



Media Release

Issued: 24 June 2016

**Agriculture and Environment
Committee**

Chair: Glenn Butcher MP

Deputy Chair: Tony Perrett MP

Parliamentary hearings to examine Hendra virus vaccine

Allegations of harmful reactions to Hendra virus vaccine and risks to veterinarians treating unvaccinated horses will be aired at six public hearings for a parliamentary inquiry.

Chair of the parliament's Agriculture and Environment Committee and State Member for Gladstone, Glenn Butcher, says the committee's hearings will be a crucial phase of its inquiry into the Hendra virus vaccine and its use by Queensland veterinarians.

"We will use the hearings to try to separate the myths from the facts for the inquiry."

"The inquiry has attracted a lot of interest with almost 300 written submissions from scientific experts, equine groups, veterinarians and horse owners."

"Submissions have come from across Queensland, as well as interstate and overseas submitters."

"Many submitters have criticised the vaccine, claiming adverse reactions in horses after being vaccinated. Horse owners have also questioned the 'no vaccination – no treatment' policies adopted by some veterinarians seeking to reduce their exposure to the virus."

"Other submissions have criticised horse owners who choose not to vaccinate horses, potentially increasing the infection risks for veterinarians and others who handle horses."

"Veterinarians have raised practical concerns about the difficulties of wearing personal protective equipment in Queensland's tropical climate, and the additional problems and costs involved."

"Our hearings will give vets, horse owners and other stakeholders the chance to have their say about these and other issues."

The committee is due to report its findings by 22 August 2016.

Hearing details:

Cairns: Monday 4 July – 4:30pm to 6:00pm – Pullman Reef Casino Hotel, Wharf Street

Jimboomba: Tuesday 5 July – 2:00pm to 4:00pm – Emmaus College School Hall, East St

Brisbane: Wednesday 6 July – 8:30am to 11:30am – Parliament House

Redlands: Wednesday 6 July – 1.30pm to 3:00pm – Redlands Sporting Club, Anson Rd

Nambour: Thursday 7 July – 8:30am to 10:00am – Nambour RSL, Matthew St

Rockhampton: Thursday 7 July – 2:00 to 3:15pm Frenchville Sports Club, Clifton St North Rockhampton

[The inquiry terms of reference and background information on Hendra virus follow]

Inquiry terms of reference

On 25 February 2016 the Legislative Assembly agreed to a motion that the Agriculture and Environment Committee inquire into and report on the Hendra virus (HeV) EquiVacc® vaccine and its use by veterinary surgeons in Queensland.

In undertaking the inquiry, the committee is required to consider:

1. the development, trials and approval processes
2. the incidence and impact of adverse reactions by horses following vaccination and the reporting of adverse reactions and economic impacts of the HeV EquiVacc® vaccine
3. who bears the risks of HeV infection and who incurs the costs and receives the benefits from each risk mitigation option
4. whether the guidelines/procedures required for veterinarians attending horses that are not vaccinated against HeV are proportionate to the consequences
5. impacts on the equine industry and the economy arising from veterinarians applying a policy not to treat unvaccinated horses, and
6. the impact of Workplace Health and Safety actions on the decision by veterinarians not to attend unvaccinated horses and results of previous Workplace Health and Safety HeV investigations where there have been human infections.

Background information on Hendra virus – provided by Biosecurity Queensland

Hendra virus first emerged in 1994 in racing stables in the Brisbane suburb of Hendra. It has since been linked to 53 incidents in Queensland and NSW involving 72 confirmed cases in horses and seven in humans. Four of the seven human infections were fatal, and all occurred in Queensland.

While the incidence of Hendra virus infections is low, the risk of dying once infected with the virus is high. Approximately 80% of horses and 60% of people infected with Hendra virus die.

Flying foxes are a natural host of Hendra virus. The virus has been isolated in all four mainland species of flying foxes, and is most likely transmitted to horses through flying foxes' urine.

Most Hendra virus infections in horses have been reported in winter months, however, infections can occur at any time of the year.

The Hendra virus vaccine was developed by the CSIRO with \$300,000 in funding assistance provided by the Queensland Government in 2010.

Strategies to reduce the risk of contracting Hendra virus

Vaccination remains the single most effective way of reducing the risk of Hendra virus in horses.

Other strategies to reduce the risk of Hendra virus infections in horses include:

- not placing feed and water containers under or near trees that flying foxes may visit
- removing horses from paddocks where flowering or fruiting trees may be attracting flying foxes
- night stabling
- isolating sick horses, and
- implementing good hygiene practices – always washing hands after contact with a horse.

For media comment: please contact the committee Chair, Glenn Butcher MP on 4904 1100
For further information: please contact the secretariat in Brisbane on 3553 6662 or aec@parliament.qld.gov.au. The written submissions and other information for the inquiry are available from the Parliament's website [here](#).