

## Compo claims may hit billions

---

30Aug07

THE Australian racing industry is set to launch compensation claims, which threaten to bust the billion-dollar barrier, against bodies responsible for the devastating outbreak of equine influenza.

Prime Minister John Howard says he will support a public inquiry into the outbreak that has forced more than 1000 horses into quarantine in NSW and Queensland.

The virus has brought racing in both states to a standstill.

However, racing is expected to resume in other states from the weekend.

"I am told, at the moment, that (Federal Agriculture Minister Peter) McGauran is carefully examining the whole thing, how things happened and so forth," said Mr Howard.

"If, out of that, it is necessary to have a public inquiry, of course I would support it."

A Gold Coast law firm yesterday confirmed it had received more than 10 calls from owners and breeders considering legal action to recover their loss of earnings.

Legal experts predicted, nationwide, claims could amount to several billion dollars.

Attwood Marshall Lawyers senior partner Jeffrey Garrett said it was almost certain legal action would be taken after the situation had been sorted out.

"The reality is most people will seek to recover their losses from those that have caused this potentially catastrophic outcome," he said.

"It's inevitable. You are going to have them (racing participants) all lining up to have a crack."

Racing in Queensland will not return until next Wednesday at the earliest and could possibly be halted for longer.

Threats of legal action came as the Department of Primary Industries yesterday confirmed two horses from the western Brisbane suburb of Brookfield had returned positive swabs to preliminary tests of equine influenza.

Mr Garrett said quarantine authorities had a duty of care to ensure diseases did not spread.

Owners and breeders who called the firm were told to see how long the lockdown lasted and keep records of losses.

"Everyone is a bit on hold at the moment," he said. "It's early days yet but it would appear that the lockdown is going to affect all stakeholders in the industry and cause massive losses to owners, trainers and breeders."

He said there would be astronomical losses regardless of how much longer the situation continued.

"Even if this process is thrown out by no more than a week or two, and some sources say it could be as long as one month, this will have a devastating impact and cause massive losses," he said.

"We're talking the loss of \$1 billion and it's only going to get worse."

There have been calls for an inquiry to determine who is responsible for the outbreak.

Mr McGauran yesterday did not rule out an inquiry, but urged people not to play the blame game.

"At this time we have a vigorous and all-encompassing inquiry or investigation under way. If there needs to be a more public reporting of it, well we'll consider that at the time," he said.

He said that the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service compliance unit was investigating whether or not a breakdown in quarantine protocols was responsible.

"We are all focused in a very co-operative way -- arguably unprecedentedly -- in containing the disease," he said.

"That is the best thing we can do for the racing industry, and until the source of the infection is identified, I don't think people should rush to judgment or jump to conclusions."

He said it would be hard for the body responsible to 'wriggle out of it'.

---

[Print this story](#)

[Privacy policy](#)

---

Gold Coast Publications Pty Ltd Copyright © July 2007