



Equine Identification and Traceability Project Update

6th May 2024

As work from the New Zealand Equine Health Association (NZEHA) progresses on the nationwide Equine Identification and Traceability System (NZ EITS) project, it is time to update the NZ equine industry on its latest developments.

You might recall that in 2020, New Zealand had an incursion of equine piroplasmiasis (*Theileria equi*), requiring NZEHA and MPI to take measures to regain our disease freedom status. The response costs incurred by MPI and NZEHA were equally in the order of \$100K, and the costs to industry alone from the trade disruption were in the order of \$1M.

The *Theileria equi* Response Report from the debrief recommended that:

1. NZEHA, as the equine industry representative, invests in equine data management standards/systems.
2. Improve the process or system for the transition of data from the field to a response, i.e., from the sampling in the paddock to the laboratory to the response teams.

In the event of a disease incursion, the equine industry (and all other primary industries) have agreed to share the costs of a response under the Government Industry Agreements (GIA).

Preparing ahead of time is part of this agreement and helps reduce the costs incurred during a response. As part of the equine industry's plan to prepare for and respond to a disease incursion, we need to know how many horses we have, where they are, and how to contact owners. The NZ EITS aims to capture data on all microchipped horses, including full identification, ownership, and horse location data. This system will supplement and work alongside current Industry databases.

We have partnered with Companion Animals New Zealand (CANZ) to develop an EIT database suitable to assist a disease response. MPI is unable to allocate any Crown funding for the project from the biosecurity allocation; however, they have indicated that they support NZEHA and will provide resources for the necessary policy and legislative changes. The key legislative change will result in the **microchipping of newborn equids becoming mandatory** after a certain start date, and the NZ EIT database will be the centralised repository.

The NZEHA has drawn on funds from the existing border levy to help fund this important work. While we will attempt to keep costs low to horse owners, costs that will be incurred as a result of these changes include the insertion of the microchips (check with your vet) and the registration of the horse on the database (a maximum of a \$15 one-off fee).

We are currently seeking approval for the use of the Biosecurity Act (1993) legislation to make the system mandatory for all horse owners, requiring horse owners to have their **newborn horses** identified and registered on the NZ EITS. Microchipping will become a compulsory part of horse identification upon the enactment of the proposed equine ID regulations. Pending completion of the proposed regulatory work, it is planned that all foals born from **1 Aug 2025** will need to be microchipped and recorded in the system during their first year of life.

If your group is a registration-based system, i.e. a breed, sport or recreational equine group that registers horses, you will, of course, continue to manage the registration data for your member's horses. However, this project will probably mean changes to your current registration rules to ensure mandatory microchipping, registration, and updates to privacy statements allowing sharing of data for biosecurity purposes only. For example, data from equine studbooks may be requested if an exotic disease incursion occurs. The important information in a disease incursion is understanding how to contact the person responsible for the horse, where these horses reside habitually (location in relation to the outbreak) and how many horses are potentially affected.

We understand that some systems might require you to request additional data. We would like to work with as many sector registrars as possible to enable data sharing into the national system via an automated data interface (API), bulk upload (.csv Excel file), or directing individuals to register directly. Your members will also be able to sign in directly to update information such as changes of ownership location. We will establish a template outlining the required data fields as the project develops.

Additional benefits to the horse owner include the opportunity within the NZ EITS to sign onto the NZ Companion Animal Register for emergency management and welfare messaging; the Person In Charge (PIC) can manage these permissions themselves. Also, if chosen, Biothermo® microchips provide the benefit of easily recording temperatures when scanning a microchip.

NZEHA wishes to work alongside the many equine registering bodies to ensure alignment of our equine ID rules and mechanisms to limit confusion for horse owners and make complying easy. We acknowledge that there might be additional work for club secretaries and registrars. Having this work completed before any disease incursion will ensure an efficient and timely response when there is an issue. We appreciate the effort of our wider industry to support this project, ensuring the health and wellbeing of the New Zealand equine herd.

The NZEHA is **YOUR** industry representative at the government level, regularly addressing issues relating to equine health, welfare, and disease. Engaging with our stakeholders now is essential to being better prepared in the future.

Please contact us if you have any questions about the NZ EITS project or any other aspect of equine health, welfare, or disease.

Dr Trish Pearce, Executive Advisor at info@nzeha.org.nz

Or Hillary Milne, ID & Traceability Coordinator at hillary@nzeha.org.nz