



MERAMIST

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Terry Martin SC
Inquiry Chair
Queensland Racing Integrity Commission

12th November 2019

Attention: Terry Martin SC

Email: Contact@inquiry.qric.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Martin SC

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written submissions to the Inquiry into animal cruelty in the management of retired racehorses in Queensland (**Inquiry**). Meramist Pty Ltd (**Meramist**) welcomes the Inquiry.

Introduction

The welfare of animals is the priority of Meramist. Meramist has a deep respect for animals and is committed to handling animals at our premises in a way that minimises the risk of injury, pain and suffering and causes them the least practicable disturbance.

Meramist was shocked and appalled upon viewing the footage aired in the 17 October 2019 ABC 7:30 Report episode titled: *'The Final Race – the dark side of the horse racing industry'* (**Program**) as well as the actions of the individuals involved. The actions shown do not reflect Meramist's values and were in contravention of the systems we have put in place as an organisation in relation to our legal obligations and respect for animals.

Meramist has a comprehensive system in place to manage animal welfare and its regulatory obligations. Since the Program aired, Meramist has made further changes to its system as part of its commitment to continually improve the performance of its operations. Meramist reiterates that the matters portrayed in the Program were not known by Meramist prior to the Program airing.

Impact of the Program on Meramist's employees

Since the Program was aired, Meramist and Meramist's staff have been severely impacted.

Meramist frequently has protesters out the front of its premises, which has caused some serious health and safety concerns for our staff. As a result, Meramist has implemented permanent onsite security and has increased CCTV footage across its premises. Although Meramist recognises the right of individuals to protest, it has caused many of Meramist's employees to feel unsafe at work. Many of Meramist's employees have been forced to leave through the back gate to avoid any unwanted confrontation with protesters. Meramist employees who were shown in the Program feel anxious when out in the general public, as

they have been publically singled out and feel like they are being watched. They fear for their personal security.

Since the Program aired, at least once per week Meramist receives death threats in the form of phone calls, voicemails, emails and letters. Meramist takes these threats seriously and has informed the police on multiple occasions.

Regulatory Framework

Meramist is not aware of any gaps or inadequacies in the current regulatory arrangements, including the transport standards for managing the welfare of horses in the meat processing industry.

Meramist views the regulatory requirements as the baseline for managing the welfare of its horses. Indeed, Meramist has policies and procedures in place that go above and beyond the strict requirements of the regulatory arrangements. By way of example, Meramist implemented a policy that requires all horses transported by our suppliers old that have travelled for 12 hours must be unloaded (for a rest break) and given access to food and water. This is reflected in our livestock transport docket system, which requires a Stock Person to check (and note down) the total travel time and whether the horse has been provided water, food and rest. This is in excess of the regulatory requirement which only requires horses that have travelled without water for 24 hours to be unloaded (for a rest break) and given access to food and water.

Meramist has significant obligations under the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001* (Qld), the *Biosecurity Act 2004* (Qld) and other various other pieces of legislation and guidance material. As an exporter of meat, Meramist also has obligations under the *Export Control (Meat and Meat Products) Orders 2005* (Cth), the Approved Arrangement for Establishment 3416 as well as under various other pieces of legislation and guidance material (both in Australia and overseas). Meramist has extensive systems in place to ensure compliance with these significant obligations.

Meramist has been audited by the US in August 2018 and the EU in July 2019 and no audit findings related to animal welfare breaches were identified. In addition, Meramist has also been audited by SGS Swiss Audit in September 2018, Aus-Meat Australian Animal Welfare Certification Scheme in March 2019, SICHTMA and Global Halal Certifiers in September 2019 as well as other relevant bodies and no audit findings related to animal welfare breaches were identified.

In addition, a Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) veterinarian is on Site during operations. The veterinarian conducts regular audits and no breaches such as those shown in the Program have been identified.

Impact of reform on Meramist's business

It is not illegal to have retired race horses processed at an abattoir. Meramist also understands that there are no obligations under the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001* (Qld), the *Racing Act 2002* (Qld) or the *Racing Integrity Act 2016* (Qld) to report whether a retired race horse has been received and is going to be processed by Meramist. It is unfortunate that the solution to the thousands of race horses retired each year is to have them processed by the meat industry to minimise wastage. Meramist is open to any viable long term solution to this issue. However, Meramist notes that no viable alternatives have been proposed to date.

Every year Meramist spends approximately \$4.5 million purchasing approximately 10,000 horses. This equates to approximately 20% of our total, which is approximately \$14 million in revenue. Meramist is unable to estimate how many of these 10,000 horses are retired race

horses. If production of retired race horses was discontinued, Meramist would suffer a loss in revenue proportionate to the reduction in number of horses processed.

Currently Meramist employs approximately 170 staff, including processing staff, maintenance staff and salary staff. Based on the figures in the preceding paragraph, if Meramist's revenue decreased, Meramist would need to consider retrenching up to 35 staff.

The meat processing industry is heavily regulated. If the Inquiry makes a recommendation to prohibit the practice of retired race horses being sent to abattoirs, or a recommendation to increase the scope of any legal requirements described in the Terms of Reference, Meramist submits that any such recommendations be consistent with other jurisdictions. This is important, as the time and cost of complying with different obligations from different states and territories would be challenging and places a large financial burden on businesses like Meramist.

Meramist's contribution to horse welfare

Meramist has a deep respect for animals and is always looking for ways to improve animal welfare outcomes.

As part of its operations, over the past five years, Meramist has provided lamellar tissue samples from its horses to Professor Martin Sillence and Dr Melody de Laat at Queensland University of Technology. These samples have enabled the team at the Queensland University of Technology to develop the world's first therapeutic antibody for horses and the first ever cure for equine laminitis.

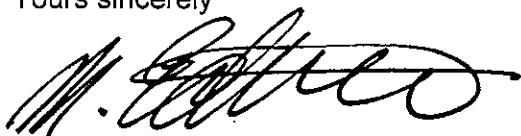
Equine laminitis is a painful foot condition that affects up to 30% of certain horse and pony breeds. Over 30% of affected horses and ponies to be euthanised within 12 months, and over 30% of affected horses and ponies experience a recurrence of the disease within 2 years.

Meramist hopes to continue its relationship with Queensland University of Technology to continue to deliver benefits, which will ultimately improve the quality of life for horses worldwide.

Conclusion

Meramist looks forward to co-operating with the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely



Mike Eathorne
Managing Director
Meramist Pty Ltd

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