



BACKGROUND

- 25th August 2007 Australian public first notified of Equine Influenza (EI) an exotic disease in local horses.
- Nationwide ban on all horses & associated products.
- Infected or Suspect Properties Quarantined.
- Strict guidelines relating to biosecurity.
- Severe penalties to ensure compliance.



EQUINE INFLUENZA HELP STOP THE SPREAD IN YOUR COMMUNITY

**Horses in New South Wales have tested positive for equine influenza.
Whether you have horses or not, you need to be aware of what this means for you.**

**If you know or suspect that your horse has horse flu, you must ring
the Hotline on 1800 675 888.**

- Despite this increasing EI & public opposition.
- Zoning introduced to burn out high risk areas & free restrictions in low risk.
- Buffer zones of vaccinated horses.
- 28th February 2008 Australia Provisionally Free.
- Horse movement permits ceased by June 2008.

COST

- Financial costs may never be accurately calculated. (1)
- NSW TB Industry recorded a loss of over \$32m in prize money & \$4m in other returns to owners. TAB losses were \$200m. (2)
- However over 80% of horses are not involved in racing. (3)

- The Australian Horse Industry Council (AHIC) survey estimated losses at \$522m between August & December 2007. (4)
- Less tangible is the psychological impact of EI.
- An online survey conducted at the time of the outbreak found extremely high levels of non specific psychological stress in respondents. (5)
- The following report is based on unstructured interviews with people involved with horses living in the Lower Hunter Valley NSW.

CONFUSION

- From the outset confusion was a prominent feeling expressed by those interviewed.
- The initial confusion was about the disease & its significance.
- *“I didn’t understand. I mean everyone's horse has had flu before” horse owner who like most confused equine influenza with other respiratory diseases.*



- Nationwide standstill of horses unprecedented. People were stopped in transit or at locations away from home.
- *“I was told to turn around, then I was told to continue my journey, then I was stopped again and sent back.” Horse transport driver.*
- Problem of information reaching targets. Many gaining information 2nd, 3rd etc hand.
- *“Nobody knew what was going on” Pony Club Instructor.*



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- Information sort from local vets. Most had no knowledge of AUSVET Plan & had to rapidly come up to speed.
- Nature of an exotic disease outbreak meant decisions constantly being modified or changed. Caused much confusion.
- As much disinformation as information posted on internet.
- Even so those that had no internet access disadvantaged.

- Difficulty in teaching biosecurity & problems in application.
- *“I had over 20 individual owners that had riding horses.... Keeping them away was impossible & I couldn’t supervise them all.”*
Owner of equestrian centre
- Although promoted, individual biosecurity on close contact horses did not prevent illness (its aim though not understood was to reduce the amount of virus). Owners became increasingly frustrated at what appeared to be a senseless waste of time & effort.



- As more cases of EI occurred veterinary opinion amongst local practitioners became divided.
- Many vets believed that the virus could not be eradicated & money should be spent on vaccination.
- This caused further confusion amongst horse owners.

FEAR

- Within a week it was apparent that EI was spreading rapidly affecting all horse activities.
- Unconfirmed reports of horse deaths.
- *“Until there were some horse deaths nobody paid any attention”* horse owner.
- Most owners expressed that their first concern was that their horses didn't get sick & die. As horses became ill shortages developed in some medications.



- Fear of spreading disease meant that some people curtailed their normal activities even if it meant loss of income.
- *“I stopped work fearful that I would bring EI home to my own horses.” Horse Dentist*
- Others had attended horses unprotected later to find out that had subsequently become sick.
- *“An owner rang 2 days after I had shod her horse to say it had EI... I rang everyone I had seen afterwards sick to the stomach.” Farrier*



- Some parents prevented their children from mixing with those off infected properties.
- *“We & next door were the only infected property in our locality.... the horses were exposed before anyone knew EI was happening.... nobody wanted to come near us.... (it was) terrible for the kids.” Horse owner & father.*
- Phone threats were made to 2 families interviewed resulting in police involvement.



- Fear for horse's welfare was exacerbated by economic uncertainty.
- *"Initially I could visit 1 horse & then not see another horse for 72 hours." Equine Vet*
- Some able to find alternate work, others not so lucky.
- *"I got a job as a courier through a friend otherwise I could not have paid the mortgage." Farrier*
- Others could not conduct normal farming activity as their horses were at other locations



DISCRIMINATION

- New outbreaks were often blamed on the first locally identified property. Often not the source for that area.
- *“We informed the DPI our horses had become sick.... because we were the first to do so we were blamed for bringing in EI even though our neighbor's horses had been sick before ours.” Horse property owner*

Quarantine Area
KEEP OUT

CENTENNIAL parklands



**NO VEHICLE
ACCESS**



- Others were the source but through no fault of their own.
- *“We came back from the campdraft after being told to do so. The next day the 1st horse became sick.” Professional competitor*
- Farriers, produce store owners & saddlers reported pressure to service some clients & not others. This was based on either the infection status of the person’s property or a perception of that persons potential to spread disease.

- Not all infected properties were visually identified (due to sheer numbers) & not all people on infected properties notified the DPI.
- *“Taping of properties identified you as unclean....others have EI but they pretend they don’t.” Horse owner & breeder*
- Later fully recovered horses were segregated from vaccinated horses by some horse clubs.
- *“The horses were all safe ... they seperated some including my daughter’s horse ..she was crying” Mother of daughter at pony club.*



- Anger was also directed at individuals that were perceived as bring EI into an area.
- *“I made a decision to stop delivering feed after a woman came into the shop & accused me of transmitting EI to her property.” Produce store owner*
- A large racehorse establishment was left without stable hands after the trainer blamed on radio local horse owners for bringing EI to his property.



ANGER

Almost all persons interviewed were angry at
“The Government.”

Many believed the government was to blame for
the EI outbreak.

*“If Quarantine hadn’t been so slack it would
never have got out & infected our horses.”
Event rider whose horse contracted EI at
Carrols Ranch Maitland*

JOHN HOWARD ... OLD AND DISHONEST

SOURCE: Crosby Textor polling company, Aug 2007

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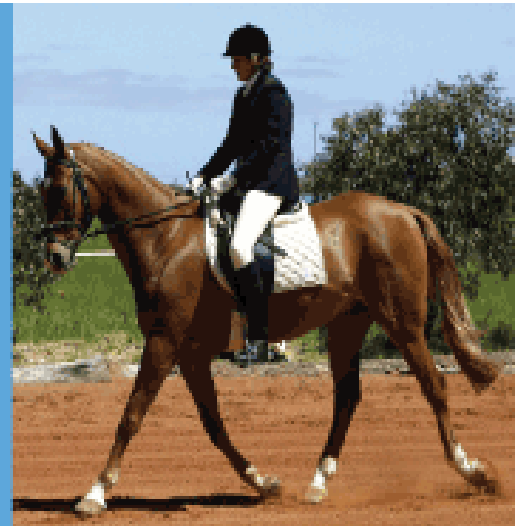
SOURCE: Crosby Textor polling company, Aug 2007

- Those whose incomes were wholly or largely derived from horses expressed the greater level of anger.
- “No freedom through no fault of your own & then no livelihood.” Farrier
- Anger was directed at groups within the horse fraternity, notably at the TB industry.

- Many held the TB Industry equally culpable with the Government.
- *“It’s the greed of the racing people who push to have their shuttle stallions quickly through quarantine.” WB breeder*
- Many resented the media focus on tb horses.
- *“I have trained all my life to represent my country. Now I can’t qualify because my horse is quarantined.” Olympian short list rider*

Official Games Notice

Equestrian Events
cancelled due to Equine Flu



- Those who had managed to avoid EI despite being in high risk areas were extremely angry when their locality was declared “purple” (to allow mixing of horses within defined areas to encourage EI spread & burn out & seen as another example of the government bowing to the TB industry.)
- *“After weeks of complying with their biosecurity now they want our horses to get sick.... Within a week of horses being transported past my front boundary my first horse becomes unwell & the rest just followed.” Horse breeder & competitor*



Hopelessness

- At peak many felt EI could not be stopped.
- *“I felt like a sitting duck ... it was a matter of time.” SB breeder & trainer*
- Others described mixed feelings of helplessness & hope against hope that EI might somehow miss their property.
- *“You just hoped your biosecurity might be a bit better than you neighbors.” vet & horse owner*

- Some were just overwhelmed.
- *“It was like trying to put a bush fire out with a water pistol.” Horse breeder & competitor*
- Horses varied in how ill they became from barely noticeable to seriously ill & sometimes dead
- *“Once a horse was sick it was impossible to attend to all the others following biosecurity. If one got it they all did so what was the point?”
Manager adjustment property*

LONELINESS

- In rural areas horse sports play an important role in providing social interaction. This is within & between families & communities.

“My area didn’t get EI till much later. We kept the horses in work thinking the bans would soon be lifted. They weren’t & the children missed out on a summer sport...we also missed camping & seeing our friends at shows.” Mother & property owner.



DEPRESSION

- A few interviewed identified themselves as having suffered from depression for which they had received or sort help.
- *“I realized that the only friends I had were horse people too.....I could no longer visit & in the end I didn't want to even talk on the phone” Farmer.*

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- Proportionally few horse deaths but significant to owners.
- Deaths mostly in the young, old or compromised
- *“She had no trouble foaling but the foal died within 2 days.” Foal death confirmed as a result of EI*
- Owners often felt guilty
- *“If we hadn’t of moved her (from an EI free area) the foal wouldn’t have died.” above owner*



- Feelings of depression was not limited to those who had EI on their property
- *“We had sold the cattle partly because of the drought & partly to concentrate fulltime on the horses. But we had no outside mares & the shows stopped. Eventually I just lost any interest” Horse breeder & competitor who attempted suicide the following February*

- Most people report an increased sensitivity to their horse's health.
- Most are fearful that EI will occur again.
- *"I was in a cake shop when on the radio I heard EI mentioned. I thought they were saying it was back. I just sat down and cried."*
Property & horse owner



SO WHAT CAN BE LEARNED?

- EI provides a very recent model of the impact of an exotic disease on Australia.
- This effect is far more wide reaching than what can be measured in purely financial terms.
- Although some positive outcomes were listed by those interviewed (& not detailed here) the overwhelming experience was negative.
- It would be reasonable to extrapolate that an exotic disease where animals had to be slaughtered would seriously increase this.