

Tenterfield's First Trial Hendra Vaccinated Ride

Another year on the endurance calendar and the Tenterfield club prepared for its 30th anniversary bash..... HOWEVER this year things were different. The dreaded H word hit the agenda and with vet prosecutions pending suddenly the life of endurance vets and ride organisers took on a difficult twist.

Tenterfield must be the “guinea-pig” Club being the first to run a ride in 2008 after the EIEI OHH outbreak in 2007..... lock-downs and horse movement embargoes..... It seems so long ago. New Biosecurity Protocols meant the horse riding fraternity needed to be informed and responsible. The EI contagion was arrested by adopting strict protocols. EI boundaries were drawn across the landscape, selective inoculations commenced, horse movements were curtailed and certified horse health declarations were introduced.

However the Hendra virus presents a more complicating and deadly risk. Hendra is an endemic disease that can kill horses and people. In addition the symptoms of Hendra virus in horses can be difficult to differentiate from other diseases or stresses effecting horses.

Every ROC has **duty of care** obligations to horses and everyone attending their ride event. The ROC must demonstrate **due diligence** for all possible identifiable risks associated with the running of the ride. It is known that vaccination against Hendra virus is the most effective way to virtually eliminate the Hendra virus risk to horses and people. Risk elimination is the highest level of hazard control and a superior protection to engineering controls, adopting biosecurity protocols or using PPE. So after reviewing Hendra information contained in the NSW & Qld DPI guidelines for the management of suspect Hendra cases at horse events the ROC realised that managing the risk of Hendra virus by procedural control would require the willing collaboration of everyone attending the ride and more volunteers than the Club could reasonably muster to implement the procedures. The Tenterfield ROC also considered our compact ride base, lack of direct phone/communication, difficulty maintaining effective horse separating, provision of non-communal water and how this could be achieved, concern about the accuracy of data presented on HHD forms and the Clubs inability to provision an isolated base

for an indefinite period in the event of a Hendra incident. Additionally there was no local vet support for an unvaccinated horse event and so the Tenterfield Club decided to run the first HeV horse only “trial event” in line with QERA’s invitation (although HeV events have been happening in FNQ for some time). The Hendra virus is not just a horse health and welfare issue, it is about personal safety and the welfare of people. Running a HeV horse only event was the simplest and safest option for Tenterfield Club and the one we were most comfortable with.

Tenterfield formally notified QERA of its reasoned decision on 29 Feb 2016 and participated in the Fernvale Hendra information forum on 10 March to inform the membership. The facts about Hendra virus were presented by an informed Vet panel with ample time for questions and discussion at the forum. It was determined that ROC’s had the right to set horse eligibility standards for horses attending their events and riders can choose to vaccinate or not.

The Tenterfield Ride proceeded on 30 April-1 May with identified eligible HeV horses presenting with a Hendra Certificate and signed HHD. Protocols for the ride were simplified and the threat of disruption to the ride due to a Hendra incident alleviated. 77 horses and riders participated in the events much lower than previous years. Sadly we had to turn folk away from outside the HeV high risk area or if they had not vaccinated. We know this was a disappointment for some regular riders, supporters and sponsors as Tenterfield Ride is acclaimed by some as their favourite ride on the endurance calendar. We hope they can ride with us again soon.

The Club members, volunteers, officials, vets and riders enjoyed a great relaxing weekend of riding in perfect weather conditions. Completion rates were high. We were also very grateful for the support from the AERA President Melanie Scott and QERA President Gerard Bou both rode and completed at Tenterfield.

There are many issues we now face in endurance because of the deadly Hendra virus.... Victoria and South Australia have already put out position statements for those coming or travelling through the affected areas. AERA’s 2016 biosecurity statement is also pretty extensive. NSWERA to which our ride is dual affiliated is “monitoring the situation”. Meanwhile we await the

enquiry regarding the vaccine and new WPH&S laws will place the onus of responsibility on the horse owner. Thankfully repeat vaccinations are now only annual requirements

Tenterfield has taken on board the latest scientific research and professional advice in respect of Hendra virus and planned our ride accordingly. We recognise that we need to work closely with our endurance vets and support them as well as respect the safety of our volunteers, riders and of course our horses.