

Queensland's peak horse industry body expressed serious concerns today about recent reports implying that poor nutrition has played a part in the incidents of Hendra virus. Of particular concern is the implication that hungry or malnourished horses are perhaps more likely to eat contaminated feed and being in a weakened state, more likely to succumb to the infection.

Queensland Horse Council Inc president Mrs Debbie Dekker said it is very concerning that some horse owners may be misled into thinking that if their horses are healthy and they are feeding them, they don't have to worry about following the practical and thorough guidelines that are recommended.

"The incidents I have studied and or been involved with have had very well nourished and well cared for horses, most of them in the prime of life" said Mrs Dekker.

"There was some preliminary speculation about greedy horses perhaps being more likely to eat contaminated feed but greed in horses does not necessarily mean poor nutrition or hunger, any more than it does in humans" she said.

"If the last few years have taught us anything it is that Hendra virus, though rare, can occur with any horse and their human handlers, anywhere and at any time of year, in good seasons and in bad." Mrs Dekker said.

"Even though the Hendra virus horse vaccine is expected to be commercially available in 2013, we strongly recommend that horse owners will need to continue to minimise risk of infection. "

"This needs to now become a way of life for horse owners and carers" said Mrs Dekker.

The QHC recommends horse owners and carers take the following steps to reduce the risk of their horses becoming infected with Hendra virus.

- Place feed, water and hay containers under cover.
- Bring horses in at night into covered enclosures or night holding paddocks with no trees in them. Remove all nearby and overhanging trees from night time enclosures or holding paddocks.
- Do not use feed that might be attractive to flying foxes.
- Remove horses from paddocks where flowering trees have resulted in a temporary surge in flying fox numbers. Horses may be returned after the trees have stopped flowering.
- Completely remove horses from and never allow access at any time to areas where flying foxes roost.
- Do not plant trees that attract flying foxes in or near horse paddocks.
- Plan a quarantine area on your property for sick horses where they can be isolated.

The Queensland Horse Council Inc. is a not-for-profit organisation, representing and advocating for the Queensland horse community on such issues as emergency disease response, education and awareness. The QHC relies solely on memberships and sponsorship to fund its operations and initiatives. To increase horse power, join the Queensland Horse Council Inc. Visit www.qldhorsecouncil.com or find us on Facebook and Twitter to find out more.

For further information please contact QHC President Mrs Debbie Dekker on 0420 926 281