

The President

Mr Peter POND

President
World Arabian Horse Organisation
Forest Hill Arabian Stud
PO Box 12, Wyong
NSW 2259
Australia

By email waho@btconnect.com

Lausanne, 20 April 2017

Dear Mr Pond,

Thank you for your letter dated 10 April 2017.

I would first like to underline that horse welfare and athlete safety are primary focuses for the FEI in every discipline.

We appreciate your acknowledgment of the extensive work that the FEI is conducting with regards to horse welfare issues in Endurance, and this work is an ongoing priority. The FEI is focused on improving horsemanship and education in Endurance around the world, and especially within Group VII countries.

The regulations imposed by the FEI for Endurance are amongst the most stringent in world sport. No other equine sport provides a greater level of veterinary attention and support to each individual horse than Endurance. Veterinary Officials, Judges and Stewards work together throughout the event to safeguard the welfare of the horse.

Last year, the FEI Endurance Organiser's Protocol – a mandatory agreement to be signed by National Federations and Organising Committees – was introduced to guarantee the correct and full application of the applicable FEI rules and regulations in international Endurance events, with the aim to further ensure the welfare of equine and human athletes, the safety of all participants and the implementation and respect of common principles of behaviour, fairness, and sportsmanship. Group VII was the first region where this was implemented.

In order for the FEI to approve the competition schedules, the Endurance Protocol must be signed once a year by the Organiser and the National Federation. By signing the Endurance Protocol, which is incorporated into the competition schedule of each event, the Organiser and National Federation agree to comply with all applicable FEI Rules

As I am sure you are aware, in February of this year the FEI Secretary General announced further measures to be implemented by the UAE National Federation addressing the serious horse welfare issues in Endurance in the region, including the prevalence of fatal bone fractures, possibly as a result of over-training or pre-existing injuries that have not been given

sufficient time to heal. These measure included ongoing studies to determine causes, so that actions can be taken to prevent similar tragedies in the future, hosting series of meetings with trainers and team veterinarians in the UAE specifically to address the high level of catastrophic injuries in the region, and close collaboration with the new senior management at the UAE Federation.

We are pleased to say that we are seeing a visible effect as a result of our work with the UAE Federation. The change of mentality is clear and while we are working hard to reach all individuals, the National Federation is making a big effort to reduce the risk of injuries and fatalities, which are our main concerns at the moment. Since the implementation of new rules and sanctions this February, including more stringent sanctions introduced by the UAE National Federation itself, there have been no further catastrophic injuries recorded at international events, clearly demonstrating the effectiveness of the strategy and the much closer relationship with the National Federation.

Recent visits to the region (March 2017) by the FEI Endurance Director have shown that key points have improved substantially, namely: better compliance with the rules; better behaviour of the athletes and significantly increased sanctions being applied for breaches when they do occur; improved performance from Officials with more accurate and fair judgement; good feedback in the event reports referencing the cooperation of the organisers; less problematic cases to handle at the event clinic in all three UAE venues; post mortem examinations on all fatalities in both national and international events; monthly reports from the UAE National Federation sent to the FEI; much better communication between the FEI and the National Federation and good performance and proactivity by the National Federation in addressing problems.

This work is always ongoing for the FEI and additional measures that will be in place before the start of the next season include strict rules and protocols for team stables and trainers, plus an increased number of coaching courses and education opportunities for athletes, trainers and officials.

In your letter one of the concerns that you raised was that horses were not being presented for veterinary inspection following retirement from a race. Under FEI Veterinary regulations horses may not leave the venue during the period of the event, unless exceptionally authorised by the Veterinary Commission or Veterinary Delegate. In other words no horse leaves the grounds without being checked by a vet.

As you have referenced, we are conducting research as part of the Global Endurance Injuries Study (GEIS), and this has provided scientific proof of risk factors that was presented at the FEI Sports Forum on 11 April and will be further expanded upon at the FEI Endurance Forum in Barcelona next month, which is open to all.

The initial results of these studies, by Dr Tim Parkin and Dr Euan Bennet from the University of Glasgow, who are conducting the FEI's GEIS, and Professor Chris Whitton from the University of Melbourne, who is a world leader in bone fatigue research, show that speed and non-compliance with mandatory rest periods are the key risk factors, with an increase of seven days on the mandatory rest periods established in 2014 potentially preventing 10% of the failed-to-qualify statistics. The studies also show how intensive training results in an accumulation of damage and the inhibition of bone repair that occurs during rest.

You may be interested in watching the two presentations that were made at the Sports Forum. They are available, along with the powerpoint presentations that accompany these talks, at www.inside.fei.org/fei/about-fei/sportsforum/2017

The FEI is also working with data science company EquiRatings on horse welfare and data analysis projects in Endurance. Initially this will include developing data analysis and predictive analysis tools to measure and manage risk for both equine and human athletes.

It is likely that, as a result of these studies, there will be changes to rules and qualifications processes, once the findings have been fully evaluated by the Endurance Committee.

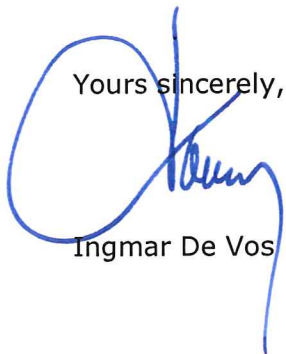
Ultimately Endurance is a discipline against the clock, testing the athlete's ability to safely manage the stamina and fitness of the horse over the course in a competition against the track, the distance, the climate, the terrain and in the fastest time. Education in horse training, management, rest periods and recovery times amongst other elements of horsemanship will be the key to injury reduction. It is not just a question of restricting speed, as has been scientifically proved by the research conducted in Glasgow and Melbourne.

The FEI greatly supports and recognises the work of HH Sheikh Sultan Bin Zayed Al Nayahan, and sees this initiative as an exemplary role model to others.

Our role as the international governing body is to ensure Endurance is practiced well around the world. We work together with our National Federations, national governing bodies for Endurance and wider stakeholders and believe that education and having an open dialogue is key to change.

We very much appreciate your input and have taken your comments on-board. It is clear that we all share one main focus, the welfare of horses within our sport.

Yours sincerely,



Ingmar De Vos