

ILLEGAL MOVEMENT OF HORSES COULD RESULT IN HUGE KNOCK-ON EFFECT

African horse sickness (AHS) is a controlled animal disease in South Africa, and because of the high potential for international spread of AHS, outbreaks in the AHS Controlled Area in the Western Cape Province have a significant impact, not only on affected properties, but also on the exportation of horses from the AHS Free Zone.

The 2011 outbreak of AHS in the AHS Controlled Area had a devastating effect and was probably caused by illegal movement of an infected animal into the area, although this could not be confirmed. This outbreak occurred in the small town of Mamre, in the Malmesbury State Veterinary District, of the AHS Surveillance Zone of the Western Cape Province.

The area around the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa has historically been free from AHS, with only sporadic outbreaks which have all been suspected to have been caused by the introduction of AHSV positive horses from other provinces. Based on this, in 1995 a protocol was submitted to the European Union (then the European Community) proposing the establishment of an AHS Free Zone in the Cape Peninsula, from which export of horses could resume, provided certain conditions were met. This was accepted by the EU in 1997 and again allowed the direct export of horses from the AHS Free Zone of Metropolitan Cape Town to European Union Member States.

Subsequent to the implementation of regionalisation, two other AHS outbreaks have occurred within the AHS Surveillance Zone, in the Stellenbosch district. These outbreaks were a result of AHSV serotype 7 in 1999, when 32 horses died, and of AHSV serotype 1 in 2004, when 16 horses died. In February 2011 the outbreak in Mamre, recording 73 fatalities, again resulted in the suspension of horse exports directly from South Africa to the EU and other countries.

Thanks to the quick and decisive actions of Veterinary Services, Western Cape Department of Agriculture who enlisted the assistance of a number of partners including the Equine Research Centre (who donated vaccines, 289 of which were administered, with dramatic results), Racing South Africa, the Cape Breeders' Club and the Acorn Group of companies who assisted with covering the enormous costs resulting from this outbreak (a conservative estimate of R850 000), it was quickly and effectively brought under control. The City of Cape Town Disaster Management and the Stellenbosch Provincial Veterinary Laboratory also made significant contributions to the control of this outbreak.

At the time of the outbreak, South Africa was exporting on average 200 horses per annum. The revenue loss to industry stakeholders directly involved in the logistics of exporting horses is estimated at R20 million per annum. There was also a loss of foreign investment as a result of a decrease in direct exports which was estimated at R200 million per annum, 33% of which was offset by importers utilising alternative shipping routes via Mauritius.

The speedy and cohesive response to this outbreak, which resulted in it being brought under control very quickly, highlighted the importance of Private Public Partnerships to control diseases such as AHS.

It needs to be understood that the vaccination requirements dictated by the Movement Control Protocol for horses are there to prevent the disease from spreading via horses moving from affected areas to the surveillance area. This also applies to movement restrictions in the AHS Controlled Area

that are put in place by the State Veterinary Services in the Infected parts of South Africa during the AHS season, when the risk of moving a horse that may be carrying the virus undetected into the Controlled Area is much higher. The equestrian associations and their members who rely on the movement of horses for their events must continue to ensure that the correct procedures are followed when moving horses.

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