

Horse owners meet as risk of flu eases

By **NICOLE HEINRICH**

UP to 500 horse owners packed into the WA State Equestrian Centre in Brigadoon last Wednesday night as the threat of an equine influenza outbreak in the State began to subside.

Horse owners were asked to be vigilant for signs of respiratory disease such as a dry, hacking cough, watery nasal discharge, fever, loss of appetite, muscle pain and stiffness and laboured breathing.

Speakers also discussed stable hygiene, containment strategies and ramifications for the industry.

WA Horse Council chairwoman Diane Bennit, of Lesmurdie, was surprised by the turnout after the Department of Agriculture lifted a standstill order on horse movements in WA earlier that day.

"It showed the depth of interest and commitment of riders and horse people to find out what's happening," she said.

"But there are a lot of pony clubs, adult riding clubs, polo players, event riders, agistment centres and recreational riders not just around Midland and the Hills, but many areas of Perth."

Ms Bennit said the outbreak had cast doubt over many events including endurance race the Tom Quilty Gold Cup and show jumping at the Perth Royal Show.

"It is having a huge impact on all

sorts of things - showjumping, pony clubs, polo," she told the *Reporter*.

"The Quilty has 340 entries and there's no guarantee it will go ahead. Everything is in doubt."

Robert Charlton from Mundaring Veterinary Hospital said the threat of a horse flu outbreak in WA was unlikely after 15 horses tested here were clear.

"We thought we'd have a lot more calls than we did," he said.

"But it was widely publicised and most people were pretty accepting of the standstill."

Dr Charlton said it was wise for horse owners to keep an eye out for signs of the flu.

Ms Bennit said the WA Horse Council would convene a meeting on Thursday for organisers of equestrian events to discuss the biosecurity procedures they would need to implement.

She said judges and jockeys coming to WA from eastern states posed a threat of spreading the virus.

"They're going to have to undergo quite strict biosecurity measures."

Ms Bennit said Australia was - before the outbreak - the only country that had not experienced equine flu.

"It's amazing that it hadn't already happened. It's a huge thing," she said.

"We're lucky it wasn't foot and mouth disease or something else where horses can drop like flies."

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