

HORSE HEALTH

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Setback for Australian flu outbreak

By Louise Cordell

AUSTRALIA'S recovery from an outbreak of horse flu has experienced a setback with further cases detected this month.

The respiratory disease is highly contagious and has spread rapidly, with a huge impact on the Australian horse industry.

A national response involving the Australian and state Government and equine organisations has been working to eradicate the disease, but the battle is not yet won. From the end of last month, buffer zones and ring vaccinations have been used to contain areas of high concentration infection in New South Wales and Queensland. This is exclusively for the eradication campaign and there is currently no proposal for any general vaccination of horses. Australian Veterinary Association President Dr Diane Sheehan has said that while the crisis is far from over, it is important to know how the disease entered the country and how it spread.

She said: "There is still much to be done and our first priority must be to continue to provide the resources necessary to get this under control, and to help those who need assistance. However, questions will have to be answered about how this breach of bio-

security occurred so that we learn from it.

"Just as importantly, we need to look at whether the resources we have available will be adequate in future."

The outbreak has cost the equine industry millions and it is estimated that the after effects will be felt for many years to come.

Alasdair King, veterinary manager at Intervet, said: "While Australia could, in some ways, be considered lucky, as it appears that the strain of flu virus introduced is one of the less virulent ones, the outbreak is still disrupting every aspect of the horse industry. The breeding season is also suffering as movement restrictions stop stallions and mares being brought together. In fact it is believed that up to 70 per cent of brood mares in New South Wales may remain uncovered."

Now, the Equestrian Federation of Australia has developed a horse flu action plan it claims can revive the equestrian industry.

Under the plan state and federal governments would offer extra financial assistance to affected horse owners via an interest relief scheme. The EFA is also seeking an immediate vaccination programme for equestrian horses if the equine influenza outbreak is not under control by next month.



Anyone who has ever worked in a busy stable will know the impact that one badly behaved horse can have. This month we talk to Carmen O'Connor, a Reiki master teacher and practitioner, about her work and the range positive effects her treatments can have. After a year working with horses she has found benefits can include reduced nervousness and stress, increased suppleness and flexibility, greater manageability and improved performance levels. Carmen said: "Animals' reactions are based on their instincts. They can't read about the potential benefits of Reiki in a magazine and so have no preconceptions about what to expect."