



AgForce Queensland Farmers Limited

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Ref: MG/LH/GG067

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

By Post & by Email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir

Re: The Feasibility of a National Horse Traceability Register for all Horses

AgForce Queensland Farmers (AgForce) is the peak rural group representing beef, sheep & wool and grain producers in Queensland. The broadacre beef, sheep and grains industries in Queensland generated around \$6.2 billion in gross farm-gate value of production in 2017-18. AgForce exists to facilitate the long-term growth, viability, competitiveness and profitability of these industries. The producers who support AgForce provide high-quality food and fibre to Australian and overseas consumers, manage around 40% of the Queensland agricultural landscape and contribute significantly to the social fabric of rural and remote communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on this important issue.

Many of our members own horses which they use on-property as part of their business as well as for pleasure. As livestock commodity producers, it is easy for our members to see the failings of the current lack of traceability for horses. Over the last two decades, significant investment has been made into implementation of the NLIS for livestock and implementing both electronic and mob-based reporting. This investment underpins valuable market access and safety of our beef, sheep and goat industries and aims to ensure that biosecurity responses are both timely and targeted. To have such systems in place for cattle, sheep and goats, which are often retained on farm alongside horses (which are more often and readily transported), is a mismatch.

It is easy to say that a national traceability system is the answer to resolving this mismatch and ensure that incidents, such as the one that gave rise to this inquiry, are not repeated. AgForce believes further work into the feasibility of a traceability system is required before we can provide appropriate comment however, we have the following preliminary comments:

- The number of movements undertaken by horses, usually in small numbers ie, two horses to a horse-float, can be significant, making compliance and enforcement challenging and relatively more expensive compared to sheep and cattle.
- Successful implementation of the register relies on a functional app capable of being utilised with and without internet connection (given many of our members do not have connectivity).
- The register would preferably combine/supersede existing state or breed-based ones and in development should consider the current NLIS system and potential improvements to it that have been identified in the last 10 years. Other traceability programs should also be examined.

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- Any register would have to be implemented with an accompanying education emphasis and a visible enforcement campaign. A repeat of the circumstances that led to this inquiry will not be avoided with a register alone, rather a behavioural change is required about animal suitability. Rarely does a new regulation change alone result in practice change and nor is it usually the most appropriate response to an issue, particularly if it is the only tool being used.
- Many on-farm horses are also utilised off-farm in camp drafts and the like. Any register must be capable of dealing with this dual role.
- The majority of our members are located regionally, often with veterinarians many tens, if not hundreds, of kilometres away. Hence, the cost and practicality of having all horses microchipped is very challenging. As a result, we expect that many people will choose not to comply and this would in turn call into question the feasibility and effectiveness of a register (at least without adequate resources allocated for compliance enforcement proportionate to risk).

We understand that NSW has already commenced work on a cost benefit analysis on implementing horse traceability and we await the outcomes of this report in further considering the issue. Queensland's Department of Agriculture is involved in the overseeing working group for this work and we will also seek their views on an appropriate identifier and database.

In summary, AgForce looks forward to hearing the results of further investigation into a horse traceability system and whether appropriate mechanisms can be put in place to identify and fund horse traceability. If the issues above as well as those posed by others to the Senate Committee can be resolved, we look forward discussing how a functional register could operate.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Policy Specialist, Lauren Hewitt

Yours faithfully 


Michael Guerin
Chief Executive Officer