

Horse Notes



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A time for thanks and celebration

A message from Victoria's Chief Veterinary Officer, Hugh Millar

Many horse owners and industry professionals have been asking for information about the Equine Influenza (EI) epidemic. How was the battle won? Should we be embarking on a wide spread vaccination program? When will we be declared 'free' of the disease for export purposes? What biosecurity measures are important for the industry in the future?

Welcome to 'Horse Notes', the new Department of Primary Industries Newsletter for the horse industry. The key objective of *Horse Notes* is to answer some of the questions horse owners and industry participants have in the aftermath of the EI epidemic. Inside you will find articles that will answer all of these questions, and more.

The Victorian horse community has shown great courage and responsibility in the way the Horse Flu epidemic was handled. The hard work, inconvenience and sacrifice of many professional and recreational participants has ultimately paid off, with no cases of EI diagnosed in Victoria. The final cases in New South Wales and Queensland were reported on 9 and 25 December 2007 respectively. Surveillance is continuing to ensure Australia's long term freedom from the disease. Australia was officially declared to be free from EI on June 30 2008.

There are lessons that can be learned from our time under the EI shadow. Many of the biosecurity measures that became part of our everyday existence around horses during EI are a great example. These basic precautions can help in preventing the spread of not only EI, but also other infectious equine diseases. Remembering simple steps, such as washing of hands, use of separate equipment for each horse and isolation of ill animals can go a long way towards containing disease and keeping your horse healthy. Read on to find more practical biosecurity advice to help protect your animals.

We also learned about the importance of being able to trace horse movements and locations in the case of an exotic disease outbreak. To assist in this, the Victorian DPI is enabling property owners running horses to register their properties and obtain a property identification code (PIC), similar to that used in other livestock industries. This will allow horse owners to be notified of any important or exotic disease issues that may affect them in the future. Look inside for more information about how to obtain a Property Identification Code (PIC) and register on the state's database.

I would like to thank all of those involved with horses for the effort and energy put into protecting Victoria from EI. Many groups and individuals were involved in the battle against EI, and without their involvement and dedication, the outcome could have been very different.

So, as we attend the races, equestrian events and pony club rallies around Victoria, let's not forget the lessons EI has taught us, but celebrate what is a diverse, vibrant industry, vital to so many Victorians.

Equine Influenza: how the battle was won

Dr Roger Paskin, Principal Veterinary Officer, Biosecurity Victoria

Equine Influenza (EI) is a disease of horses that is exotic to Australia. It is highly contagious, characterised by fever, joint pain, loss of appetite and respiratory signs (including an often characteristic cough). The recently published *Report of the Equine Influenza Inquiry* by the Hon. Ian Callinan AC found that the disease appears to have been introduced into Australia via a quarantine facility in August 2007. Efforts to progressively control and eradicate the disease have achieved success.



EI was initially spread via equestrian events in New South Wales. From these events, the disease spread to various locations in New South Wales and Queensland.

The initial national response took the form of a three-day horse movement standstill, starting on 25 August. It was extended for a further three days and ended on 31 August. Following that, New South Wales and Queensland implemented a zoning system with prohibitions on horse movements and other restrictions on vehicles and equipment for varying distances around known infected premises. New South Wales began with a three tiered system, with the most severe restrictions being imposed in the 'red zone', less onerous restrictions in the 'amber zone' and very few restrictions in the 'green zone.'

Queensland's zoning system was initially less complex, comprising a red and a green zone; however the outer part of the red zone was declared 'amber' in December 2007.

Unaffected states imposed bans on horse and equipment movements from Queensland and New South Wales, and initiated surveillance measures to detect the disease if it should enter. Gatherings of horses were restricted either voluntarily in consultation with peak bodies or by regulation.

Apart from a few 'outliers', the disease did not spread far beyond the areas it initially reached in late

August. Although the number of infected properties (IPs) appeared large, the geographic extension of the disease was never very great. It remained confined within clearly demarcated areas within New South Wales and Queensland. At its height, it never infected more than 100,000 animals out of a total national population of around one million.

Disease spread was largely local, most likely by contact between horses on neighbouring properties. There is reason to believe that spread occurred through the air over short distances (approximately two kilometres) but this was probably fly-borne. Human activity and movement caused further spread sometimes over considerable distances – probably on clothing, vehicles and riding tack.

The disease impacted heavily on active working horses. Even if symptoms were not severe, horses took several months to fully recover. Attempts to work them before full recovery could result in serious complications.

The adverse impacts on racing, showjumping and other events were considerable. Not only did owners, trainers, bookmakers and other organisations involved directly in racing experience loss of income and disruption but there were spin-off effects on service providers such as farriers, dentists, veterinarians, feed suppliers, saddleries and the like.

In Victoria, a number of strategies were put in place after the lifting of the horse standstill. These included:

- *Passive Surveillance.* Horse owners and equine practitioners were encouraged to report and have investigated all cases of respiratory disease in order to exclude EI. Over 400 properties were investigated, involving more than 1300 horses. All were found negative for EI.
- *Border Control.* Surveillance points, staffed by a private security company and supervised by DPI field staff, were set up at 32 border crossing points from New South Wales. The number of suspected breaches investigated was 629, many of which were found to have been quite innocent movements of furniture or other items in horse floats. Only three cases were deemed to warrant prosecution.
- *Industry Liaison.* Ongoing cooperation with horse industry peak bodies proved to be extremely fruitful. The racing sector imposed unprecedented biosecurity restrictions on horse racing. The non-racing sector placed a voluntary moratorium on the holding of events and implemented their own biosecurity guidelines. The State Government granted financial aid to horse clubs suffering financially due to suspension of their events.
- *Sentinel Practice Surveillance.* As the epidemic subsided, it became necessary to more actively search for EI. A number of private practitioners were recruited to provide regular feedback on the

numbers of horses they had seen during the course of their normal work that showed signs of respiratory problems or were apparently unhealthy. Using this system (initiated in December 2007), around 150,000 horses on over 13,000 properties were examined; 51 were sampled and all were found negative.

Vaccination was used in all states and territories to vaccinate horses with a high earning potential (eg racing Thoroughbreds and Standardbreds) as an insurance policy to maintain their health should the disease reach them. Vaccination was also strategically used on a limited basis to create vaccinated buffers in New South Wales and Queensland. However, the role of vaccination in defeating EI was, in the end, highly debatable. In Queensland, the disease died out before reaching the buffers. In New South Wales, vaccinating helped to reduce local spread in a few cases. Essentially, the disease was fairly well controlled before enough horses were immune to have made any material difference.

Following confinement by movement restrictions and biosecurity measures to a small segment of the horse population in New South Wales and Queensland, in the end EI did what all influenza viruses do when there are no hosts left to infect: it burned out. Gradually, zoning provisions were relaxed and finally lifted in March 2008.

Months of careful searching and laboratory-based surveillance yielded nothing: EI was gone.

The disappearance of EI is a tribute to all of those involved; not only the veterinary professionals and paraprofessionals who worked so hard to eradicate it, but also to all horse owners and industry service providers who gritted their teeth and stared the infection down.

Australia is the only country in the world to have eradicated EI and proven scientifically that the virus is absent. We have shown that our disease emergency response strategy works and our international reputation has been greatly enhanced as a result.



Do you have a horse or other livestock trespassing on your land?

Naomi Pearson, Equine Policy & Legislation Officer

Recent changes made to the *Victorian Impounding of Livestock Act 1994* can assist in preventing that pesky neighbour's stallion, miniature pony, goat, poultry or other livestock from trespassing on your property.

When a domesticated animal (other than a dog or cat) trespasses on your property, the first thing you should do is notify the local council. The council can then impound the animal. Alternatively, you can deliver the animal directly to the council pound (after which you must notify the council or the animal owner). If the animal trespasses on your property again, the new laws now enable a council to serve a Notice of Objection on the owner of the animal. After this Notice is served, it becomes an offence for the owner's livestock to trespass and can incur a penalty of up to \$2,200.

Previously it was not an offence for an animal to repeatedly trespass. The possible impounding cost was the main incentive for livestock owners to confine their animals but sometimes the animal continued to trespass. This new offence discourages livestock owners from allowing animals to repeatedly trespass on neighbouring properties.

Furthermore, to ensure that livestock owners' containment facilities are adequate, the new laws enable council to serve a Notice to Confine on the owner of livestock that are inadequately contained. This Notice contains specifications on how to adequately confine the animal to the property, including fencing type and maintenance. It is an offence to fail to comply with this Notice, with a penalty of up to \$5,500.

For further information contact the Bureau of Animal Welfare, DPI on (03) 9217 4347 or email animal.welfare@dpi.vic.gov.au. To view the Impounding of Livestock Act visit www.legislation.vic.gov.au

(Note: Different laws apply to wandering dogs and cats. Contact your local council for further information).

Horse identification: taking the microchip to the next level

Dr Lloyd Klumpp, Manager Animal Health Field Services

The use of microchip transponder technology has proven to be a valuable way to permanently identify individual horses. New technology currently being trialled is providing the opportunity for the microchip implants to provide functions other than simple identification. One such advance is the incorporation of a temperature sensor within the microchip. This will allow an animal's temperature to be recorded with the same simplicity as scanning for identification. The difficulties and stresses on the horse associated with taking a horse's temperature may be minimised by the use of a bio-sensing microchip.

DPI is conducting a trial of this technology using a microchip which is virtually identical to the microchips currently in use for horse identification. The device being tested is actually smaller than existing microchips. The aim of the trial is to determine the correlation of the temperature recorded by the chip and the rectal temperature of an animal. Once this is established, it will enable the microchip to be routinely used for temperature monitoring of horses under Australian conditions. The ease of use, acceptance and reliability of the technology will also be investigated.

It is hoped that this exciting new technology will make routine health monitoring easier and safer, and may provide horse owners with a range of benefits into the future.

Equine Influenza: to vaccinate or not to vaccinate?

Dr Roger Paskin, Principal Veterinary Officer

Since EI has been overcome, mostly without any great impact from vaccination, the question as to whether vaccination should be undertaken on a larger scale over the long term has been exercising many minds in the horse fraternity.

Unfortunately, there exists in the public mind an unflagging belief in the efficacy of vaccines, probably born of the fact that smallpox was eradicated largely through vaccination. Very few diseases are amenable to effective control and eradication through vaccination. Influenza – whether human, equine or any other – is one of them. In fact, vaccinating against influenza can often get you into more trouble.

For a start, even the most effective known vaccines against EI don't fully protect against the disease. Horses may still become ill despite vaccination, something that has happened repeatedly on many occasions around the world. Secondly, vaccination

simply doesn't prevent the horse from contracting the virus, even if it often succeeds in suppressing disease symptoms. Apparently healthy (and vaccinated) horses are well able to excrete virus after coming into contact with infected animals.

This means that vaccinated horses act extremely well as 'Trojan Horses' for EI. Incidentally, it was a vaccinated horse that brought EI to Australia . . . and to Japan . . . and to Hong Kong . . . and to South Africa . . .

To make practical sense, any ongoing vaccination against EI would have to include most horses in Australia. Apart from the fact that there simply isn't enough vaccination available for such a Herculean effort on an ongoing basis, the costs would deter most owners in the non-racing sector.

The outcome would be that Australia would have a two-tier horse population: one segment (probably the smaller part, owned by the more well-to-do) which would be vaccinated and capable of hiding virus infection, and a second segment, unvaccinated and fully susceptible. Should virus enter the country and 'hide' in vaccinated horses (as has happened on numerous occasions elsewhere), any spillover into the non-vaccinated population would be disastrous.

There are proponents of vaccination who claim that vaccination is "widely used overseas and there are no problems." The problem with this assertion is that in countries where vaccination is routinely practiced, EI is not a notifiable disease and is therefore not reported to the international community on a regular basis. Neither are any quarantines or movement restrictions implemented. The unpleasant truth is that outbreaks occur regularly in countries where vaccination is practised, horses are scratched from races, meetings are disrupted and the industry just has to live with it. There can be little doubt that if offered the opportunity to live in a disease-free, vaccine-free environment as we do in Australia, our counterparts overseas would jump at the chance.

Back in the 1960s, the mistake was made in thinking that vaccines would solve all problems. Instead of isolating EI and allowing it burn out, many countries opted for vaccination. The presence of the virus was masked; effectively the disease was driven underground and horse owners found that they had vaccinated their horses into an unpleasant corner.

The Australian industry would do well to think carefully about whether to embark on long-term vaccination. The long-term consequences might just be more unpleasant than dealing with a short-term epidemic.

That doesn't solve the problem of how to keep the disease out of Australia; that will have to be affected by drastically improving quarantine measures. At least we have now learned that most valuable lesson.

Horse property registration

Dr Tony Britt, Manager Animal Standards

Owners of Victorian properties that have horses are now able to register their properties with the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and obtain a Property Identification Code (PIC). Registration is voluntary and free of charge but the benefit is that it enables DPI to effectively contact property owners in the case of an infectious disease outbreak.

DPI has already issued PICs to over 5500 horse properties. Many have previously obtained a PIC because they run cattle and/or sheep. PICs issued by DPI to the owners of Victorian properties consist of eight characters in the following format '3ABCD123'. Property owners who choose to register their properties are issued with a PIC card.

Horse owners and carers should check with the owners of the properties on which their horses are located (such as agistment centres) to establish whether these properties have a PIC or not.

DPI is participating in a national working group that has been formed to review property and horse identification arrangements nationwide in the context of the industry's future biosecurity needs. The outcomes of the working group may influence DPI's approach to property and horse identification in the future.

The property registration application form can be obtained by visiting DPI's website at www.dpi.vic.gov.au, or by calling the DPI Customer Service Centre on 136 186.



Riding high against the odds

Annemaree Docking, Horse Notes Editor

Many of us appreciate the feeling of freedom and the challenge offered to us when we are in the saddle - but imagine what that would be like for someone who experiences a disability.

The benefits of horse riding for people with a disability have long been acknowledged. It can help improve posture, strength, balance and motor skills, not to mention the benefits of that special bond that develops between any horse and rider. The Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) has been doing fantastic work in this area since 1964.

However, for many of these rider's, it's not just a case of having a bit of fun, recreation, or even rehabilitation - this is serious sport and they have serious ambitions that require an amazing level of determination and dedication.

Australia is nearing the end of the selection process for the 2008 Beijing Paralympics. Paralympic equestrians shortlisted to represent Australia are undertaking intensive training in pursuit of their dreams.

Mary Longden, the team coach based in Bunyip, Victoria, has been involved with the RDA for many years. Her dedication and support of the movement is admirable. Under Mary's watchful eye, the team hopefuls are working hard towards final selection, which will be announced on 4 July.

Australia has been sending an equestrian paralympic team to the Paralympics since the sport was introduced at the 1996 Atlanta Games. At the Sydney Games, the team was successful, winning two gold, two bronze and gained a fifth place overall in the dressage event. In Athens, Jan Pike brought home silver and bronze for Australia.

Horse riding is an expensive sport for anyone and the paralympic squad is no exception. Our paralympic team needs very special, highly trained four legged athletes to assist in their ambitions. A highly trained horse is a large expense, as are the ongoing care and competition costs.

RDA is a volunteer non-profit organisation with branches all across Australia. RDA Awareness Week is coming up 28 July to the 5 August and more information can be found on the RDA website at www.rda.org.au or call (03) 9731 7388.

Left: One of our paralympic hopefuls - Grace Bowman.

Living Legends: champions of the past and dreams for the future

Annemaree Docking, Horse Notes Editor

Standing in front of the historic Woodlands Homestead, the CEO and Veterinary Director of Living Legends, Andrew Clarke, talks about the famous horses in his care. His knowledge of the individual personalities on the farm is obvious as he discusses his charges with enthusiasm.

“Doriemus is the thinker – the family man.....Silent Witness, he’s the most mentally tough horse I’ve come across, to perform at that level for as long as he did. Might and Power was a fierce raceday competitor but at the farm he just loves the kids. He’ll stand at the fence all day if the kids are there to pat him,” Dr Clarke said.

Living Legends, the International Home of Rest for Champion Racehorses, is based in Greenvale, just outside Melbourne. It is a living museum, with some of our greatest racing champions on display. The property is 80 hectares with views of the city and the airport.

The Homestead is an amazing story in its own right, with heritage steeped in racing and the early settlement of Victoria. Woodlands was a ‘kit home’, built in England and shipped to Australia in the 1840s. It has been home to many colourful characters over the years and was frequented by Melbourne society. Some of the first point to points and races in the colony were held in the front paddocks and the Oaklands Hunt Club regularly hunted on the grounds.

“People come here to remember the great victories and to meet the champions. Horses have a way of touching people’s souls and capturing their imagination. These days kids don’t always have the opportunity to pat a horse. Here we encourage everyone to be hands on. It’s good for the horses and the people,” Dr Clarke said.

Living Legends has been open to the public since October 2006 and is funded by donations, sponsorships, special events and tours. The historic gardens around the homestead are being restored and a heritage action plan is being put into place.



*Might and Power and friends
Photo courtesy of Andrew Clarke, Woodlands*

Modelled after the Home of Rest in England, the farm has big ambitions for expanding the facility and housing more Thoroughbred greats on the property.

“When EI was identified, we closed the gates. Being so close to the airport, it was a risk we couldn’t take. We were unable to attend special events with the horses, such as the Melbourne Cup Parade. We are still in the early stages of development and it was quite a blow to our funding. We understand that many of our horse industry colleagues have also made substantial sacrifices during EI. Being a not-for-profit organisation, we are relying on external sources of funding to help us through this difficult time,” Dr Clarke said.

The beautiful homestead, gardens and the serenity of the retired champions make it an ideal setting for a weekend picnic or a mid-week break, with a glass of red at a picnic bench under the magnificent trees. Take the time to see what has been and what surely will be, a quintessential part of Melbourne’s racing history.

For more information about tours and events, or how you can contribute to the Living Legends, visit www.livinglegends.org.au or call (03) 9307 1165.



Horses: the vital signs

Annemaree Docking, Horse Notes Editor

Knowing how to check your horse's vital signs and what is normal for an adult horse at rest allows you to quickly identify illness and distress and, more importantly, do something about it.

For more information or advice on how to measure a horse's vital signs, or if you have any doubts about your horse's health, contact your local equine vet.



	Normal in adult horses at rest	How to measure
Temperature	37 – 38°C	The thermometer is inserted into the horse's rectum. Read the temperature after one minute.
Pulse/Heart Rate	Approximately 38 bpm (beats per minute)	The pulse can be found under the jaw, the underside of the dock etc. The easiest way is by locating a stethoscope on the near side of the chest, behind the elbow.
Respiration	8 – 15 breaths per minute	Observe the ribcage or place your hand in front of the nostril to feel exhalation.
Dehydration		The pinch test – pinch the skin on the horse's neck. The skin should flatten within one second of releasing the pinch of skin. The longer it takes to flatten is a measure of the dehydration level.
Capillary Refill Time (CRT)	1 – 2 seconds	Lift the horse's upper lip. Press your thumb firmly against the gums for two seconds. This will leave a white mark. Normal pink colour should return within 1 – 2 seconds.
Mucous Membranes	Linings of the eyelids, gums, inside the nostrils. The normal colour is a moist pink.	Abnormal: Very pale pink, bright red, grey, bluish, yellow.

How can you protect your animals: biosecurity basics for horse owners

Annemaree Docking, Horse Notes Editor and Sam Forrest, Industry Liaison Officer

Before August 2007, the Equine Industry in Australia had been very fortunate that it had never experienced the far reaching effects of an exotic disease outbreak. Despite the successful containment and eradication response, the threat of EI has highlighted the importance of ongoing biosecurity.

Biosecurity is the control measures that every individual can take to reduce the spread of infectious disease. Good on-farm biosecurity and personal hygiene is important in the prevention of exotic and infectious diseases which can affect horses. These practices should become a part of every day operations and remain in place beyond the recovery phase of EI to protect the industry and ensure horse health.

Whilst many owners may think that these measures don't apply to them, it is important to remember that prevention is better than cure'. Every horse owner needs to do everything they can to reduce the risk of an infectious disease being introduced to their property and animals.

Taking basic precautions is common sense and once you are in the habit, they are quite easy to implement. Reducing the incidence of infectious disease in our animals, whether they are used for recreation or business, saves time, money and enhances the quality of life for both horse and owner.

For further information, contact your local DPI Officer, visit the DPI website www.dpi.vic.gov.au, or speak with your local vet.

Other useful resources include:

- *DPI Victoria Ag Note AG0753 - Diseases of Horses Notifiable in Victoria for full list of Diseases*
- *DPI Victoria Ag Note AG1285 - Health and Biosecurity Guidelines for Transport of Horses*
- *DPI Victoria - Biosecurity for Equine Event Organisers*
- *DPI Victoria - Biosecurity for Equine Industry Service Providers*

Event	Biosecurity Precautions
New horse arriving on the property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Isolate new horse from resident horses for two weeks. ▪ Check twice daily for signs of illness (monitor temperature, food and water intake). ▪ Use separate equipment for the new horse. ▪ Handle the new horse last or use disposable overalls and change footwear before tending to other horses on the property. ▪ Wash your hands after tending to the new horse.
Attending activities/ events/training offsite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do not share equipment. ▪ Do not use communal water troughs. ▪ Monitor your horse's health during the activity. ▪ Avoid contact between your horse and other horses at the event. ▪ Wash your hands if you handle other people's horses. ▪ Monitor your horse's health after returning home and if practical, isolate for two weeks following the event. ▪ Maintain records of all horse movements. ▪ Disinfect equipment, tack and transport vehicle after returning from the event. ▪ Avoid contact with other horses on your property until you have showered, changed clothes and disinfected your footwear.

Event	Biosecurity Precautions
Visitors to your property or horse (including farrier, vet, dentist and riding instructor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have one entrance to the property with a designated parking area for visitors located away from the horses. (If a service provider needs to park closer to the animals, have a specific area for this). ▪ If you have a large number of visitors coming and going, introduce foot baths at the entrance. ▪ Be equipped for visitors to wash hands and disinfect equipment. Provide anti-bacterial hand gel, disinfecting wipes and a spray pack of disinfectant on hand. ▪ Record visitor details – name, date, purpose, horse visited etc.
When you visit other horse properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wash hands, change clothes and disinfect footwear before handling horses on your property. ▪ If any equipment is used on another property, disinfect it before using it at home. ▪ If visits are frequent, keep a log of properties attended, including dates and times. Use a separate set of boots, clothes and equipment to that used at home.
Neighbouring properties with horses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Double fencing and the planting of trees between fences reduces nose to nose contact between animals. It can also reduce the chance of injury.

Event	Biosecurity Precautions
Good animal husbandry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct daily health checks. ▪ Use worming and vaccination programs. ▪ Maintain health records for each animal. ▪ For horses that are stabled or yarded, remove manure and dirty bedding twice daily. ▪ Control vermin and insects. ▪ Keep tack and equipment clean – special attention should be given to feed and water buckets and paddock troughs. ▪ Ensure prompt, hygienic removal of deceased stock.
Signs of illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Isolate the animal immediately. ▪ Call your vet. ▪ Do not handle other stock until you have washed your hands and changed your clothes and footwear. ▪ Wash and disinfect any gear that has come into contact with the sick animal including rugs, halters, leads, brushes feed and water buckets. ▪ If a number of horses fall ill or you have sudden, unexplained deaths, call your local vet or the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline 1800 675 888.
Vaccination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It is recommended that horses be vaccinated against Tetanus and Strangles.
Disinfecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Step One – Remove loose material: Ensure all manure and dirt is brushed off the surface. ▪ Step Two – Wash: Use warm, soapy water, rinse thoroughly and dry. ▪ Step Three – Disinfect: Once dry, disinfectant can be applied. Wiping or spraying is effective, provided good coverage is achieved. ▪ Note: Always wear gloves when mixing disinfectants, use according to manufacturers' instructions and be careful with your tack and equipment.



WASH YOUR HANDS, WASH YOUR CLOTHES AND WASH YOUR GEAR



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Horse Notes



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- Under 10 10-17 18-24
- 25-34 35-44 45-54
- over 55

10 Your gender?

- Female Male

11 Any other comments you would like to make?

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If you have any other enquiries about this project please contact the Editor, Horse Notes at DPI on (03) 9658 4076

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