



The Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare

An all party group for members of both houses at Westminster formed to promote and further the cause of animal welfare by all means available to the Parliaments at Westminster and in Europe

MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 16th October 2012 The Equine Crisis Report & The Grand National

Members Present: Stacey Frier (RSPCA), Claire Robinson (RSPCA), Jeanette Allen (EHWS), Lord McNair (ECMA), Rose Anderson (Aintree), Will Lambe (British Horseracing Authority), Annie Adams (Office of Laurence Robertson MP), Anthony Roberts (RCVS), Jacqui Molyneux (RCVS), Sylvia Tabor (DTA), Philip Roberts (VIOVET), Gary Gregory (Central Bedfordshire Canine Trust), Katie Baxter (ASSVAP), Sally Phillips (RSPCA), Melanie Savile (McTimoney Chiropractic Association), Nicki Choule-Rowe (McTimoney Chiropractic Association), Pieter Kat (LionAid), Chris MacSween (LionAid), Vanessa Hudson (Animals Count), Bob Bayliss (RSPCA), Jessica Stark (World Horse Welfare), Nic de Brauwere (NEWC/Redwings), Nicola Markwell (Redwings Horse Sanctuary), Hannah Lynch (World Horse Welfare), Richard Wyatt (HorseWorld), Gerry Walkins (HorseWorld), Miranda Stevenson (BIAZA), Keith Meldrum (World Horse Welfare), Rachel Cunningham (Blue Cross), Simon Pope (WSPA), Caroline Lucas MP, Jim Fitzpatrick, MP Baroness Mallalieu, Laurence Robertson MP, Simon Hart MP, Neil Parish MP, Baroness Golding, Kerry McCarthy MP

1. AGM

Neil Parish informed the Group that the Officers of the Group needed to be re-elected. All Officers were happy to continue in their roles and it was asked if any other member wished to be considered.

It was put forward that the Officers would be as follows:

Chairman: Neil Parish MP

Vice-chairmen: Jim Fitzpatrick MP, Caroline Lucas MP, Mike Hancock MP

Treasurer: Andrew Rosindell MP

Secretary: Lord Soulsby

2. Equine Crisis Report

David Bowles (RSPCA) – We have published the Equine Crisis Report which we are pleased to present to this meeting. All of the equine organisations have come together to say there is an impending crisis and similar trends have been seen by all of these organisations. There are 2,800 places for horses within the organisations and those are full or close to capacity. The RSPCA has 120 places for its own horses but we have over 600 in our care at the moment. Many of these are kept in private boarding costing £3m every year to take care of them. It is not sustainable for any organisation to have that many horses in private boarding.

The RSPCA took 304 horses in from April 2011 to April 2012, double the amount we took in last year. Horse World Welfare found it took in 3 times as many horses last year as the previous year. Redwings have seen an increase of 50%. It is not just specific to RSPCA but something that every organisation is seeing across the board. We are seeing more horses that have welfare problems with the number of prosecutions having increased by 60%. The owners are having difficulty giving the horses the veterinary attention, the care, and other resources that they need. The RSPCA is spending money prosecuting the owners who have not cared for the horses and that also is not sustainable. We are at a stage now where all the equine organisations have said they are almost full up but also we are saying for the first time that

Marisa Heath, Secretariat

Tel: 07736 899 547 E-mail: admin@apgaw.org Website: www.apgaw.org

there are 6000 horses which the organisations have collectively established are at risk of being welfare cases in the near future. With another winter like the last, with rain and cold weather, some of those 6000 will go from being at risk to being welfare cases and prosecution cases. Where will they go and who will take care of them? We are giving a clear signal to government, local government and horse owners that this is a serious problem very close to us.

We are in this situation as we are seeing an increase in numbers of horses with relentless breeding despite the fact the horses go for £5-10 at the local market. People are still breeding them, as they believe they may at some stage get money for them. This is not going to happen, all that will happen is they will not be able to care for them. At the same time we have the Tripartite Agreement which allows free movement of horses between France, Ireland and the UK. France and Ireland are sending their horses across to the UK to add to the growing population. This needs to be addressed.

Roly Owers (World Horse Welfare) – Some of the 6000 horses are fly-grazing on illegal land which means they are left to fend for themselves and ownership is unclear. Others are owned by breeders and dealers and some are simply with over-whelmed owners who cannot look after their horses in the current economic climate. There could be a real crisis this winter; if a fraction of those 6000 need our care the system will not be able to cope. The Local Authorities will have no option but to euthanise those horses. Earlier this year, Redwings became aware of a situation in South Wales dealing with 60 horses. In that case several charities stepped in at the last moment and offered homes to the horses but it stretched everyone to the limit. We are dealing with horses in the tens and hundreds at any one time owing to people suffering from bankruptcy. The charities now have such limited space that even if 100 of the 6000 horses need help we are going to struggle to cope this winter.

This is not scaremongering, we are facing this now and so we are here to raise the profile amongst the public and to promote rehoming. We are also looking to Government for help, as we cannot solve this problem without their help. Fly-grazers are left to fend for themselves so their health and welfare is compromised, they are packed with worms, often poorly tethered and have poor feet. Farmers are not able to farm their land, school land is being used, road accidents occur from horses straying, horses are appearing in people's gardens, nature reserves are being trashed. People feel helpless in this situation with taxpayers, farmers and charities picking up the bill for irresponsible ownership. There is no law on fly-grazing. There should be criminal legislation for fly-grazing to allow Local Authorities and landowners to take prompt action when horses are left illegally on their land.

There is also a need to have identification of the owners. We have horse passports but they were not intended as an enforcement tool and many horse do not have passports. The essential equine database, funded by Defra was ceased last month and whilst the database was not perfect it was the only tool available to allow tracing of horses to owners. Without that we cannot address the problem. Finally the sector is trying to promote responsible breeding practice but government should use its resources to support this and ensure people realise there is no market for the horses being bred.

Neil Parish MP – With linking horse to owners are you looking towards compulsory micro-chipping then?

Roly Owers– There is legislation that all foals need to have microchips but it will take a while for that to feed through. Often the microchip does not tie to the passport and you need then to tie into provide owner traceability. The whole system needs to be changed and linked to the equine database.

Dene Stansall (Animal Aid) – Fly-grazing seems to be a major problem and that is most of the travelling community. Where would the horses go if they were not fly grazed? Can they all be rehomed?

Roly Owers – It is not just the travelling community, it is dealers too. The reality is there is a significant proportion of the 6000 that is of poor stock so rehoming chances are small.

Dene Stansall – The longevity of horse ownership is difficult, as horses can live to thirty years and ponies forty, as they [horse owners] do not realize what they are taking on as time, money and knowledge of horses is needed; so there is an education process there. Maybe people should have to take an exam before they have a horse. We should prevent

people from breeding horses in a random manner unless they have passed certain criteria. I know that over five and a half thousand horses leave the racing industry each year and that too is a burden on the general horse population.

Neil Parish MP– How many of the 6000 are people who take on a horse with best intentions but then cannot afford to keep it?

Roly Owers– There are no definitive figures but I estimate you are talking 50/50. There are some decent dealers out there but also many rogues who form part of the problem. Education is critical to the long-term solution to this. The idea of legislation is attractive but what we know is that regulation is only useful if you can enforce it.

Baroness Mallalieu – We are looking at an immediate crisis and I agree with education but that is long-term. The crisis is this winter and of 6000 horses a number of them cannot be rehomed. The last thing we want is people of their own accord to be picking up horses, for example a recent case saw a woman buying 40 horse at a market as they were only £5 and putting them all in a field. She ended up being prosecuted herself for neglect. The organisations have to educate the public to understand that you should put the horse down particularly if it is old rather than passing it onto a dealer. If the horse has no future they should not go through the process of being handed around and ending up in a bad situation.

Nick de Brauwere (NEWC) - A lot of people who have 10-20 horses have nothing to do with organized sport but are collecting subsidies for having an unusual breed or doing something unique. There is simply an overpopulation issue which has been caused by a number of reasons. Subsidies for grazing on common land needs to be stopped.

Sally Philips (RSPCA) - If a horse is found on someone's land the landowner becomes responsible for that. Can we get large landowners on board to help with this issue by providing land?

Neil Parish MP– It is an interesting idea but we have to be sensible and not put more horses onto land which may be needed for other things.

Jeanette Allen (EHWS) - The Equine Steering Group is looking at practical solutions and the central database is one of them. The funding may need to be enabled by Government, and the poor quality of passports needs to be addressed. Trading Standards and Local Authorities are being asked to go out without the sufficient tools and they have nowhere to put the animals pending prosecution. They know who the worst offenders are locally and if they can be hit it may act as a deterrent. Penalty fines for not registering the horse should be looked at as currently it is a passive process and change of ownership should be DVLA style. Funding of the database is the issue as it is not commercially viable. Yet for £200,000 a year we could be helping to support those prosecution bodies more effectively with the database. With big prosecutions you have a deterrent. On the issue of abandoning horses or fly-grazing, the landowner should not be responsible, that is an old and bad law which should be changed.

Gavin Grant (RSPCA) - The epicenter of many of these difficulties is Wales and the Welsh Government have joined together many of the relevant parties and have established a Starter Finisher group to look practically at what could be done here to see where laws might need to be changed. The Nature of the Tripartite Agreement was constructed to enable legitimate trade to take place but it seems now to be acting as a cloak over the dealing and transfer of horses of remarkable little value between the 3 countries. We would urge Defra again to tackle this matter within the context between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, as I know they have appetite to look at France already.

Tm Morris (BHA) - The situation with thoroughbreds can give us some insight. In terms of dealing with overbreeding, as we are more market lead, we got together with British breeders and started to address concerns on breeding. We involved World Horse Welfare. Consequently breeders of quality horses have downsized considerably. The Tripartite Agreement was used to deal with extremes of overbreeding in that the Republic of Ireland bred more thoroughbred horses than France and Great Britain together, When the Irish economy crashed the Tripartite Agreement let the problem come over. People do not move a horse to slaughter; they move it on a wing and a prayer that they might sell it. The good news is that Defra have said they are reviewing that. With racehorses there is a robust competition entry system to be used as enforcement. However, less good is the identification issue, there was an incentive to register helping us trace thoroughbreds but many non-thoroughbreds have no identification which means there is no

enforcement strategy viable. The two positive lessons which can be taken from the thoroughbred breeding industry is to work together and that identification works.

David Bowles – We are looking at this issue in 2 aspects - the long-term and short-term. Today we are looking at the short-term and this winter. The two issues to take to Defra are to get better co-operative and informative sharing between Local Authorities, Defra and Ministeries. The second issue is to look at the Tripartite Agreement to turn off the tap off horses coming in.

Roly Owers– The Minister also needs to be clear on fly-grazing. The onus is totally imbalanced with no penalty for owners fly-grazing, it all falls on the landowner and that needs to be changed. It is also about getting the education to the people who need educating.

Neil Parish MP – The Minister Rupert De Mauley and Secretary of State Owen Paterson are the first port of call. Gavin Grant made the point about what is happening in Wales which we should look at and see what lessons can be learnt.

Faye Stacey (People4Ponies) – It is a tradition to breed, people continue even though they are not selling. Also there is the issue of wild ponies, and perhaps the removal of stallions from Dartmoor etc for a few years needs to be considered.

Action: Baroness Mallalieu as chair of the APPG on the Horse to accompany Neil and speakers on meeting with Defra to discuss the report and the issues set out during the discussion.

3. Grand National

Dene Stansall (Animal Aid) I have been the horse consultant to Animal Aid for 13 years and I take in unwanted thoroughbreds.

There were 888 horses killed in the past 2000 days of racing. Last year there were 94,376 starts from around 14,056 horses in training. 240 horses were killed in racing. 1 in 37 horses die each season prematurely.

Historically, the Grand National has been a race of change; it has evolved since 1839 when the fences were just brush and a post and rail in front of them. Now we are stuck in a bubble where we do not seem to want to touch it now. Out of the last 50 years, the last 2 decades have been the worst as 18 horses have died in the race. 2003-2012 has seen 399 runners overall, 147 finished the race, 252 did not finish, 157 fell or unseated the rider or collapsed exhausted. Nine horses were killed. 9 brought down or carried out, 10 refused at a fence or to race, 76 pulled up.

The difficult fences, too many runners and the race being too long cause death and injury. In 2011 and 2012 there were 30 fences, and 40 runners and two deaths both years.

Many fences have large drops on the other side and have grown in size from 1937. The fences have not got smaller and are more problematic than they have ever been. Becher's Brook undressed of hedging is rows of wooden poles which have a big impact if the horse hits it. For example, to name but a few, in 1987 Dark Ivy was killed at Becher's Brook, 1946 Largo suffered a rotational fall, 2011 Dooneys Gate fell and killed. Aintree and the BHA are not dealing with it.

Before 2000 the mean average number of runners in the race was 29 now it is 40. 1883 saw 10 runners, In 2000 it changed to 40 runners.

Self-regulation is not working. We need a Code of Practice for Horseracing

Professor Tim Morris (British Horseracing Authority) - The Grand National is a high profile event not only in horseracing but nationally too. It provides the biggest sale for tabloid papers and large circulation and is one of the key events on free to air television which gives you some indication of where it sits on the national psyche. I make no apologies for saying that we need to keep a sense of perspective having just heard the debate on the 6000 horses in potential crisis. Animal Aid advocates that we do not run the race. It is our role to improve things but the fact is that the opposition does not have the popular support. Animal Aid's agenda is not to use animals which is to be respected

but it is not something for the vast majority of people who want to interact with animals. It would mean the end of the thoroughbred breed. It is a minority view. It is about animal welfare or animal rights?

The middle ground is where we should naturally sit as a responsible regulator. A balanced view of animal welfare includes jockeys too as their welfare is also at risk. We have to be sensitive to public concerns but focus on basing our changes on evidence. In 2011 we started a review and we are building on it. As a regulator we have only been around since 2008 and in that time we have taken strong action on the whip. We are the most strongly regulated equine sector and I don't think there has been a failure of regulation in racing.

With regards to Breecher's Brook what is not understood is it is there for a reason to keep the speed of the race down and the field spread. Speed is a more important factor than field size. Additionally jockey standards and race horse standards have been looked at, evidence from Australia has shown that if you make them too high people take more risks.

As regulators we are committed to change and this is a sport that is being open, is talking about what it is doing, publishing it, doing reviews of jump safety, trying to move and be open. We are happy to listen and take part in the debate to make the right improvements.

Gavin Grant (RSPCA) – The RSPCA inspectors have not been present at the Grand National for the last few years so when I returned as Chief Executive this year I asked for them to start again. These officers who attended the race are particularly relevant as they are equine inspectors and have great expertise. Those officers were placed around the course to cover start and finish, each officer covering two fences at both circuits. The conclusions of what was witnessed was put into a report which we did not publish as we felt it was better to send it to the BHA and Aintree without publicity. The recommendations made were that we are concerned that the nature of the animals competing may well have changed and that the construction of these horses may be physiologically different to the traditional horses which competed in the Grand National. Speed is a critical factor and in many ways to a layman's eyes the nature of these horses looks entirely different, they look more like flat race horses competing over fences. The distance, the decision to shorten the race by moving the start forward was acknowledged as a positive change. We are concerned at the number of runners taking part, it is an unforgiving course, unique in racing and as such the alignment of the horses and speed at which they are going are all factors for why they fall and become injured. The number of horses should be examined again. Breecher's Brook has been looked at and further modifications seem to be taking place. I believe the last Grand National saw something of a sea change in public attitude with the race and what occurred this year has posed a question mark over the future of the race. We would urge further examination of Breecher's Brook and the other drop fences. We acknowledge and recognize that the BHA and Aintree have taken on a number of issues on-board. We recognize that there is work underway on the nature of the core of these fences and there is a cost to moving to fences which are more forgiving when the horse hits them so we applaud moves being made there. We are an evidence based science led charity and officers were present during the race alongside David Muir, the RSPCA Equine Specialist, to really consider the fences and pace and other things which impact on the horses. It is a dangerous race which ought to be a test of the skill of jockeys and the athleticism of horses but we fear it is moving into a different terrain where it becomes a spectacle where the death of the animals is part of the entertainment. Should there not be further reflection of this it will be the people of the country who will turn away from the Grand National as it will become an inappropriate activity in a nation of animal lovers.

Andrew Tyler (Animal Aid) I was disappointed that Professor Morris spoke about Animal Aid not being representative. Last year a survey showed a clear majority of people believe the race is cruel. Animal Aid can only make an argument to put to the public and the media, the news coverage last year was wholly negative as people are getting fed up of this travesty. We are putting together a draft text of a code of practice which will govern the standards for racehorses and we are convinced the Grand National will fail that test.

Baroness Mallalieu – I sit on the British Horseracing Boards and there is enormous movement and willingness to improve things. People want to see a spectacle but they do not want to see horses falling. There is a changing climate but what the British Horseracing Board needs is encouragement and support to make the changes.

Neil Parish MP – Can I have some views on the types of horse being raced compared to what was raced?

Dene Stansall (Animal Aid) - It was the import of French bred horses in recent years into British racing that added more pace to races. Grand National winner Neptune Collonges, Gold Cup winner Kauto Star, Big Bucks, and other big winners were all French bred and added pace and speed which in turn can mean more fallers as the whole field is going faster.

Neil Parish MP - Is there more that can be done to the fences? What about the number of horses in the race?

Tim Morris –I am mindful of massive changes without analysing what it will do. Aintree is accelerating its rates of change but does not want to make it worse by bringing in changes that cannot be revoked. On the type of horses, we published a massive review having met welfare groups where the type of horse came up and nobody could put their finger on it. On numbers of horses in the race we are taking a considered reflective view but we do not have the evidence at this time.

Roly Owers (World Horse Welfare) – BHA do listen to our concerns but for the Grand National large numbers of horses still fall or are brought down so that is a problem and the reality is that the latest changes are not improving that situation. Part of that is the core of fences and part has to be number of runners. It does not have to be forever, changes can be trialled as this is not an exact science. There is room for trying a reduction of field numbers and seeing how it works.

AOB

Faye (People4Ponies) - We have been campaigning to end hot branding of horse and ponies in England. Hot branding is the repeated application of red-hot fire to identify the horse. It is very painful and considered unacceptable by all the key veterinary associations, as well as the RSPCA, Blue Cross and Animal Aid amongst others. Additionally it is not very effective as the marking often fades or cannot be read. It has been banned in many countries and in this country it is banned from all other species of animals which is why the Government here should also ban it.

Neil Parish MP - You are right that it is not effective as you can rarely read the branding and it means the horse is difficult to handle afterwards.

Baroness Mallalieu - I believe that there will be an announcement from Defra shortly based on chief vet report on hot branding.

Neil Parish MP – That is good news and in the meantime I will take your concerns forward to Defra and seek to find out when that announcement will be. Perhaps a meeting with the Minister will be useful so I will seek to arrange that.