

Last night I attended a meeting at the Royal Showgrounds, convened by the VHC in an attempt to bring some order to the chaos affecting horse owners in the bushfire areas.

At the present time there is a huge amount of donated feed and goods but it has been very difficult to get it to those in need. This is partly due to some areas still being declared as crime scenes and partly due to health concerns due to the large number of homes built pre 1984, using asbestos. The major concern is that the DPI are in charge of livestock and have delegated recovery to the VFF, but horses are not "livestock". They are said to be "companion animals", thus the RSPCA is responsible for their welfare.

While almost every major equine agency, welfare group and breed society were present last night, the RSPCA were notable by their absence.

Several vets were present and Chris Heislars spoke of his frustration at not being permitted to even accompany any rangers to assess the condition of injured horses. He is certain that horses were euthanized unnecessarily by inexperienced rangers. The Australian Veterinary Association will attempt to refund the vets who have been treating injured animals and using their own stocks of medicines.

With so many groups trying to assist, the most pressing need is a central point for people in need to contact. The Former EFA Victoria: now called Equestrian Victoria, have offered to immediately develop a data base with an inventory of who has what and where it is stored. This data base will be updated as goods are distributed and received.

There is feed awaiting delivery from interstate as it is recognised that there will be no pasture until next spring, and perhaps not even then as the total seed bank has been incinerated. Ongoing deliveries will need to be co-ordinated.

Horse people often find it hard to handle large squares weighing over 1/2 a tonne and rolls weighing about 380kg. A horse will eat about 10kg daily so a large square gives about 2 months feed. Store one on top of the other if there is a tractor available to lift and get a tarp for the top. Large squares as bad as little squares if they get wet. Rolls can last outside but need to stay on edge. If you roll onto the flat side it is easy to peel off lumps for your horse. They can be rolled fairly easily into a horse float or trailer.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU NEED FEED OR GEAR

Contact Equestrian Victoria and you will be told of the closest place to get what you need. You may need to provide proof that you are in need as it is too horrible to say, but already there have been cases of feed being stolen and people from unaffected properties claiming goods.

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