

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CROSS PARTY GROUP ON
SCOTTISH HORSERACING AND BLOODSTOCK INDUSTRIES
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 28th JUNE 2017 AT 6.00PM
IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT**

1. PRESENT

Miles Briggs MSP; John Scott MSP; Sulekha Varma;

Apologies: Neil Bibby MSP; Rachael Hamilton MSP.

In attendance:

Delly Innes (minutes)

2. UPDATE FROM SULEKHA VARMA, RACING MANAGER, HAMILTON PARK RACECOURSE

Sulekha Varma has been a Clerk of the Course for seven years, as a trainee at Haydock Park Racecourse, and fully fledged at Market Rasen, Nottingham, Huntingdon and Warwick and for the last eighteen months at Hamilton Park.

The BHA public statement on equine welfare: *“As with participation in any sport involving speed and athleticism, there remains an inherent risk of injury that cannot be eradicated. It is the BHA’s aim to ensure that no injury or fatal injury occurs which could have been sensibly prevented.”*

In the last twenty years, the equine fatality rate has fallen by a third, from 0.3% to just over 0.2% of all runners, and shows that racecourses are heading in the right direction re- equine welfare. There are 14,000 horses in training with approximately 90,000 runners per year in the UK, with 6,200 runners in Scotland, and the sport employs 20,000 people directly, and 80,000 indirectly to care for horses in training.

Current Schemes in Place

- Veterinary research (currently part-funded by the Levy Scheme)
- Retraining and re-homing schemes for retired racehorses
- Vetting and training of trainers and jockeys

Every racecourse is inspected by a BHA inspector prior to the start of the season, and twice during the course of a season. The Professional Jockeys’ Association employ current jockeys as safety officers, to voice any concern that jockey’s may have regarding safety.

Turf Management

Scottish courses are spending a c. £650,000/annum on the maintenance of their tracks. Turf management has progressed hugely in recent years, moving away from use of agricultural practices to amenity management, using products designed for the likes of golf courses and football pitches.

Soil analysis is carried out by European Turfgrass Labs in Alloa, who inform the courses what nutrients may be lacking and advise on soil structure and drainage quality.

The Scottish tracks are investing a significant amount into turf maintenance, and their groundstaff teams have been recognised by the Racecourse Association, with the following awards:

- Kelso Racecourse – Jumps Racecourse Groundstaff Team of the Year, 2016

- Hamilton Park Racecourse – Flat Racecourse Groundstaff Team of the Year, 2014
- Musselburgh Racecourse – Dual Code Groundstaff Team of the Year, 2011
- Ayr Racecourse – Dual Code Groundstaff Team of the Year, 2010.

Investment and innovation is a priority at all Scottish tracks. Kelso and Hamilton Park have recently bought verti-draining machines at £40k/unit, for de-compaction. Perth has created a purpose built exercise track and grazing area, given that 40% of their runners travel over-night.

Using GPS mapping, Hamilton Park has created a consistent radius on the bend that allows horses to travel in a more balanced, and safer, way. Musselburgh has introduced a fibresand bend, the first course in the UK to do so, at cost of £100k and other courses in Britain have followed Musselburgh's lead.

One-Fit Padded Hurdles

There were concerns regarding previously used timber-framed hurdles, which ran the risk of bare wood coming into contact with horses' legs and horse's legs going through the birch on impact. Kelso Racecourse is one of the first courses to install padded hurdles. So far, results show a reduction in fallers of c0.5% on installation of one-fit padded hurdles.

Irrigation

The irrigation of tracks is crucial for producing safe, consistent turf during dry weather. Research shows injury rates increase on 'firmer' ground, and Jump tracks aim to produce 'good' ground, whilst Flat tracks aim to produce 'good to firm' ground. Perth has recently invested £250k in a new irrigation system for 2017. The Scottish tracks take water from local water sources, which is then put onto the ground, and either evaporates or is fed back into the local water source, so no water is wasted.

Facilities

Each of the five courses has invested in secure stable yards, which are regularly disinfected with dust-free bedding, good wash-down areas and a veterinary treatment area. The racecourse also provides a sampling area for post-race sampling, carried out by the BHA. Jockeys are also tested for drugs and alcohol.

Perth, Musselburgh and Hamilton Park have all built new stable yards in the last ten years. Musselburgh now has a secure walkway directly from the stables to the course, with ample horse box parking, and a level unloading ramp.

Personnel

There are a huge amount of staff involved in a raceday, and each race meeting across Britain is carried out within the same system. There are at least two vets at every Flat meeting, and 3 vets at every Jump meeting, with more vets in place for the larger meetings, such as the Scottish Grand National. All vets must be current practitioners, with at least five years' experience in Equine Veterinary work, and have attended a course on approved Equine Emergency Care within the last five years. Veterinary Surgeons on-course will:

- Provide emergency First Aid Care to injured horses.
- Arrange transfer to a Veterinary Centre of Excellence if required.
- Euthanase animals on humane grounds.
- Carry out endoscopy examinations on-course, and the jump tracks have x-rays available on site.
- The BHA's Veterinary Officer and Equine Welfare and Integrity Officers will:
 - Ensures vaccinations of all horses are up-to-date.
 - Check microchips of every horse before it can enter the Racecourse Stables.
 - Ensure previously injured horses are fit to race.
 - Oversee post-race sampling of runners.

Scotland has two excellent veterinary hospitals in Glasgow and Edinburgh, meaning that no track is far from a centre of equine veterinary excellence.

Farrier

A farrier is available on every raceday for emergency farrier work, before and after racing.

Horse Ambulance

Each Scottish track uses Peter & Kim Horse Ambulances Ltd, who provide four purpose built horse trailers manned by an experienced, dedicated crew. The horse ambulance is a modified trailer, with shallow ramps and straight front un-loaders, so the horse does not have to turn or reverse to exit the trailer.

Safety During a Race

The waving of a yellow flag informs jockeys that the race is to be stopped immediately, along with a loud whistle, so there is an aural and visual cue for the jockeys. If part of the track is blocked by an injured horse/jockey, a chequered flag is waved, and by-pass arrows can be used at Hurdles/Fences, to advertise to the jockeys that part of the track is blocked by an injured horse/jockey. The Bypass Boards positioned above hurdles/fences will also stop a loose horse from jumping a fence with a casualty on the hidden side. This also serves to protect those treating the casualty. Doctors, Vets and Clerks of the Course are all provided with two-way radios for communication during a race. Treatment screens are used for privacy for veterinary treatment on the track.

Post-Race Recovery

Wash-down areas are provided near the un-saddling areas, with copious amounts of water and buckets located around the course, and on the back of vehicles. Post-race ataxia in horses is thankfully fairly rare but can occur in all forms of sport horse. In these cases, water is immediately administered to lower the horse's temperature and regulate their breathing. Horses at high-risk of post-race ataxia are highlighted to the Clerk of the Course, via the BHA Veterinary Officer, prior to racing.

Miles Briggs thanked Sulekha and added that he would like her to make the presentation to the Animal Welfare Cross Party Group to explain how proactive the Clerks in Scotland are to maintain the highest levels of equine welfare. Delly Innes will approach the Animal Welfare Group.

3. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 1st November 2017 at 5.30pm in Q1.03.