


**The Hon. Tony Burke MP**

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

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Professor Peter Shergold AC  
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Dear Professor Shergold

Thank you for your letter of 14 September 2009 enclosing your third report on the implementation of the Australian Government's response to the Callinan inquiry into the outbreak of equine influenza (EI) in August 2007.

I am pleased you consider that the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is continuing to make solid progress in implementing the government's response to the EI inquiry. I am also pleased that you continue to be well supported by the department.

You raised several issues in your report, including progress towards permitting the importation of horses from Japan, the condition of horse facilities at Spotswood and Eastern Creek Quarantine Stations, horse quarantine fees and the procedures during the recent incidence of equine herpes virus at Eastern Creek.

In relation to the importation of horses from Japan, I note the Victorian racing industry is advocating that the direct importation of horses from Japan resume as soon as possible. As you note in your report, subject to agreement on appropriate procedures and documentation, it should be possible to allow the direct importation of horses from Japan for the 2010 southern breeding season and Spring Racing Carnival.

I note your concerns about the need to improve the horse facilities at Spotswood and Eastern Creek Quarantine Stations. Through the Horse Imports Program, the department has begun upgrading facilities at Eastern Creek and has relocated the air-conditioning ducts from inside to immediately outside the stalls. You may also be aware that the three major horse import agents and Thoroughbred Breeders Australia (TBA) have recently advised they support ending horse imports into Spotswood after the October 2009 intake to reduce the future increase in horse quarantine fees as much as possible. Improvements to horse facilities at Spotswood will depend on the future use of the station for horse quarantine.


I note your concerns about the capacity of the Australian horse industry to recover the full amount of the Horse Imports Program's cumulative deficit of \$2.5 million, as well as cover ongoing program costs. I have decided that the industry will not have to recover \$1.5 million of this amount. The remaining \$1 million will be recovered over three years to reduce the financial burden on the industry. As I mentioned earlier, the horse import agents and TBA support the use of a single government quarantine station for horse imports, to gain further cost efficiencies. In the next month, I expect to receive detailed advice on, and options for, future horse quarantine fees from the Horse Imports Program.

Although, as you note, the recent equine herpes virus incident at Eastern Creek was not welcome, I am pleased you consider the response suggests that the government's strengthened quarantine procedures following the 2007 EI outbreak are effective. I am particularly pleased with the Horse Imports Program's consultative processes and the conservative approach to diagnosing and managing the disease.

I am grateful for your report and intend to make it and this letter publicly available. Your report has assured me about the government's continued progress in implementing the recommendations of the Callinan inquiry. I look forward to your continued oversight of the government's response until June 2010.

I would be pleased to meet with you at a mutually convenient time to thank you personally for your report. My office will contact you to arrange a suitable time.

Yours sincerely



Tony Burke