



### **MEP Horse Group on Responsible Equine Ownership –2<sup>nd</sup> March 2016 - Brussels**

The urgent need for responsible ownership of horses, ponies, donkeys and mules across the European Union was discussed in the European Parliament. Representatives from across the horse industry, Member States, the European Commission and NGOs discussed **Julie Girling MEP's** proposed draft Own Initiative Report which aims to help address equine welfare problems identified by the recent report on the EU's horse sector, *Removing the Blinkers: the health and welfare of EU equidae in 2015*.

Introducing the discussions, Julie Girling, explained that her decision to produce an Own Initiative Report on Responsible Equine Ownership reflected how fundamental knowledgeable, responsible owners are to the health and welfare of the EU's 7 million horses.

"This report and its call for guidance and education of horse owners is in line with the Better Regulation agenda in that we aim to advise owners on how to care for their animal. We hope the report and any guidance or code which emerges from it will help to inform other debates on how we care for our horses, including transport, health and trade.

"A code of practice will help lift the level of information and knowledge out there so helping to build a stronger foundation for Europe's 100 billion euros equine sector."

**Dr Alf Füssel of the European Commission, DG SANTE**, supported the principle of guidance or a code of practice to help install responsible ownership and to "spread knowledge" which is "an important part of improving health and welfare." He emphasised that horse owners, the sector and governments must acknowledge that together 'We are responsible'.

Dr Füssel emphasised the importance of robust equine identification to link each horse to an owner and to identify where Europe's horses are in the event of a disease outbreak, in addition to provisions which will come into effect through updated Animal Health and Zootechnics Regulations.

**Dr Daryl Noble, Agricultural Attaché, Permanent Representation of the Republic of Ireland** spoke in favour of a code of practice for Europe.

"The case for developing a guide to good practice for keeping equines is well-founded. Ireland has similar guidance which covers the basics which are too often overlooked: the costs of keeping an equine, the environment and shelter they need, the hoof and dentistry care, the importance of ID and also of scoring body condition. Guidance can help prevent both health and welfare problems"

**Leanne Masterson** spoke eloquently about her personal experience of excelling at horse care and management within the **UK's horseracing industry** and the importance of their mandatory educational programmes in her success. "Responsible horse ownership is at the heart of good health and welfare, and I know more than most how well race horses are cared for and increasingly retrained for 'second lives' which too is part of being a responsible owner."

**Roly Owers, Chief Executive of World Horse Welfare**, echoed other views when he spoke of the benefits of education and guidance. "Deliberate cruelty to horses is rare, and the vast majority of

welfare problems arise from a horse owner's lack of knowledge. A code of practice, similar to that in the UK, would set out the basic standards of how to care for and keep a horse, pony, donkey or mule and can only help build the knowledge and skills of Europe's 3.5 million horse owners and the EU's equine sector as a whole."

**Marlene Mizzi, MEP** wished to include information about working equines particularly in Tourism and **Philippe De Backer, MEP** inquired on cloning.

Julie Girling summed up by explaining that "Where no law exists, a code of practice could fill the gap and help move us towards better and more informed ways of keeping these unique and valuable animals. We want a code that is not prescriptive, but based on the principles of the 'Five Freedoms' that set out the basic needs of animals in a general way. We look forward to receiving your support for the adoption of the report."

*The report should be available in a few months and discussed in the EP after summer.*

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