

The Equestrian Federation of Australia

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A Message from Geoff Sinclair

Every one of us is surprised at the instant impact the introduction of Equine Influenza has had on Equestrian Sport in Australia. The enjoyment of an EI-free environment is obvious now. The EFA National Office and State Branches have been working tirelessly from the first major outbreak in Warwick (Qld.) on 25 August with the Government at Federal and State level to get the spread of disease under control and get the right recognition and assistance for all people affected in the Equestrian Industry.

NSW is the largest horse state in Australia and Queensland a close behind. The cancellation of all events until 2008 and lock down in restricted areas is really important if we are to stop the disease spreading permanently. Although only a small portion of the horse population in these states is infected, the spread in infected zones is rapid and it is essential to keep it in those zones so that it works its way through the horse population. We expect that the spread of EI will go to many more horses in these areas over the next few months and then, if we are all careful, slow down and eventually stop.

When the Federal Minister for Agriculture asked us for an estimate of the people employed in the industry that would be affected he was surprised that our estimates were so large. Over 23 employment categories from coaches to equestrian journalists, 7,000 small to medium businesses employing over 12,500 individuals are mainly reliant on the Equestrian industry for their income. Many of these have had their income reduced to nothing and can expect this situation to continue over the next few months. Having talked to many and been affected personally we know the pain.

Racing may get most of the publicity because the public identifies with this but I can assure you the personal representation to Government and the inclusion of EFA representatives on industry committees working to solve the problem has been very strong and well received.

Vaccinations in two forms are now being implemented in restricted areas to help control the disease. Denis Goulding, our Team veterinarian, has organized for all Olympic Games squad horses to be vaccinated soon. Franz Venhaus, our EFA CEO is a representative on the National Management Group (NMG) that decides on what action will be taken. Barry Smyth represents the whole Horse Industry on this group on behalf of the Australian Horse Industry Council and he and Franz have been fantastic in ensuring that our sport is understood and heard.

There is much debate as to whether we should just get on with permanently vaccinating the whole horse population as they do with travelling horses in Europe and USA but we can assure you there is no guarantee that vaccination stops the disease. The cost to do this compared to the possibility of becoming EI-free is around 100 million dollars a year (approx \$200 per horse) which each of us will have to bear. This does not include the cost of related requirements.

**The EFA gratefully acknowledges the support provided by its
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Most riders and owners in the equestrian industry do not earn their income from horses. Without competition, lessons or events they are saving many of their hard-earned dollars that would normally be spent on horses and events. They are also desperate to get back on their horses and actively enjoy them again.

Remember that EI is not life-threatening and anything that you can do to enjoy your horses now or meet with your horsey friends and clubs even without an event and help support the people employed in the industry that help us have fun will be well appreciated in these times. We're sure when states gradually get back to normal everyone will go crazy in the summer weather to enjoy our sport again.

After personal meetings with Federal Minister Peter McGauran a large amount of funding has been made available to people suffering and we know many of you have applied for it. For some, having never gone to a Centrelink office before, this is very difficult, but the help is meant to get us all through this period, which will go on in some areas for months to come and you should realize this is a small way the community can help. \$5,000 relief for affected businesses, \$20 a day subsidy for professionally trained horses, weekly new start allowances for people whose income is insufficient and extension to tax payment deadlines are all some of the help that EFA members can get from the \$110 million assistance package. The Equestrian Industry will get a large portion of this funding.

We know there has been discussion about a class action for the cost of this to many individuals. There is debate as to whether this would be successful and as we know the Government has appointed a commissioner to investigate the outbreak fully. These things take many years to come about and there is a strong possibility, in my personal view, that they will not get up, however individuals would be able to join an action in the future and should watch for information as the lawyers that specialize in this will certainly advertise when the time is right and would include all Equestrians affected, not just racing.

All National Sport Committees and High Performance Panels have been working with events in a cooperative way over the past month to establish a calendar for next year. We appreciate the goodwill shown by everyone in understanding the big picture and often compromising their own event to establish the best outcome for all EFA members and for our success at the Olympic Games next year. The calendar will be on the EFA web site next week.

I want to personally thank our CEO Franz Venhaus, our High Performance Manager Brett Mace and all the National Office team for working so diligently and often 7 days and nights during this difficult time to ensure we get the best outcome. In addition Chairman of EFA NSW David Lawrence and Branch CEO Wendy Cohen and Chairman of Equestrian Queensland Brian Fitton and General Manager Rob Ferguson have contributed hugely in ensuring that we are heard and the Government takes the right action. Thank you for your wonderful ongoing work.

Finally, make sure you always follow the bio security guidelines until the last case of EI is gone, enjoy you horses even if it as at home in this wonderful spring weather, help other equestrians, particularly those that are employed in the industry through the coming months and visit you web site www.equestrian.org for up-to-date information daily.

Good riding



Geoff Sinclair
EFA President