary principle of biosecurity is to isolate the imported horses from any direct or indirect contact to the Australian horse population thereby reducing the risk of disease transmission to very low. This is achieved by maintaining tight control over movement of people and objects out of the quarantine facility while horses subject to biosecurity control are present. Only those industry personnel essential for the husbandry of the horses are permitted entry to the facility e.g. grooms, veterinarians and occasionally farriers, who have undertaken an induction and training process.

In accordance with quarantine principles, the risk of an outbreak of exotic equine disease such as EI in the Australian horse population increases with personnel movements out of the quarantine area, especially when those personnel are likely to have contact with Australian horses. Horse riders and equipment are not essential for the daily husbandry of the horses therefore, in the interests of biosecurity, they should not be permitted.

Facilities

The government's Mickleham facility is designed to meet the basic needs of horses during quarantine and includes the stable complex for housing the animals and the opportunity for some exercise as part of a horse's daily maintenance i.e. turn out yards, a paddock and a horse walker. The compound does not provide facilities to allow for training and riding of horses.

WHS

Horses are large and dangerous animals. Each year in Australia, more deaths are associated with incidents with horses (mostly falls while riding) than with any other animal, including sharks, snakes and spiders (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-17/horse-more-likely-to-kill-you-than-bees-wasps-snakes-spiders/8188842>). Increasing contact between people and horses during quarantine,

and particularly allowing riding of horses in quarantine, would increase the likelihood of a serious incident to staff or industry personnel within the quarantine facility

Insurance and Liability

The Mickleham post arrival quarantine facility was not built to facilitate training and riding of horses in the various disciplines i.e. dressage, jumping, race training, therefore the current insurance policy protects personnel and horses for incidents relating to the maintenance of horse husbandry and welfare in the context of biosecurity control, and not for incidents relating to riding / training of horses.

Operational implications

Extra people and equipment moving into and out of the quarantine facility would necessitate extra department supervision impacting staff availability for other tasks and potentially increasing costs for importers.

Conclusion

The duration of post-arrival quarantine for horses is short (14 days). The Mickleham post arrival quarantine facility is designed for the basic needs of horses under biosecurity control and includes the provision for natural exercise (turnout yard, paddock, horse walker). Given the biosecurity risks associated with increased movements out of the compound, the human health risks associated with riding/training of horses, and the current insurance cover being specific for only basic horse husbandry during quarantine, the department considers that riding of horses during post-arrival quarantine is not necessary or desirable, and does not plan to facilitate the building of horse riding/training facilities.

Alternative Option

Approved Arrangements (AA) may be entered into with the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources which allow operators to manage biosecurity risks using their own premises, facilities, equipment and people, with occasional departmental compliance monitoring in the form of auditing. The [Class 7.12 Approved Arrangement Conditions for Horses](#) outlines the requirements that must be met to register an AA with the department and provides the avenue by which horses that require consistent riding/training within quarantine may be imported. Information on how to apply for an AA site is available [here](#).