

19 March 2013

The Secretary

Public Works Committee

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Sent via e-mail to: pwg@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary,

Harness Racing Australia (HRA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the post entry quarantine facility being considered by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works.

HRA is the peak national body for the sport and business of harness racing in Australia. HRA represents 6 State Controlling Bodies, 116 racing Clubs, more than 30,000 owners, over 7000 licensed participants and more than 19,000 people who rely on harness racing in part or totality for their livelihood.

More than 12,000 horses compete in over 15,000 races annually and a recent assessment of the Australian harness racing industry undertaken by IER for HRA¹ highlights that nationally the harness racing industry is responsible for generating \$1,421.5 million in value added contribution to Gross National Product.

HRA is resolute in its long-held policy that Australia's first line of defence from exotic diseases must continue to be a strong national quarantine barrier. HRA expects that the Commonwealth will continue to maintain and resource stringent border security as any reduction of standards could cause irreparable damage to all equine industries.

¹ IER Size & Scope of the Harness Racing Industry in Australia 2013

The reports of the Callinan Inquiry and the Beale “One Biosecurity: A Working Partnership” Review, which followed the EI response, both stressed the need for constant vigilance at Australia’s borders and effective quarantine measures.

HRA shares the view expressed in the report of the Callinan Inquiry (page 64) that horses should be considered “high risk imports” and has supported the changes introduced to improve the biosecurity of horse importation processes.

Care must be taken that complacency, poor quarantine policies and practices, under-resourcing and political interference do not erode the integrity of border security as the years roll on and the impact of the 2007 EI outbreak fades from corporate memory. EI wreaked havoc in the harness racing industry, with financial losses totalling more than \$12.5 million² suffered across the nation - not to mention the social impacts. HRA stakeholders suffered first hand and many are still recovering. Standardbred owners and breeders have no desire to again face crippling financial exposure should another exotic equine disease penetrate the national quarantine barrier.

However, strong biosecurity built on sound science and the hard lessons learned from recent history does not have to be a predictor or prisoner to the design of future facilities. A new facility planned for Mickleham provides a once in a lifetime opportunity for government and the equine industry to design facilities which deliver and manage both the biosecurity risks with key business drivers which will assist commercial outcomes and maximise traffic.

To this end, HRA submits that the following two points require further exploration before settling the final design phase of the project:

1. Investigate the costs associated with the incorporation of a privately funded and (if required) maintained exercise track within the proposed quarantine station
2. Ensure suitable and appropriate staff supervision amenities

Investigate the costs associated with the incorporation of a privately funded and (if required) maintained exercise track within the proposed quarantine station

² Harness Racing Australia Inc. - Equine Influenza Impact Report PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2008

As best it can, HRA have attempted to have the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) include an 800 metre exercise track in the design of the Mickleham facility during the stakeholder engagement processes, including via public hearings, direct meetings with DAFF representatives and the Horse Industry Consultative Committee (HICC) meetings - but to no avail.

A previous quarantine facility at Spotswood (Victoria) and current facility at Eastern Creek (NSW) have not had the space to encompass such training facilities which are necessary to attract high quality competitors for various equine pursuits to promote equine sports. Horses spend five weeks or more in quarantine, severely impacting on their fitness and condition - hence they don't come to Australia.

This was once the case in the Thoroughbred world as well, but the well resourced industry has built a private station for international thoroughbred competitors. It is no accident that this move coincided with the well heralded 'internationalisation' of the Melbourne Cup and associated events. Unfortunately this is an exercise which extends beyond the capabilities of the harness racing industry currently - therefore privately funding exercise facilities within the proposed Mickleham station is worthy of investigation.

To date, DAFF's response to HRA's exercise track proposition appears narrowly focussed, concentrating almost exclusively on the *potential* barriers and *potential* costs, with little or no appreciation of what these barrier or costs are, let alone the commercial opportunities of increased traffic which would exist through the attraction of international horses (across breeds) if appropriate exercise facilities were available within the station to maintain fitness.

Other benefits include the establishment of a multi-use exercise facility for equine disciplines other than racing stock by incorporating showjumping and dressage arena's, as well as turnout yards in the centre area.

HRA accept such a facility will require private funding for construction, equipment, on-going maintenance, apportioned rent, staff supervision, exercise rostering, ancillary capital works (fencing, gates etc...) and other associated shared costs including utilities so as to ensure biosecurity risks are vigilantly managed.

Based on previous experience the proposed exercise track (design attached) itself would cost circa-\$80,000. The harness racing industry also has great experience in track preparation and facility maintenance, should they be required, but exploration of the associated costs cannot be undertaken without the cooperation of DAFF.

For the purpose of illustration only, an approximate visual display of the exercise track on the proposed site is attached for your information. This representation has utilised the current design (as provided to HRA from DAFF) with an overlay of the proposed exercise track to current scales. Of course extra design and survey work would be required, but on first cut, the track fits neatly. It must be noted that HRA remain open to size modifications including circumference in order to meet any space restrictions.

Currently an average of 54 Standardbreds (five year average since 07/08) pass through PEQ annually. Apart from just 1 racehorse during this time, the remaining horses have arrived exclusively for breeding purposes.

The commercial benefits of exercise facilities is undeniable as it will stimulate visitation and trade in new equine markets, promote and grow the industry with better horses, further encourage the emergence of international broadcast and wagering agreements with North America and Europe - spreading commercial returns to be shared across an entire industry.

While this proposal has been overlooked and discouraged throughout the stakeholder engagement period, it is hoped the Committee can see fit to at least recommend that DAFF investigate the costs associated with the incorporation of a privately funded and (if required) maintained exercise track within the proposed quarantine station at Mickleham - at least as part of the next design phase.

Ensure suitable and appropriate staff supervision amenities

As with HRA's exercise track proposal, observationally at least, transport companies specialising in horse imports have had similar difficulties having their design issues for suitable and appropriate staff supervision amenities addressed satisfactorily by DAFF.

It concerns HRA that that large numbers of valuable, high risk imports may not be adequately supervised within the current plans, particularly in the event of accident or

emergency - situations which are not only difficult to predict, but which require immediate, skilled and careful handling.

It is also likely an expectation of horse owners and insurers that 24-hour monitoring means close and easy access to horses by experienced attendants as opposed to remote observations from outside the facility. Proposed arrangements appear incongruous with this reasonable assumption and the best interests of the horse.

HRA is of the view that any issues can be addressed via regulations which include the ability to remain permanently on site for the duration of the PEQ period if that is the want of a horses owner.

Any moves otherwise may well not only damage Australia's hard fought equine import programs reputation, but negatively impacting the commercial viability of the program with increased instances of horses re-routing to sit out PEQ in New Zealand as an alternative.

In closing, HRA reiterates a resolute commitment and support of strong biosecurity program - our borders cannot be compromised, it's not in anyone's interest. However, better results with long lasting benefits can be achieved in a true partnership approach to the topics highlighted within this submission.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should the Committee require any further information or substantiation of HRA's position.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'A' followed by a horizontal line that extends to the right and then curves back under the 'A'.

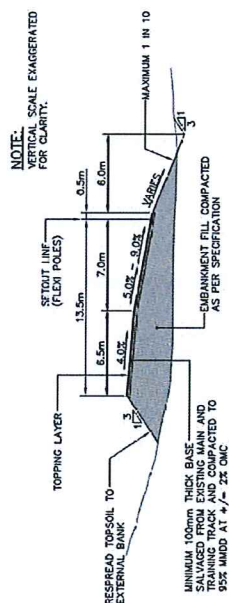
Andrew Kelly
Chief Executive



TRAINING TRACK

FAST WORK/GALLOPS TRACK

TRACK DESIGN DATA SUMMARY	
TRACK CIRCUMFERENCE	= 804.65m
BEND RADIUS	= 83.1m
SPIRAL CURVE LENGTH	= 42.6m
STRAIGHT CROSSFALL	= 5.0% min
BEND CROSSFALL	= 9.0% max



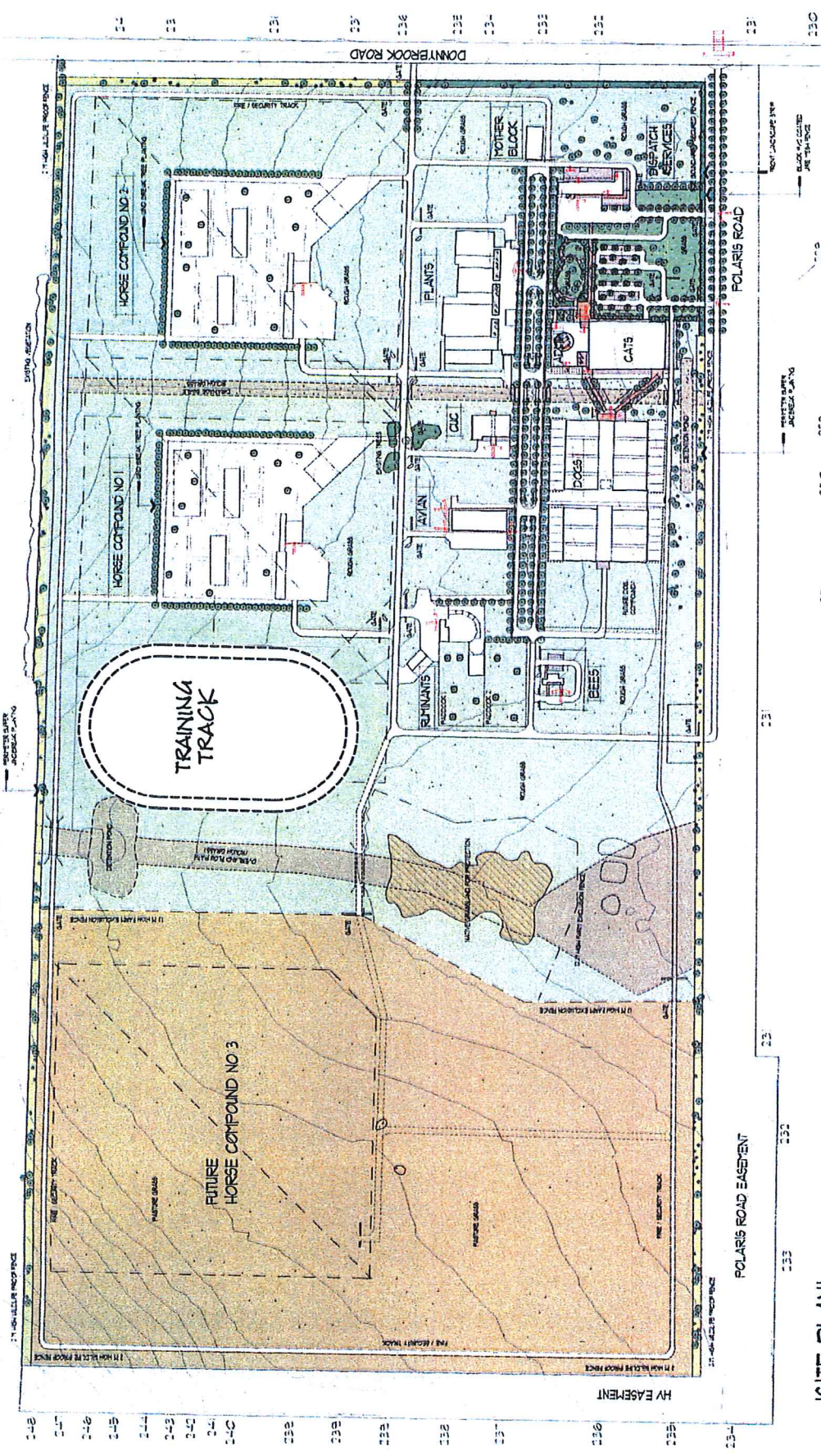
TRAINING TRACK TYPICAL
CROSS SECTION - FAST WORK/GALLOPS TRACK

SIGNATURES ON ORIGINAL OR PREVIOUS ISSUE OF DRAWING		DATE	CLIENT
APPROVED	DATE	PROJECT	
WRS 29/8/12	29/8/12	RWE 29/8/12	TITLE
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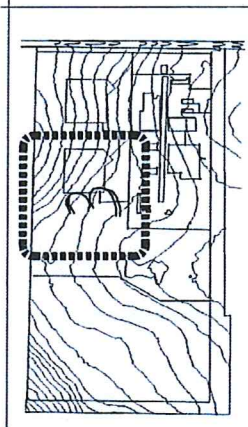
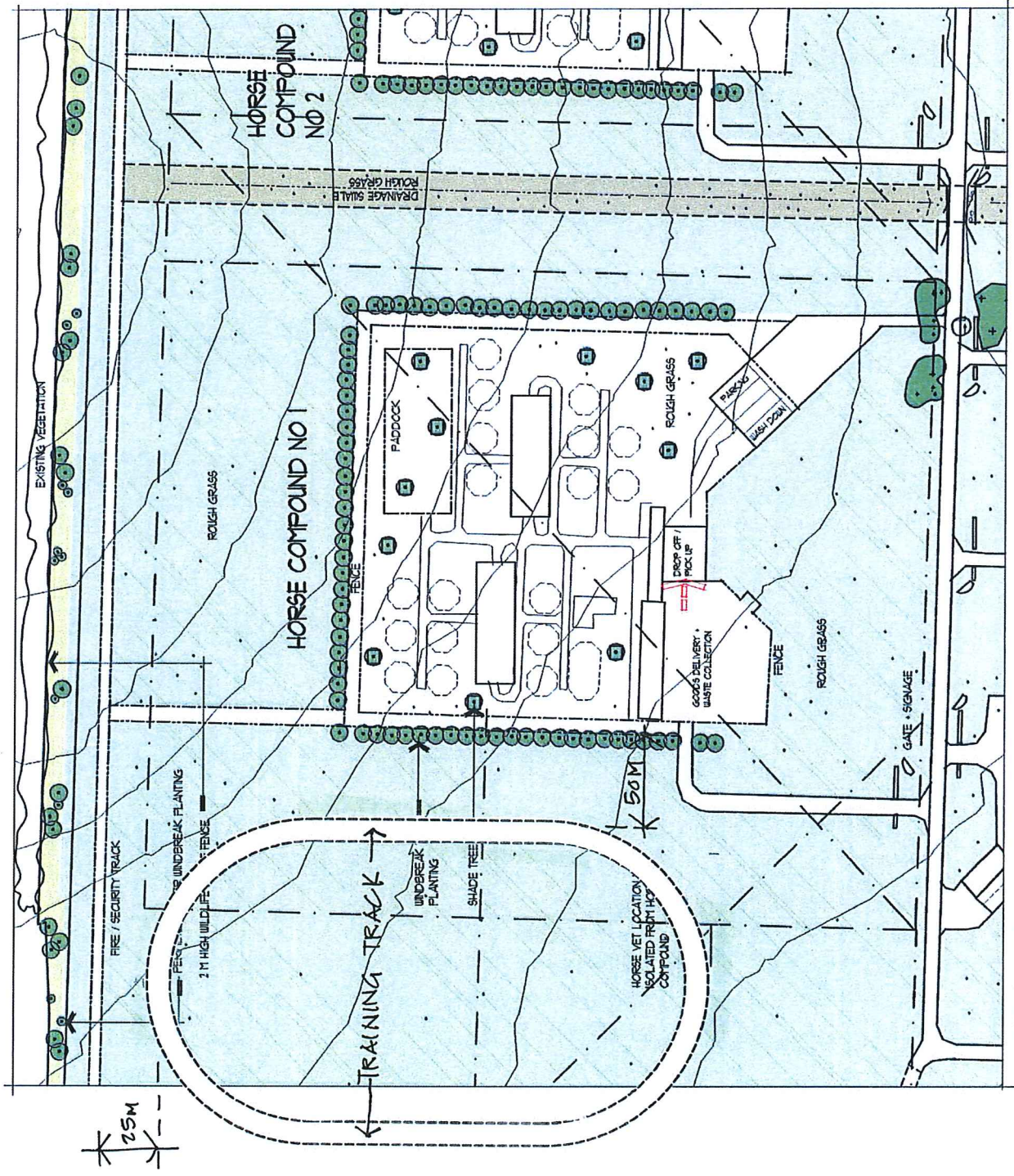
HORSE RACING VICTORIA

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'SITE PLAN'
LANDSCAPE CONCEPT PLAN
FUTURE POST-ENTRY QUARANTINE FACILITY

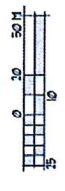




KEY PLAN



1160 LC II
SEPT 2012



LANDSCAPE CONCEPT PLAN - 3
FUTURE POST- ENTRY QUARANTINE FACILITY