

24th May 2006 QHC Media Release

The decision of the State and Federal governments to provide a combined \$600,000 to progress the development of a horse vaccine for Hendra virus has been welcomed as a wonderful result by horse people, equine professionals and the wider community.

Since the catastrophic outbreak of the deadly Hendra Virus (HeV) occurred at Vic Rail's racing stables in Brisbane in 1994 there have been 14 known outbreaks involving horses in Queensland and New South Wales, with the most recent being on the Sunshine Coast last week

The CSIRO Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL) at Geelong in Victoria is preparing to conduct a vaccination trial with horses. The AAHL estimates that the cost of this horse vaccine trial is \$930,000 over 15 months and it has committed \$330,000. This additional funding of \$600,000 will mean that the research for a candidate vaccine can be further developed.

Dr. Peter Reid, who was the Veterinarian at the cutting edge as the dramatic events of the 1994 Hendra Virus outbreak unfolded, has hailed the announcement as a magnificent result but said that horse trials on the two highly promising candidate vaccines would need to be funded. "Anyone who has been involved in a Hendra Virus case becomes deeply affected by this tragic disease," he said. "This funding is a vital step towards fulfilling a key recommendation made to the World Health Organization that in order to protect people from becoming infected, vaccination for horses should be prioritized for Hendra control."

"The vaccine will put Australia at the international forefront in the fight against deadly emerging diseases like Hendra virus. The announcement of additional funding is a huge relief for all those people who have been so active in highlighting the need for the development of a vaccine," Dr Reid said.

The President of the Queensland Horse Council Ms Debbie Dekker has expressed her profound thanks to Queensland Primary Industries Minister Mr. Tim Mulherrin and to the State and Federal governments for providing this additional funding.

"Words cannot express how delighted I am to see this vital research given support," she said. "Many people's lives have been changed forever by Hendra Virus and the QHC and a team of dedicated people have worked so hard to see this day."

"We will have a long way to go and it is very important that people do not relax their guard to protect their horses and themselves," she stated. We must remain vigilant, and the Queensland Horse Council will continue to provide information of HeV and present educational seminars on essential safety precautions."