

EQUINE DISEASE – QUARANTINE ISSUES IN THE SPOTLIGHT

EQUINE FLU

The outbreak of Equine Influenza in Australia is Australia's first major outbreak of equine disease in many decades.

Whilst investigations are underway, it has been reported to have possibly been introduced via a quarantine station in Sydney by shuttle stallions. The impact on Australia's equine industry, but in particular the Thoroughbred sector, has already been enormous.

South Africans will clearly recall the impact of our last outbreak of equine flu in December 2003 which brought racing operations in all centres barring Kwa-Zulu Natal to a standstill for a number of months. In contrast to the response of the South African veterinary community, which instituted an immediate and expansive vaccination campaign to limit the extent of the outbreak, it is understood that Australia are at present opposed to introducing vaccine to the country, instead preferring to control the movement of horses.

South Africa has first hand experience of how difficult it is to control movement of horses with African Horsesickness (AHS), but the problems associated with equine flu are infinitely worse as humans are also capable of transporting the disease. To date, Queensland and New South Wales remain the only States affected and with the hugely valuable Spring Carnival about to commence, Victorian Racing Authorities, are holding thumbs that their defense system will work.

It should be noted that the South African Veterinary Services has suspended imports from Australia until further notice.

STRANGLES

Much closer to home, it has been reported that a small number of horses completing their pre-export isolation at a facility outside Johannesburg showed clinical signs of infection, suspected to be strangles, before departure to Mauritius. This has led to a delay of the export. Given the importance of the Mauritian market to South Africa, the risks associated with introducing an infectious disease such as strangles to the Mauritian horseracing population was too high and all parties involved with the decision-making process should be applauded.

The horses affected by the suspension include a number of permanent Thoroughbred exports for the Mauritian Turf Club, but mostly endurance horses using the Mauritian quarantine facility on a temporary basis prior to being exported to Europe and beyond.

CAPE TOWN VS MAURITIUS?

In respect of the latter scenario, it is clear that Mauritius has played a major role in sustaining the export of South African horses whilst direct exports from South Africa have been suspended, particularly during the last period of shutdown between February 2004 and October 2006.

As a brief reminder, it operates on the basis of two separate protocols: firstly, an arrangement between South Africa and Mauritius and secondly between Mauritius and the EU. The process requires 21 day pre-export isolation at a State-approved facility in South Africa and then 40 days pre-export quarantine in Mauritius before entry to Europe is allowed.

When the EU lifted the embargo on exports from South Africa last October, the Racing South Africa-owned and operated vector-protected Kenilworth Quarantine Station was re-opened for business.

The EU protocol allows direct exports from South Africa to the EU (and other trading partners) and Racing South Africa encourages all exporters and importers of South African horses to regard Kenilworth Quarantine Station as their preferred option.

The benefits are as follows:

- Income derived from Kenilworth Quarantine Station is used to fund Racing South Africa's operations and its strategic partners working for the benefit of the broader equine community:
 - Equine Research Centre (R2 million already contributed this year) supporting essential services to the equine community and the following research themes:
 - Equine Infectious Diseases that impact international trade
 - Equine Sports Medicine
 - Equine Management and Welfare
 - SA Equine Trade Council (R500 000 already contributed this year)
 - Import Export Working Group (supporting a partnership with Directorate of Veterinary Services)
 - AHS Trust (see below for latest news)
- Employment of local people – Kenilworth Quarantine Station employs a quarantine manager and his assistant, a head groom and seven grooms.
- Skills development - opportunity to advance training and skills development through quarantine services
- Support of local industry: feed and bedding supplies, equestrian equipment, equine services such as transporters, veterinary, farrier etc.
- Advancement of South Africa's international equestrian ambitions
 - International horseracing
 - Other international equestrian disciplines

Each export via Kenilworth Quarantine Station is, therefore, an investment in the South African equine industry.

Whilst changes to international veterinary regulations are being negotiated to allow for improved protocols, it is accepted that South Africa's export zones will remain at risk and that the prospect of another shutdown is real. The Mauritius transit quarantine will, therefore, continue to play a role within South Africa's broader export strategy, but preferably not at the expense of local operations and a unified approach is called for.

AHS TRUST – 2007 VACCINATION CAMPAIGN

Racing South Africa and the Western Cape Breeders Club are pleased to announce a contribution of R200 000 to the AHS Trust's 2007 vaccination campaign due to commence within the next few weeks. The money, which is over and above Racing South Africa's R250 000 annual sponsorship of the Trust, will be used to vaccinate susceptible horses in the Eastern, South-Eastern and Southern Cape regions.

Apart from supporting local communities without access to the vaccine and therefore saving their horses (often the only means of deriving income), it will also raise the herd immunity in those areas of strategic importance to the Western Cape and generally raise awareness of the disease.

The vaccination campaign is a joint initiative between the AHS Trust, Equine Research Centre, Department of Agriculture and the vaccine manufacturer, Onderstepoort Biological Products.

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