

### **Equine industry takes collaborative approach for new Hendra virus test**

A new test that potentially shortens the wait for Hendra virus results from days to hours is set to reduce both human exposure to infected animals and horse losses due to delays in treatment.

Equestrian NSW is pleased to announce its support, through a \$40,000 contribution, to a new project led by Associate Professor Benjamin Ahern from the University of Queensland, to validate a new Hendra virus test. The new testing protocol will enable prompt treatment of suspected infected horses at point of care.

The project, administered by AgriFutures Australia, brings together the equine sector with co-investment from Equestrian NSW, the thoroughbred industry, universities, private veterinarians and government.

Equestrian NSW Chief Executive Officer, Bruce Farrar, welcomed the new project, funded and overseen by AgriFutures Australia, and highlighted the need for a sector wide and independent approach.

“We’ve been very interested in the research and development underway for a new Hendra test, with our members showing their strong support for a solution. No one organisation can deliver what’s needed, so we wanted an industry wide, collaborative approach” said Mr Farrar.

“We were very attracted to AgriFutures Australia’s co-investment opportunities because of its independence, strong governance and rigour in assessing competing projects, and its funding approach,” said Mr Farrar.

Annelies McGaw, AgriFutures Australia Program Manager applauded Equestrian NSW’s investment and the industry wide collaboration.

“We’re very grateful to have Equestrian NSW’s support and to be facilitating a collaborative equine-wide approach to tackling Hendra virus.”

She added as a rural research and development corporation AgriFutures Australia must adhere strict assessment and procurement processes and this project and funding round was no exception.

“Research proposals made to the AgriFutures Thoroughbred Horses Program are assessed by an independent panel made up of industry experts including vets, breeders and researchers. Each proposal is assessed based on its scientific merit, as well as the potential impact on the industry.”

“Associate Professor Ahern’s project demonstrated a robust methodology, strong data to support the project’s success as well as tangible and timely benefits for the industry,” said Ms McGaw.

“Realistically, if all goes to plan, the test could be available to be used to support horse health in 1-2 years.”

According to Professor Ahern the team are already on track to making the testing protocol available and are currently working with Biosecurity Queensland to validate the test and to

ensure its sensitivity and specificity is as good as, if not better than the current gold standard laboratory based test.

“One of the major benefits of this research will be the ability to obtain results for the Hendra Virus status of a horse 30 to 40 minutes post-sample collection, compared with hours or days for results to be issued currently,” said Associate Professor Ahern.

“Once validated and approved for use this test will be able to be rolled out immediately. It ultimately will enable rapid appropriate treatment for horses, while limiting the exposure of the virus – before diagnosis – to those caring for them. It will also reduce case mishandling errors due to delays in diagnosis.”

Mr Farrar added: “Members will receive regular updates on the progress of this project via the Equestrian NSW website [www.nsw.equestrian.org.au](http://www.nsw.equestrian.org.au) and social media accounts.”

This University of Queensland project has been supported by AgriFutures Thoroughbred Horses Program, Equestrian NSW, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries Queensland’s Biosecurity Sciences Laboratory, GeneWorks, Equine Veterinarians Australia, the Australian Veterinary Association, and five private veterinary practises in QLD and NSW.

For more information about AgriFutures Australia and the Thoroughbred Horses Program visit [agrifutures.com.au/thoroughbred-horses](http://agrifutures.com.au/thoroughbred-horses).