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Media Release

New Zealand Racing Board welcomes ERMA decision

The New Zealand Racing Board has welcomed today's decision by ERMA New Zealand to approve the conditional release of the equine influenza vaccine ProteqFlu.

New Zealand Racing Board Chief Executive Graeme Hansen said the vaccine had been approved for the export of horses, and emergency use only if there was an equine influenza outbreak in this country, and then only under the direct control of MAF Biosecurity New Zealand.

"The clear preference is to prevent equine influenza from ever reaching our shores and extensive precautions and education have taken place to try and ensure that we maintain our equine influenza-free status.

"However, if there is an incursion, it is important to have available the most effective vaccine that could curb the spread of the disease quickly," Mr Hansen said.

"ProteqFlu gives a much faster onset of immunity – two weeks compared to up to eight weeks for other vaccines – and immunises against multiple strains of the equine influenza virus," he added.

Mr Hansen said the New Zealand Racing Board had worked closely with MAF Biosecurity New Zealand around border control measures after an outbreak of equine influenza occurred in Australia last year. It had also undertaken an extensive training and awareness building campaign around equine influenza across New Zealand.

"We will continue to work closely with MAF Biosecurity New Zealand and the Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Group to help ensure the controls imposed by ERMA New Zealand around any use of this vaccine are strictly adhered to," he said.

Mr Hansen said an outbreak of equine influenza in New Zealand would be devastating. It would most likely mean an immediate, complete shut down of the racing and breeding industries for at least three months.

"The social and community impacts from this would be widespread and many people in the industry would effectively be out of work," he said.

"All other equestrian activities such as showjumping, pony club and horse trekking tourism businesses would also be shut down."

Equine influenza is a highly contagious airborne respiratory virus, which affects horses and other equine species. It has a very high morbidity with almost all horses exposed to the virus likely to become infected.

Mr Hansen said ProteqFlu was the equine influenza vaccine of choice internationally. It was approved for use in the EU, Canada and the United States and was registered and used to control the spread of, and eventually eradicate, the equine influenza virus in Australia after an outbreak occurred there last year.

The New Zealand Racing Board and the Equine Health Association made the application to ERMA New Zealand to register the ProteqFlu vaccine so they would be able to react immediately should an incursion of equine influenza occur in New Zealand.

To view more information about ERMA New Zealand's decision visit the website www.ermanz.govt.nz

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