



Canadian Food  
Inspection Agency

Agence canadienne  
d'inspection des aliments

# Equine Infectious Anemia Disease Control Program

## A Report on the Recommendations of the EIA Program Working Group

**Canadian Food Inspection Agency**

Animal Health, Welfare and  
Biosecurity Division  
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## Executive Summary

Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) is a persistent and incurable viral disease of equines (i.e. horses, donkeys, mules, zebras) which has nearly worldwide distribution. There is no available vaccine or treatment for EIA. It is a World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) listed disease and has been on Canada's list of reportable animal diseases since 1971.

Subsequent to the release of an EIA program discussion paper in 2015 and the interest expressed by Canadian equine stakeholders to work collaboratively with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), a working group (WG) was formed. The members were asked to provide their input into the development of a new national disease control program which would address some previously identified challenges. The WG was composed of federal, provincial and industry representatives from all regions and their work and recommendations are outlined in this document.

The WG unanimously endorsed the implementation of mandatory EIA testing associated with some movements of horses in western Canada. It was determined that the CFIA is the only stakeholder who can require this type of testing however, the CFIA only has this authority if a primary zone for EIA is declared by the federal minister. As a result, the WG endorsed the declaration of a primary zone for EIA in Canada.

Implementation details including zone location, which movements will require mandatory testing, permitting and enforcement will be developed during the next phase of program design and with input from stakeholders. In addition, the scope of CFIA's disease response activities will need to be redefined to account for a shift in resources towards the implementation and maintenance of the zone.

The proposed redesigned program will be released for stakeholder comment once implementation planning is complete. This is expected to occur in 2017 with the goal of implementing the new program in 2018.

### 1. Purpose

To describe the work of the EIA Program WG and outline their recommendations for the development of a future EIA disease control program in Canada.

### 2. Background

#### *The Disease*

Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) is a persistent and incurable viral disease of equines (i.e. horses, donkeys, mules, zebras) which has been found nearly worldwide. It is transmitted almost exclusively through blood or blood products and infected equines are the source of all new infections. Although most affected equines appear to have few clinical consequences, some forms of EIA can be associated with high morbidity and mortality. Accurate and simple live animal laboratory tests exist but there is no

available vaccine or treatment for the disease. As an OIE listed disease, a requirement for international trade or movement of equines is proof of an individual animal test with negative results. Many countries also have control programs based on serological testing.

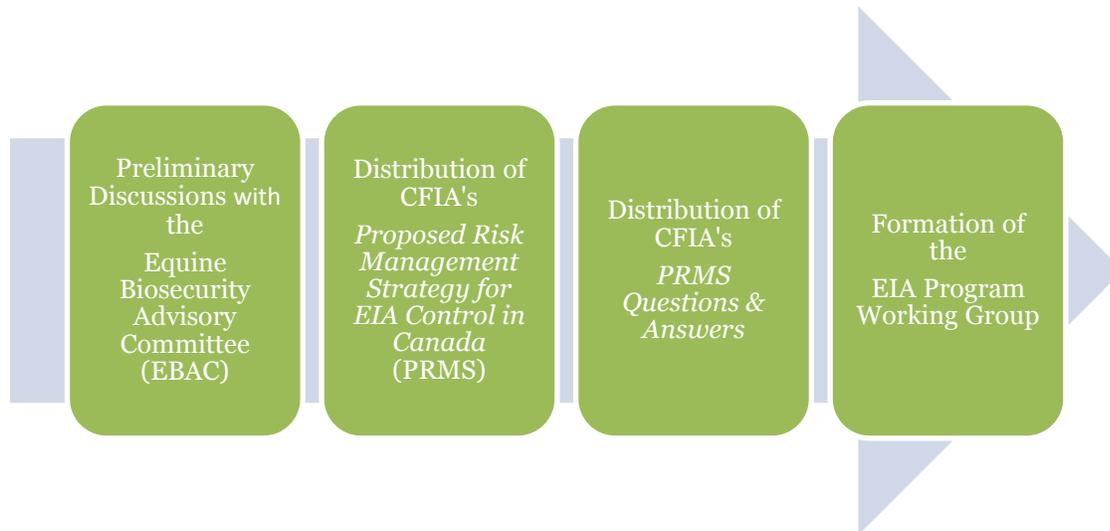
EIA became a reportable disease in Canada in 1971 and there has been some form of national disease control program since 1972. In response to an industry request, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) developed the current EIA program in 1998 as an approach the majority of horse owners would support. The program was developed in conjunction with industry, participation is voluntary, and industry supports its delivery by way of partial cost-recovery. The program was based on internationally recognized disease control standards, science of the disease, knowledge of the disease situation in Canada, and available diagnostic methods at that time.

Canada's current approach to EIA control faces some notable challenges. Following implementation, considerable progress was seen in participation in EIA testing and the reduction in positive cases in eastern Canada. However, the program appears to have had limited impact in western Canada where the amount of surveillance testing is relatively low and detection of the disease continues. As a result, a significant amount of federal resources are being spent responding to infected animals in the same geographical areas with little benefit to the tested negative horse population.

### *Previous EIA Program Consultation Activities*

In 2014 the CFIA initiated preliminary EIA program redesign discussions with members of the Equine Biosecurity Advisory Committee who were at that time working with the CFIA to develop voluntary biosecurity standards for the equine sector. In February 2015 the CFIA released the Proposed Risk Management Strategy for EIA Control in Canada (PRMS) which was distributed broadly to Canadian equine stakeholders. The document provided disease information, highlighted some of Canada's current EIA program challenges and proposed a new control strategy. It also described how the CFIA sees itself in the context of future disease control and response and identified a disease control concept (zoning), which the agency is in a unique position to use to support a national strategy. Stakeholder feedback on the PRMS was encouraged and a follow-up Q & A document was released by the CFIA in the fall of 2015 to address some of the major themes identified in the comments.

Responses to the PRMS were received from a number of stakeholders representing different regions from across the country, a variety of activity groups and perspectives ranging from the individual horse owner to provincial veterinary organizations to national industry organizations. It was clear that most stakeholders were interested in continuing the discussion on program redesign and there was a willingness to work collaboratively with the CFIA to further explore the possibilities for EIA control in Canada. To that end, the CFIA initiated the formation of a WG composed of representative Canadian equine stakeholders with the goal of identifying an agreed upon way forward.



### 3. EIA Program Working Group

#### *Structure*

Fifteen individuals participated in the EIA program WG which was comprised of equine stakeholders from across the country. Members included representatives from Equestrian Canada, The Horse Welfare Alliance of Canada, provincial equine and equine sport associations, academia, federal (CFIA) and provincial and territorial governments as well as equine owners and veterinary experts.

Eleven webinar meetings were held between January and June 2016 which were chaired by the CFIA. Members were asked to bring their unique perspectives and expertise to the discussions and contribute to the development of a redesigned national EIA disease control program.

The working assumptions utilized by the WG included,

- although eradication of EIA in Canada is not a feasible goal, the majority of equine stakeholders support a national EIA disease control strategy with CFIA involvement and leadership
- the goal of the program is to protect the owned tested population
- EIA control in Canada is the shared responsibility of all equine stakeholders
- the CFIA's involvement should be restricted to value added roles which it is uniquely positioned to play
- the amount of CFIA resources required for a redesigned program cannot be higher than the status quo

Previously identified program challenges included,

- regional differences in where positive cases are being identified (i.e. over 98% of the EIA cases identified in Canada since 2001 were located in western<sup>1</sup> Canada)

<sup>1</sup> Western Canada = YT, BC, AB, SK, MB

- regional differences in EIA surveillance intensity (i.e. ~70% of all EIA tests performed by accredited veterinarians occur in eastern Canada<sup>2</sup>, but over 65% of the national equine herd is located in western Canada<sup>3</sup>)
- current EIA control relies heavily on CFIA disease response activities which requires significant resources

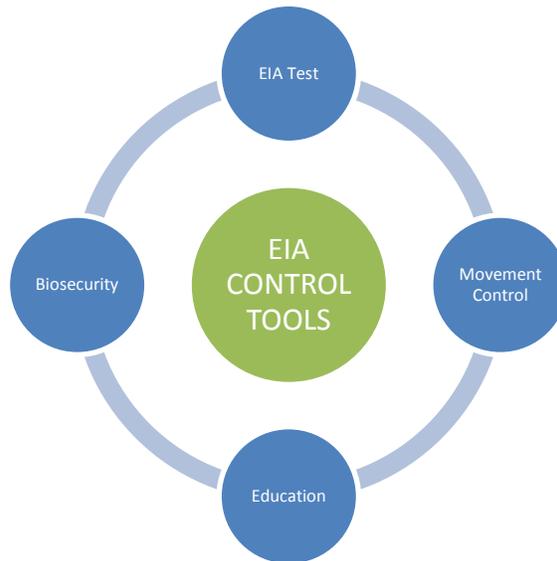
### Discussion

The basic elements of a disease control program include prevention, surveillance and response and these elements are created using different disease control tools. The WG initially focused on identifying the range of tools available for EIA control, determining which of the different stakeholders had the ability and/or authority to use them and where they could be applied. The goal of these discussions was to increase awareness among all members as well as develop resources that could be referenced during upcoming phases of the program redesign.

**Basic Program Elements**

- Prevention
- Surveillance
- Response

The WG identified that the number of tools available to control EIA is limited. The main ones being the ability to: test for EIA; control the movement of infected or untested animals; implement good biosecurity practices; and, provide EIA information and education. Used in combination and appropriately applied, these tools can allow for the identification of infected animals (virus source), that can pose a risk to susceptible animals and thereby prevent further transmission of the virus.



<sup>2</sup> Eastern Canada = ON, QC, ATL provinces

<sup>3</sup> Based on Canadian Census data – Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture 2006. Available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/ca-ra2006>.

It was difficult to discuss movement control in isolation of testing requirements due to their interdependence. For example, controlling the risk of EIA transmission from an infected or untested horse moving from point A to point B where it can come in contact with test negative horses involves fulfilling the requirement for a negative test result. Biosecurity and education are also strongly linked as one must be made aware of what the risks are to be able to implement appropriate mitigation measures such as EIA testing, fly control and the safe handling of potentially infectious blood.

Members suggested the following as points in time when some form of EIA control could be applied: event participation; movement to a new premises; change of ownership; movement across national and provincial park borders; and, movement across provincial borders. It was agreed that strong controls already exist for movement across international borders (i.e. import requirements), and this is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

Working through these exercises highlighted the different stakeholders' capabilities and limitations in the context of EIA control and their ability to prevent the comingling of tested and untested populations. The participants also gained a clearer understanding of where program gaps and future possibilities exist. For example, it was noted that although the CFIA has significant authorities granted to them under the *Health of Animals Act* and *Regulations*, their ability to require EIA testing and to prevent a horse's movement based on EIA status is currently limited to those animals being imported into the country or those involved in a CFIA disease response (i.e. positive cases or their identified contacts). Currently the CFIA cannot impose general requirements for untested horses moving between privately owned premises or across individual provincial borders. Members were informed that in 2013 there were legislative changes to the *Health of Animals Act* which enable zoning for diseases for which Canada is trying to control or eradicate. It was explained that if Canada was to be zoned for EIA, those horses involved in certain movements within, out of, or into an identified zone could be required by federal regulation to have proof of a negative EIA test result in order to be permitted to move.

- Provinces are unlikely to impose mandatory control actions for EIA
- Industry-mandated testing is limited, especially in areas where the disease continues to be detected
- Zoning is needed for the CFIA to be able to impose new mandatory testing requirements
- More EIA education and awareness is needed

Discussions also revealed that although the provinces and territories have the authority to apply disease control actions such as testing requirements, movement controls and ordering the destruction of animals for diseases of concern for their province, a Ministerial order would be required to do so. The decision to enact such an order would be based on perceived risk and it was the opinion of the

provincial WG representatives that it would be extremely unlikely for the provinces to undertake this for EIA. One of the main reasons provided was lack of available resources.

It was discussed that although event organizers and private property owners have the ability to require EIA testing prior to permitting a horse's participation or entry, the choice to implement and enforce the requirement is voluntary. Several members expressed their concern that the majority of owners and organizers have become complacent in their efforts to control EIA, particularly in western Canada. It was raised that some organizers do not feel supported by their counterparts which makes it difficult for them to enforce requirements. Some examples given were that not all of the provinces' horse racing commissions require EIA testing for their tracks and that although Equestrian Canada (EC) recommends EIA testing as a best practice for their sanctioned events, it is not mandatory. It was the opinion of the WG that the lack of industry required testing represented a significant gap in the program and that without stronger requirements being put in place (e.g. provincially or federally mandated testing), this was unlikely to change.

The WG felt strongly that education and awareness is extremely important for effective EIA control. It was raised that previous education efforts appear to have failed to reach all those who needed it which represents another gap. Members stressed that they felt a well-planned and well-executed EIA education strategy is going to be essential to the success of any new program. It was concluded that all stakeholders have a role to play in EIA education whether it be in its development or dissemination or simply making oneself aware of issues that may negatively impact the health of their animals. It was agreed that this area represents a significant opportunity for development and that a coordinated effort among national industry stakeholders is needed to secure the necessary funding and implement a future education strategy to support the program.

The approach of using zoning to help achieve the goal of the program prompted several questions and much discussion amongst the group. It was emphasized by the CFIA representatives that zoning was being put forward for consideration because it is a unique tool that can be used to address the identified gap of lack of mandatory controls in areas where the disease continues to be identified. It was also explained that with zoning there is the advantage of flexibility. For example, boundaries and requirements can be modified (e.g. increased or decreased), depending the circumstances and risks which may change over time. The chair noted that once members had a better understanding of what possibilities zoning provided, the concept was well received although several questions remained regarding the specifics of implementation. Some members initially identified that they felt movement to all commingling sites within the zone should have testing requirements associated with them and that change of ownership should also be considered. After more discussion it was acknowledged that a staged approach for the introduction of mandatory requirements would be best and to initially focus on the types of activities where the greatest number of equines would be impacted (e.g. larger events), and the enforcement of requirements was not too logistically challenging.

The group briefly discussed redefining the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders for disease response activities (e.g. epidemiological investigations, testing of suspects, movement controls). CFIA representatives explained this would be necessary to allow the CFIA to reallocate some of their available

resources to the implementation and maintenance of the zone. Members acknowledged that private veterinarians, industry and owners could play a more active role in disease response and it will be important to look for opportunities where they could coordinate their activities with those of the CFIA.

The chair noted that the members were also in favour of introducing enhanced ID requirements as a condition for movement and this represents another area for consideration and development during the next phase of program design.

#### **4. Recommendations & Conclusions**

- The WG unanimously recommended the implementation of mandatory testing associated with certain movements of horses in western Canada.
- The CFIA is the only stakeholder group appropriately positioned to make EIA testing a requirement for equine movement in western Canada. For the CFIA to gain this authority the country must be zoned for EIA which is supported by the WG.
- The WG recommended a collaborative approach among all stakeholders to develop and deliver an effective EIA education and awareness strategy.
- National industry leadership is necessary to secure the required resources to implement the education and awareness strategy.

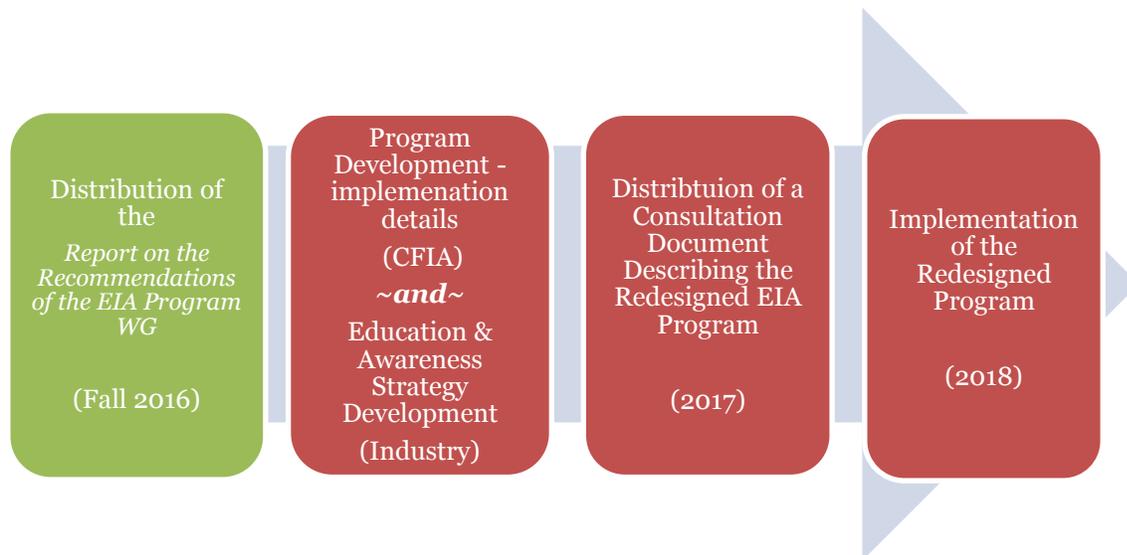
#### **5. Next Steps**

The CFIA begins the next phase of program design to address implementation details including,

- defining zone boundaries
- determining which movements will have testing requirements associated with them
- developing the permit system and its enforcement
- redefining stakeholders' roles and responsibilities for disease response

The CFIA will use the input already received from the WG as well as continue to communicate with, and obtain feedback from, stakeholders via the WG members during upcoming program development. The CFIA will also participate where possible in the development of the education and awareness strategy.

The redesigned program will be described in a document which will be made available to stakeholders in 2017. The target date for implementation of the new program is 2018.



Written comments regarding the contents of this document can be received via email at [EIA-AIE@inspection.gc.ca](mailto:AIE@inspection.gc.ca) until December 31, 2016.

## 6. Glossary of Terms

Biosecurity – the implementation of measures that reduce the risk of the introduction and spread of disease agents, which requires the adoption of a set of attitudes and behaviours by people to reduce risks in all activities

CFIA – Canadian Food Inspection Agency

EIA – Equine Infectious Anemia

Equine – any animal in the family *Equidae*, including horses, donkeys, mules and zebras

OIE – World Organisation for Animal Health

Primary Control Zone – a declared geographic area where the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) believes EIA exists

Reportable diseases - outlined in the *Health of Animals Act* and *Reportable Diseases Regulations* and are usually of significant importance to human or animal health or to the Canadian economy. Animal owners, veterinarians and laboratories are required to immediately report the presence of an animal

that is contaminated or suspected of being contaminated with one of these diseases to a CFIA district veterinarian

Surveillance – a program to assess the health and disease status of a given population and to promote the early detection of disease to maximize the effectiveness of control measures and minimize the costs and economic losses

Zone – a clearly defined part of a territory that contains an animal subpopulation with a distinct health status with respect to EIA for which required surveillance, control and biosecurity measures have been applied for the purpose of disease control and international trade