



## **Proposed Risk Management Strategy for EIA Control in Canada**

### **Follow Up & Next Steps**

Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) is a persistent, infectious disease of equines for which there is no available vaccine or treatment. In 1971, EIA became a Reportable Disease in Canada and since 1972 there has been some form of national disease control program in place. In 1998, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) developed the current program in conjunction with the equine industry which is composed of both voluntary testing by industry and mandatory response to the detection of disease by the CFIA. EIA is a World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) listed disease and the requirement for international movement of all equines is proof of an individual animal test with negative results.

In February 2015, the CFIA shared a *Proposed Risk Management Strategy for EIA Control in Canada* with Canadian equine stakeholders. The purpose of the document was to begin a discussion about a potential program redesign by providing disease information, highlighting some of Canada's current program challenges, and proposing a new national control strategy. Redesigning the program provides an opportunity to develop one which is more effective at reaching its objectives by acknowledging factors such as: regional differences in industry-directed control efforts to date and its impacts; where EIA cases are being identified; and, known risks. Also mentioned in the document was how the CFIA sees itself in the context of future disease response and control as well as identifying a disease control tool that the agency is in a unique position to provide to support a national strategy.

Feedback on the *Proposed Risk Management Strategy* document was encouraged to determine if there was sufficient support among equine stakeholders to work collaboratively with the CFIA and further explore the possibility of a new strategy to control EIA in Canada. Responses were received from a variety of stakeholders representing different regions from across the country, a variety of activity sectors and perspectives which ranged from the individual horse owner to provincial veterinary associations to national industry organizations. All feedback was reviewed and although a wide range of opinions were expressed, it was clear that most stakeholders are interested in continuing the discussion and working to address current program challenges.

As outlined in the document, next steps involve the CFIA initiating the formation of a working group composed of representative equine stakeholders and it is anticipated that this work will begin in the late fall of 2015.



## **Proposed Risk Management Strategy for EIA Control in Canada:**

### **Q's & A's**

The majority of the stakeholder feedback contained comments pertaining to the current program, suggestions for the future, and questions and concerns relating to the proposed strategy. The following questions & answers attempt to address some of the major themes and areas where clarification could be provided. There were several questions regarding the proposed zoning concept and this has been reflected below in the section, “*Proposed Strategy Questions*”. During the pre-planning phase of any program redesign, it is expected that answers related to specific implementation questions are often unavailable but those topics would be the focus of future development discussions. Please note that no decisions have been made at this time.

#### **1. How can I find out where EIA cases are being identified in Canada?**

The CFIA EIA website contains information about the disease and the control program. Maps are included on the website indicating where EIA cases have been identified from 2011 to present. This information has been made available so that owners, veterinarians, and anyone involved in the health and management of equines are aware of where known risks exist and to help them make informed disease control decisions. <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/animals/terrestrial-animals/diseases/reportable/eia/eng/1329698749489/1329703176989>

#### **2. Why does the CFIA not test more horses for EIA?**

Currently it is the owner's choice to test their horse for EIA and within Canada the equine industry decides when testing is *required*. Examples of requirements include testing prior to attending shows, races, sales or entering a new premises. An owner is also required to have their horse tested if they wish to move them across an international border. If an infected equine is identified through owner testing, the CFIA will follow up on them according to program policy.

#### **3. Can EIA be eradicated from Canada?**

Theoretically yes, but realistically it is not feasible based on the logistics and resources required to test and eliminate the disease from the entire national herd. That being said, it may be feasible to eradicate the disease from subpopulations.

#### **4. Who is responsible for providing EIA information to equine owners and raising awareness about the disease?**

Veterinarians servicing the equine industry, those who have care and control of groups of horses in which the disease has been previously identified, Provincial and Territorial governments and the CFIA are all responsible for disseminating EIA information. The CFIA has been releasing EIA information continually through its website but this does not successfully reach all horse owners. Certain industry groups have made concerted efforts to raise awareness about the disease and this has had some positive impacts.

**5. Is the CFIA trying to get out of EIA control?**

No. The CFIA's resources are being spent at industry's request. The CFIA wants to work with industry to realign available resources with activities that can have a bigger impact on the population of horses owned by people who are concerned with controlling the disease and its spread. The CFIA's current response activities are not effectively protecting this group and significant resources are being spent with relatively little impact.

## **Proposed Strategy Questions**

**6. Why zone Canada for EIA?**

Declaring a zone enables the CFIA to impose movement requirements (i.e. EIA testing). Testing combined with movement restrictions has been shown to be an effective way to control the spread of EIA. Without zoning there would be no change in how current testing requirements are imposed; these would continue to be solely industry's responsibility. As a federal agency the CFIA is uniquely positioned to zone Canada for EIA and doing so would allow the program to target areas where the current level of surveillance does not adequately reflect the level of risk.

**7. Would the CFIA respond when an EIA infected horse was identified in western Canada?**

Yes. The CFIA's response to an infected animal would be the same in all parts of Canada.

**8. Why would the CFIA stop testing horses that have been in contact with an EIA infected horse?**

The CFIA has a finite amount of resources for the EIA program and by focusing them on movement controls, the program has the potential to have a greater impact.

Identifying and sampling horses that have been in contact with an infected horse is important to control the spread of disease but the expertise to perform these tasks exists outside of the CFIA. Also, if the owner of an exposed horse did not consider EIA to be a significant issue for them they would not be obligated by regulation to test their horse. However, if they wanted their horse to participate in an identified activity, it would trigger a testing requirement.

**9. Would less be done to control EIA in western Canada?**

No, actually the opposite. Having movement restrictions based on the need for testing is a powerful disease control tool and this would be introduced in the west to help protect the owned tested population.

**10. Which activities in western Canada would have EIA testing requirements associated with them?**

These have not been determined but will need to be chosen in consultation with stakeholders. Once decided upon, testing for EIA prior to participating in those activities would become a regulatory requirement. Initially requirements could be few and gradually increased or modified over the years depending on changes in risk and / or the industry's desire to control the disease in specific subpopulations.

**11. Will all equines that move in western Canada require EIA testing?**

No, but horses who participate in activities that have been identified as having testing requirements associated with them would need to be tested.

**12. What about the horses that do not participate in identified activities in western Canada?**

The owners of these equines would not be required by regulation to have them tested. As is the case now, owners should consult with their veterinarians to discuss potential health risks and how to protect their animals from disease; this should include EIA and appropriate testing recommendations etc.

**13. Does declaring western Canada a primary zone downgrade its EIA status?**

No. The disease status of horses in western Canada would remain the same as it is today. The risk of being exposed to EIA in eastern Canada could be stated as being lower.

**14. Would testing horses for EIA in eastern Canada stop?**

No. It would be the responsibility of the equine industry in eastern Canada to determine testing requirements as they have done up to this point. Ongoing disease

surveillance would still be important in the east but could be tailored to the level of risk.

**15. How would testing requirements be implemented and enforced for those moving within, and out of, the primary zone?**

This has not been developed yet. There is more than one way that compliance with requirements can be checked and verified and this will be discussed if the strategy is endorsed by industry.

**16. Would zoning impact international movement requirements?**

No. The international movement of horses is currently, and will remain, based on the requirement for proof of a negative, individual animal test result.

**17. What about the risk posed by Canada's untested and / or unowned equine population?**

The strategy is based on mitigating the risk of a susceptible owned tested horse becoming infected by preventing it from comingling with one of unknown disease status. Therefore an untested horse would not be permitted to participate in an identified activity; EIA screening would be required.

**18. What about horses residing on First Nations land?**

First Nations horses would need to fulfill the same EIA testing requirements as any equine participating in an identified activity. The testing of horses that do not participate in these activities would be the responsibility and choice of the persons who have care and control of the animals.

**19. Is mandatory national equine identification being proposed as part of the strategy?**

No, however new identification tools may become available or linked to EIA testing in the future.