6 February 2017 

Manuel Bandeira de Mello

Endurance Director

FEI

Dear Manuel

The Endurance Committee of Equestrian Australia, which is responsible for the management of international endurance competition, consists of a number of endurance riders, vets, FEI Officials, international competitors, trainers and breeders. We have a combined experience of over 100 years of involvement in the sport.

As a Committee we have been following closely the current endurance season in the UAE. We have had committee members attending events and training sessions so that we can have eyes on the ground and not rely on hearsay and rumour. Firstly, we would like to commend the FEI on its continuing efforts to improve the welfare for the endurance horses competing in events in the UAE. We know that this has been a very difficult time for the FEI and would like to assure you of our continued support.

We would like to, once again, express our deepest concern about the welfare of endurance horses in the region and ask that the FEI increases its efforts to bring real improvement to the conditions under which these horses, live, train and compete. It is very disheartening to see the continued deaths occurring in endurance events and to hear that a permanent change in the culture of competition has not yet been achieved.

Our Committee has spent a lot of time discussing suggestions for various changes that could be implemented immediately but feel that the main issue that needs to be addressed is the speed at which horses are competed and trained. The scientific studies being conducted in the race horse industry point to lack of rest being a prime contributor to catastrophic injuries where horses are subjected to speed.

While it is hard for the FEI to impose sanctions on the training regimes that the horses undergo, some additional checks could be done during pre-ride and vet checks to detect shin soreness and horses that may have been nerve blocked. We believe this will reduce horses suffering catastrophic injuries. Physical examination for these two conditions can be done quickly and with little impact on the horse.

The examinations should be done at the pre-ride vet check. A sample of horses should be checked again prior to the start of the event to ensure that nerve blocking does not occur after the pre-ride vet check. The examinations should continue throughout the vet checks of the event. Any horses that do not react to the test for nerve blocking should be automatically disqualified and appropriate disciplinary action implemented against the rider, trainer, stable and owner.

The other initiative we would like to suggest is the mandatory and **immediate** implementation of lowered heart rates and shorter present times. These are currently only an option for events and we feel they need to be mandatory. A heart rate of 56 beats per minute and a present time of 10 minutes will reduce the speeds at which the horses are asked to travel and will assist in reducing the number of catastrophic injuries.

We would like to strongly encourage the FEI to implement these changes immediately to assist in preventing any further deaths from catastrophic injury occurring. The death toll from the current season is unacceptable and action needs to be implemented at once to prevent further deaths occurring.

One other matter that we would like to raise is the lack of transparency that occurs in terms of the actions being taken by the FEI to address the concerns relating to horse welfare. The recent announcement of further actions being taken is very welcomed but we need a continuing dialogue on progress of initiatives to keep the rest of the endurance community informed. The whole world is watching this issue and endurance has become tarnished irrevocably by the current welfare problems. We all know that the FEI is working hard but there is little visibility of what actions are being implanted and what is being achieved.

Our sport is being torn apart with a division occurring between those people who want the sport shut down and sale of horses blocked to the UAE and other endurance members who are trying for a more moderate and long term approach to resolving the issues. This is not good for the long term health of our wonderful sport. We believe that the FEI’s presence is imperative for horse welfare, however, it must be a strong presence that demands change.

We have further items that we are considering and will look to bring these to the table at the forthcoming FEI Endurance Forum.

Yours faithfully

Linda Tanian

For and on behalf of Endurance Australia