

PUBLISHED SCIENTIFIC STUDY CONFIRMS THAT THE RISK OF EXPORTING AFRICAN HORSE SICKNESS IS NEGLIGIBLE

About the scientific study:

The recent [risk assessment for African horse sickness \(AHS\)](#) in horses exported from South Africa has now been published in the prestigious peer-reviewed international scientific journal, PLOS ONE confirming that the work is scientifically valid.



Dr Evan Sergeant, AusVet

According to lead author, Evan Sergeant, an internationally renowned epidemiologist from AusVet, “The likelihood of undetected AHS infection in horses exported from South Africa can be minimised by appropriate risk management measures, including vector-protected pre-export quarantine and PCR testing in a low-risk area for AHS, such as the current Free Zone in the Western Cape.

Based on model results there would be an average of one undetected infected horse exported for every 185,000 horses exported from the low-risk area, assuming no post-arrival quarantine.

This equates to an annual probability of 1.6 cases per thousand years, assuming 300 horses exported per year. Post-arrival vector-protected quarantine and additional PCR testing would further reduce this likelihood.

The final choice of risk management measures required depends on the level of risk acceptable to the importing country, and this publication will now assist importing countries in making accurate, science based decisions regarding AHS exposure risk.

Link to paper:

<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0151757>

Says Prof Ian Sanne, Founding Director of the Equine Health Fund, who commissioned the risk assessment, “The implication of these findings is that the gates have swung open much wider for the export of South Africa’s sought after racehorses, endurance horses and sports horses. The depreciation of our currency also augurs well for this industry. We are currently exporting around



Prof Ian Sanne

R250 million per year but this can easily increase to R1 billion.”

“Import and export conditions are negotiated between the veterinary administrations of two countries. One of the important factors importing countries take into account is the level of risk an import poses. A sound risk assessment such as the one that has just been published, allows the importing country to make decisions based on science.”

African Horse Sickness (AHS) has been affecting South African horse exports for decades and key stakeholders in the industry have been working to find long term solutions to these challenges. In 1997 a small free zone was established in the Western Cape, enabling horse exports to the European

Union (EU). However, trade has been disrupted several times due to regular outbreaks of AHS in the controlled area. Currently, the country is losing out on investment because of the onerous and expensive process of importing horses from South Africa.

Mike de Kock, a top racehorse trainer comments, "South African horses are very competitive on the world stage and our results speak for themselves. Our horses are in demand but we have difficulty with delivery which is hurting this industry financially. With efficient export we could create thousands of jobs and bring in massive foreign investment."

For South Africa to regain free zone status with the European Union and OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health), it takes two years without outbreaks, followed by submission and consideration of a dossier. The recent outbreak in Paarl fell within the qualifying two year free period. In the words of leading breeder, Mick Goss, "it is by no means the end of the world".

Mr Goss went on to say: "What this outbreak does prove is the effectiveness of the excellent work which has been done on the surveillance side, plus we now have the considerable added advantage of PCR testing in place. Besides, the measures proposed by an independent international body like AusVet in limiting risk is a dimension we were never able to offer in the past."