

Media Release

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Horse virus on its last legs

Australia is well on its way to eliminating the equine influenza virus that brought the horse industry to its knees last year, earning high praise from one of the many veterinarians involved with the crisis for the effective way the nation's regulatory authorities dealt with the emergency.

Dr Ross Wilson, whose company Plasvacc supplied horse plasma therapies to sick and vulnerable horses during the epidemic, said the infection had been significantly reduced to a "trickle" of properties.

There now was an extremely good prospect the virus would die out altogether, Dr Wilson said.

Horse travel restrictions throughout NSW have been eased, ending a 100-day lockdown that was essential for the veterinary profession to tackle the problem.

The virus hit Australia for the first time in August, when horses at the Centennial Park riding facility in Sydney were detected with the virus, and quickly spread to bring thoroughbred horse racing and recreational equestrian events in NSW and Queensland to a standstill.

But while the smiles are returning to the faces of those involved in the industry, Dr Wilson added a note of caution: Now was not the time for complacency.

"All it takes is a bit of stupidity and it could set us back some months," he said.

The most impressive feature of the fight against the disease had been the unparalleled cooperation of all the government and non-government agencies involved, he said.

"We even had policemen here in Queensland keeping a close eye out for horse movements during the height of the crisis," he said.

While a series of zones still remained in Queensland to isolate the worse cases and decrease the risk of spreading infection, thoroughbred racing had resumed at Eagle Farm and punters were returning to pursue their favourite pastime.

The crisis had given those involved in quarantine services and the broader veterinary community a "good kick in the pants", Dr Wilson said.



“Justice (Ian) Callinan’s inquiry is still getting to the bottom of it, but the lesson we have already learned is that we have to remain super vigilant.

“Vets or anyone working with sick animals will have to gown up, ensure their vehicles are sprayed – if they are allowed on to the premises in the first place – and ensure those disposable clothes are incinerated.

“But in the main, for our first scrape with such a disease, we have done pretty well. I know overseas authorities have been looking at our response very closely and have been impressed.”

Dr Wilson’s company Plasvacc, based on a property at Kalbar in South-East Queensland, was an early recipient of the ‘flu vaccine from the Federal Government authority because of the importance of its product to the health and welfare of horses recovering from the debilitating effects of the disease.

“The government came good when it realized our horse plasma therapy was a product of national importance,” Dr Wilson said.

As the industry gets slowly back on its feet, Dr Wilson was adamant in reminding all those involved in the horse industry to be “conservative”.

“Barring an act of idiocy, the chances are good that we will make a full recovery from this disaster,” he said.

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About Plasvacc

Based at *Rigby* on the Cunningham Highway, Kalbar, South East Queensland and at *Oakbrook Farm* on Highway 101, Templeton, Central Coast California, Plasvacc is an Australian-owned veterinary pharmaceutical company that produces high quality hyperimmunised blood plasma products for animals such as horses, dogs, cattle, camels and alpacas. All blood plasma products are licensed with regulatory authorities such as the USDA and the APVMA and plasma is collected from special donor herds of animals kept in strict quarantine on the properties. All plasma collection and processes are conducted under approved animal ethics guidelines.

Plasvacc’s parent, Plasvacc Holdings Limited, is an unlisted public company based in Australia.

For more information on Plasvacc, go to: www.plasvacc.com and www.plasvaccusa.com

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Picture caption: Dr Ross Wilson said there was an excellent chance that the equine flu virus would die out.

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