



Reference: 06/18063

Department of
Primary Industries and Fisheries

14 DEC 2006

Dr Rebekah Day
Range Veterinary Practice
24 Coochin Street
Peachester Qld 4519

Dear Dr Day

Range Veterinary Practice Paws and Claws News – Spring 2006

I am writing to clarify some matters that have come to my attention arising out of your article titled 'Peachester safe from Hendra virus' in the Spring 2006 edition of the Range Veterinary Practice Paws and Claws News ('the Paws and Claws News').

Firstly, I consider that your statement ".....it's unfortunate that the initial response of the officials charged with controlling notifiable diseases was not as prompt as it might have been" is unnecessarily inflammatory and misleading.

As you are aware, my department commissioned an independent review titled 'Independent review of an Equine case of Hendra virus infection at Peachester' (the Report) that looked at the response of departmental officers following the incident in Peachester. Amongst other things, the Report found that:

"The actions of DPI&F staff in responding to the concerns of the PVP have been found to be in accordance with information provided in the Hendra virus guidelines including compliance with relevant workplace health and safety obligations.

It is possible that the PVP may have experienced delays and difficulties in establishing connection with an operator in attempting to contact the call centre through the 13 25 23 number, though it is considered unlikely that any such delays would have impacted in any way the events that occurred. Changes have been implemented in call centre operating procedures to ensure that all callers have an opportunity to either speak with an operator or leave a message that will be responded to in a timely manner by call centre staff.

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DPI&F staff were found to have reacted appropriately and responsively to the concerns raised by the PVP. The efforts of staff from DPI&F and from AAHL in responding to the concerns of the PVP over possible exposure of the PVP and owner to infectious material by initiating urgent testing of samples and in attempting to resolve the Hendra status of the case as quickly as possible, are to be commended."

The Report also made the following key finding in relation to the response by departmental officers:

"There is little evidence to support any claims by the PVP concerning difficulties in contacting appropriate authorities through the Animal Disease Watch Hotline (1800 675 888), a number that is also answered by operators within the DPI&F call centre. There were 3 unsuccessful calls made to this number from the Peachester exchange and all were made on Thursday 15 June. These three calls are considered likely to have been made by the PVP. There were no calls to the Animal Disease Watch Hotline on Wednesday 14 June 2006 from any phone number originating in Queensland."

Accordingly, I would ask that in the interests of properly informing the public about the incident, that in your next addition of Paws and Claws News that you correct your previous misstatement by acknowledging the findings of the independent investigator in relation to my department's response. That is, that the independent review commissioned by the department, found that departmental staff reacted appropriately and responsively to the incident.

I also refer to the statement in Paws and Claws News "...And be aware that cats and guinea pigs also have been known to contract Hendra". I consider that this statement is misleading and requires clarification.

I am advised that the only known infections of cats and guinea pigs have been under experimental laboratory conditions when cats and guinea pigs have been injected with highly infectious material subcutaneously or when administered directly into the nose or throat of the animal. I am further advised that there have been no known reported cases of cats and guinea pigs being infected outside of laboratory conditions.

Accordingly, I request that in the next edition of Paws and Claws News you clarify that guinea pigs and cats have only been infected in experimental laboratory conditions and further, that there have been no known reported cases of naturally acquired infections in either cats or guinea pigs. I consider that your previous unqualified statement regarding the susceptibility of cats and guinea pigs may incite unnecessary anxiety in the public.

I trust that you will agree that it is in the best interests of the community that they are fully and properly informed in relation to Hendra virus infection.

Yours sincerely



Jim Varghese
Director-General