

### Written evidence submitted by World Horse Welfare (MAAB0070)

Following on from our discussion, where you asked for further background on why equines are being moved (exported and imported) non-compliantly (or 'smuggled') and what evidence we have, hopefully the following helps:

- Why does this happen:
  - It is important to remember that these animals are viewed as commodities (not pets/companions) and are traded as such – their value is therefore based on demand (as with any other commodity). An animal that is eligible for the food chain will always have a value, as it can be sold for meat.
  - Re-identifying an animal with a fake passport allows equines that have been signed out of the food chain to be eligible for slaughter again – almost certainly guaranteeing that they have a greater value than when the trader has bought them.
  - Even if a horse is not intended to be sold for meat, having a clean passport (meaning it is eligible for the food chain) ensures that animal will always make a profit for the trader. If that horse fails to sell as a ridden or breeding animal, then the trader has the option to sell it to a slaughterhouse. Without that option, the horse in question would have no/little value to the trader and could even make a loss for them as (if they do not illegally dispose of the equine or abandon it) they would have to pay upwards of £300-£500 to euthanase the animal and dispose of the carcass.
  - In addition, if that horse does manage to sell, the buyer may want reassurance they can recoup some costs or do not have to pay for euthanasia and disposal if the horse can no longer fulfil the purpose for which it is bought – as they can sell the animal for meat. Re-passporting the animal, and illegally signing it back into the food chain, therefore also makes the animal more attractive to potential buyers.
  - The animals are exported/imported as while EU Member States and the UK now have central equine databases (which hold information on the food chain status of individual equines resident in that country), slaughterhouse officials often do not have access to other Member State databases or 3rd country databases. Even when they do, they often do not check the information held on them and are not obliged to do so (which they would have to do if the animal originated from that country). This means they tend to rely solely on checking the microchip number matches the number contained in the paper passport (which is easy to falsify).
  - The trade in equines is also often used to cover up other illegal activities including smuggling puppies, wild birds, exotics, people, licenced and illegal drugs or money (as enforcement agencies are reluctant to check a vehicle loaded with equines). The equine trade may therefore not be the main driver behind the movement, but one part of a more complex picture of organised criminal activities.
  - Assuming they are not covering up other illegal activities, we can infer that this trade is economic for a number of reasons: volume - double load of horses (with welfare during transport implications), buying in bulk - per load rather than per horse, increasing the value of the horse by virtue of a new ID and selling at a profit and it is all cash transactions (tax evasion). In addition, they often use red diesel, have no authorisations, no insurance, no tax and use low paid workers. In other words, they are moving the horses for as little cost as possible, allowing them to make a profit on equines that would likely be of no/little value to someone who is involved in the legal/compliant trade.

If it is easier to understand with an example:

Horse X and Y were bought as part of a large group of horses at a total cost for all of them in the low hundreds. All of the horses have received medication that means they are not eligible for the food

chain and the passports are, therefore, worthless to the individual who has bought them (who we'll refer to as the trader). The trader has a bundle of passports that belong to dead horses that were eligible for the food chain, and he/she decides to use these for the horses they have just bought (amending the chip numbers in the passports so they match the chips in the horses). The horses are moved for minimal cost to an EU country on the fraudulent passports to a market for sale. Horse X is successfully sold as a ridden pony to a trekking centre (who only intend to use the animal for a year, so want to have the option to send it to slaughter after it is no longer of value to them) but there is no interested buyer for Y, so the trader decides to sell this horse for meat. While some horses have been sold at a loss others make a profit, meaning overall it is profitable for the trader. In addition, that trader has moved equines as part of a legitimate trade – taking money from owners who have paid for their horse to be moved – and has also used the move to hide a trade in drugs. Therefore, the trade in the low value horses is only one part of a much larger and more complex business.

- We have good reason to believe that horses are being exported and imported on fraudulent passports based on the following:
  - Horse exporters/importers/dealers have been detected carrying passports without horses and some non-compliant movements were detected because of the repeated movements of allegedly the same horses (in other words, the same passports were being used for a number of import/export movements, but the horses were different ). On one occasion (that we know of) this discovery was linked to tracing the origins of a notifiable disease (EIA).
  - To show scale - one dealer we know of with an artic transporter travels to the EU at least once a week - vehicle partitioned for 18-20. They are often double loaded so 36-40 a trip (which we have witnessed), over a year 936 (18x52). We know the dealer buys with no passport or doesn't take the passports from the seller. We also know the dealer re-identifies the equines, buys and sells at EU markets and has links to the meat trade in Europe, therefore we have good reason to believe some of the equines this person is moving end up at slaughterhouses in the EU.
    - The same dealer was linked to a transporter found carrying cash and passports with no horses.
  - Historical evidence – UK horses exported on UK passports offered for sale at an EU horse market with ID only passports issued in that EU country. Irish equines being imported for slaughter in England – some of these will be unfit for human consumption but those importing are confident that the passport allows for human consumption (it has not been updated as required or is fraudulent) and the OV cannot check the Irish database for further clarification.

Also, just to reiterate that while this does have implications for human health (as many of these equines should not be entering the food chain), there are serious equine welfare and biosecurity implications. These equines are being transported 'under the radar', often long distances in sub-standard conditions and many will not be fit for the intended journey (for example, due to injury or underlying health conditions). They could also be carrying notifiable diseases as evidenced with the EIA (equine infectious anaemia) outbreaks in 2010 onwards.

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