

AQIS EXPERT GROUP ON HORSE IMPORTATION TERMS OF REFERENCE

On 12 June 2008, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon Tony Burke MP, released the report of the Equine Influenza Inquiry and the Government's response. The Government has agreed to all 38 of Commissioner Callinan's recommendations.

The report of the Equine Influenza Inquiry details a number of deficiencies with the biosecurity measures in existence at Eastern Creek Quarantine Station at the time of the equine influenza outbreak. In particular, Commissioner Callinan noted that the layout and structures at Eastern Creek Quarantine Station, and to a lesser extent Spotswood Quarantine Station, are not conducive to effective implementation of biosecurity measures.

In relation to airports where horse are imported, Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport and Tullamarine, Commissioner Callinan indicates that these airports should have an enclosure and facilities for loading and transferring horses that allow biosecurity procedures to be carried out effectively and that minimise the danger or risk to the horses and those handling them. At Tullamarine there is no such permanent enclosure.

In light of these findings, the role of the AQIS Expert Group on Horse Importation (Expert Group) is to provide advice to the Executive Director of the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service on biosecurity containment and animal health and safety, as it relates to horse imports, at Eastern Creek, Spotswood and Sandown Quarantine Stations, and Sydney (Kingsford Smith) and Tullamarine Airports.

Specifically, the Expert Group is undertake the following activities and recommend measures or upgrades to ensure appropriate biosecurity precautions are in place and the risk of injury to horses and those handling them are minimised:

1. inspections and assessments of the adequacy of facilities for the unloading of and transferring of horses at Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport ;
2. provision of advice on the adequacy of interim facilities and potential longer term facilities at Tullamarine Airport for the unloading and transferring of horses; and
3. a review of facilities at Eastern Creek, Spotswood and Sandown Quarantine Stations. This review is to consider, among other matters considered relevant, the following specific factors:
 - a. a point of entry and exit at which people who are authorised to enter can be monitored, can shower in and out and can comply with other biosecurity requirements
 - b. suitable means of electronic surveillance, including closed circuit television or other measures such as smart card technology
 - c. a secure place to store chemicals, drugs, instruments and equipment for use by people attending the quarantined horses

- d. horse stalls and yards that are separated from the main stalls and yards in the horse enclosure, to enable isolation of horses suspected or found to be suffering from contagious or infectious diseases
- e. the desirability of having separate areas in the quarantine station to hold horses forming part of a single quarantine intake but that have been imported from different regions or have undergone pre-export quarantine in different places.

In undertaking this role the Expert Group will co-opt additional expertise on specific issues as necessary, liaise with the Interim Inspector-General of Horse Importation and consult with the AQIS Horse Industry Consultative Committee and other relevant stakeholders.

AQIS will provide the secretariat to the Expert Group.

The Expert Group will provide a final report, including recommendations, to the Executive Director of the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service by February 2009