

FEI - Your reply requested on FEI anti-doping and medication policy (04 December 2009)

Dear Member Federations,

Please find below an important communication from FEI President HRH Princess Haya.

Please indicate your response to the question below by replying directly to this email, and feel free to contact me for any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,

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Dear Member National Federations of the FEI,

In the context of the dispute that has erupted within our family over the best way to achieve our shared goals of eradicating doping and protecting the welfare of horses, I write to ask for your support.

Specifically, I am asking you to give your written consent to allow the implementation of the “20 October List” with the new rules in April 2010 and place the issue of NSAID policy on the agenda for the 2010 General Assembly. I give you my word that this issue will be tabled in the form of a policy choice for the GA in 2010 and that, in the meantime, HQ will make it a priority to provide you with the necessary scientific thought and research for you to make an informed decision. I ask that you please indicate your support, or lack thereof, by replying to this email.

As you know, the FEI General Assembly approved the new Equine Anti-Doping and Controlled Medication Regulations and the recommendations of Commissioners Professor Arne Ljungqvist and Lord Stevens by a resounding 95-5 vote on 19 November. With that vote, our entire community indicated its clear and unwavering commitment to the ethos of Clean Sport. This momentous decision came after a series of deeply troubling incidents that indicated a clear need to move swiftly and efficiently to clean up our sport, or face the possibility of admitting that the problem of doping was endemic in our community.

Our commitment against doping is clear and unequivocal. Unfortunately, our unity on that issue is being tested by an increasingly bitter dispute over non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). This is not a new disagreement. The FEI ban on phenylbutazone was approved by a narrow margin 16 years ago. The debate as to whether NSAIDs should be prohibited in horse sport has been a burning question that has divided our community ever since.

Within the process chosen to adopt all the new measures for Clean Sport, the FEI re-examined the Equine Prohibited Substances List. An initial list was released to the National Federations on 20 October for review and comment. The response reflected a deep divide as to what exactly constitutes “doping” in equestrian sport. A majority of your ranks in the National Federations indicated a desire to move toward a policy that allows limited therapeutic use of NSAIDs. The FEI responded to that input by offering the General Assembly a policy choice.

The General Assembly considered two options: the “20 October List” and the “Progressive List.” The Progressive List classified specified NSAIDs up to certain levels as permitted medications and removed them from the Prohibited Substances category of the 20 October List.

The General Assembly approved the “Progressive List” by a narrow majority of 53-48.

The policy shift and the vociferous debate that has followed touches every sector of the equine landscape, be it the FEI disciplines, racing, polo, or any other of our fraternity. We should not shrink from this debate because these issues are vitally important to the integrity of equestrian sport. The time has come to allow all voices to be heard without prejudice, and without discrimination of any kind. If horses teach us anything, it is understanding and tolerance, and that example must remain paramount to us all.

In order to facilitate this debate, the Bureau passed a resolution this week delaying implementation of the Progressive List and accompanying Equine Anti-Doping and Controlled Medication Regulations (EADCMRs) until 5 April 2010. However, several National Federations have already voiced the opinion that three months is not enough time to fully debate such a contentious issue. There are also real logistical issues that HQ needs to address, including allowing time for the laboratories to harmonise and examining the legal concerns surrounding globalization.

In light of all these issues, I once again will have to table a policy choice for you to prevent our Federation being split by welfare and legal concerns and I therefore ask for your support to give the Bureau your written consent to allow the implementation of the “20 October List” with the new rules in April 2010 and place the issue of NSAID policy on the agenda for the 2010 General Assembly. I

give you my word that this issue will be tabled in the form of a policy choice (as the majority of NFs have once again requested) for the GA in 2010 and that, in the meantime, HQ will make it a priority to provide you with the necessary scientific thought and research for you to make an informed decision.

We all agree on the important things. Everyone involved in this debate wants to eradicate doping. Everyone involved in this debate wants to protect the welfare of horses. We all favor “zero tolerance.” The General Assembly approved an outright and unequivocal ban on substances that are intended solely to enhance performance. There will be no retreat from that. But the term “zero tolerance” is easy to use – and easy to abuse. In human sport, “zero tolerance” is actually the same policy as the Progressive List. Acceptance of the Progressive List for equestrian sport does not mean acceptance of doping.

This is not a debate driven by geography or cultural differences. It is not a split between developed and under-developed; and rich from poor; or East and West. Many of the most developed nations among our NF body have voted for the Progressive List, and feel passionately that this is the way that the sport must go. I would equally highlight that many of the smallest and most under-developed nations in our sport have vocalized clearly to me their overwhelming concern that this policy change will not allow them as National Federations to fulfill their duty to protect their equine communities. Some have also expressed fear that passage of the Progressive List presented them with the problem that they would be unable to institute the necessary educational tools fast enough to protect their equine communities from those with a lack of knowledge who would unwittingly abuse the rules.

To be sure, there will always be unscrupulous people who seek unfair advantage in competition, and there will always be callous people who put winning ahead of animal welfare. Those people are not represented in this debate. No one is advocating a policy deliberately intended to serve those despicable ends. Rather, this is a debate about how to deal with substances that can be used properly or improperly. If used properly, they are of benefit to horses. If used improperly, they can threaten animal welfare.

There are good arguments on both sides of the issue, and we should listen to each other with consideration and respect. Our equine partners in sport will be the losers should we not agree to debate this in a calm and rational fashion.

As your President, I promised never to prejudge anybody, or any situation, and to always try to hear everyone’s point of view. I promised to listen to you all and work to find solutions with the Bureau and Headquarters. I also swore that I would back tough decisions taken by the General Assembly, and stand up for the FEI and the National Federations.

I believe totally in our General Assembly and your authority to guide this International Federation. I respect totally your individual right to vote, and the knowledge and experiences, both personal and professional, that each and every one of you brings to our family. Together you are undeniably the FEI, and no President, no individual is, or ever should be, capable of overturning a decision that was democratically voted for.

The vote in Copenhagen established a policy, but the developments since then have raised legitimate questions about its implementation. The laboratories need time to adapt in order to apply the new requirements in harmonized fashion. The policy change affects National Federations and organizers who must comply with state laws as well as international competition rules. It has implications for the breeding industry and the selection of horses. It impacts all those concerned with animal welfare, be they for or against the Progressive List.

We must be conscious also of all of the concerns that have been raised by our sister organisations, be they the Racing Industry, or a myriad of Veterinary Groups, or a variety of Welfare Organisations, or simply but most importantly our public, for they are the individuals who collectively give our sport life and a soul. That accounts for all of those factions who are not voting members of our IF. Yet, equally inside our community of 134 National Federations, we are divided, and both sides are of strong opinion.

On the other side of the divide, there lies a majority, albeit a more silent one. After much consultation, I understand the trepidation of those NFs who have voted for the Progressive List, but who are not willing to stand up and make themselves heard. They primarily feel that they have a right to treat their horses, and to make them comfortable within the boundaries of restorative medication and with no wish to pursue performance enhancement.

Many of the NFs who voted for the "Progressive List", have categorically stated that their athletes feel passionately that this is truly the right path for anyone who wants to claim that they care about the welfare of horses, and that to withhold treatment from horses in competition is indeed more cruel than to administer.

All these views are legitimate and clearly need an opportunity for broader debate and consultation. Unfortunately, the division of opinion is so deep and so passionate, that it threatens to divide our Federation. That is not an outcome that any of us can accept. Whatever your individual beliefs, we are collectively bound by the duty to serve our sport, and our FEI family.

Let us put this "time out" to good use so that we can engage in a calm, rational debate over the best way forward and then vote on this policy issue at the 2010 GA. In the meantime (as of 1 January 2010), the FEI will apply the clean sport recommendations not related to the new regulations, which have you have

already approved and which will allow for considerable progress on the FEI's clean sport initiative.

We will probably never have unanimity, but working together, we can agree on an approach that serves the interests of equestrian sport and the athletes — both human and equine — who practice it. That, after all, is what we all desire.

Once again, I ask for your support in approving the implementation of the “20 October List” with the new rules in April 2010 and place the issue of NSAID policy on the agenda for the 2010 General Assembly. I ask that you please indicate your support, or lack thereof, by replying to this email.

Yours respectfully,
Haya Al Hussein