

Will there be Equestrian Sport at the Melbourne Games?

The Hon. Secretary of the Organising Committee of the 1956 Games has received following letter from the Australian Ministry of Health. No doubt that our readers will be interested to know the exact reasons invoked which probably prevent equestrian sports to be part of those Games:

MINISTER FOR HEALTH
Commonwealth Offices,
SYDNEY, N. S. W.
26th June, 1953.

Dear Mr. Tanner,

I desire to refer to your letter of 4th June, 1953 in which you request a reconsideration of the question of relaxing the quarantine laws to enable horses to enter Australia for the Olympic Games in 1956.

You may have seen the correspondence which passed between the President to the Equestrian Federation of Australia and myself, but so that you may be fully informed of the position, I welcome this opportunity of letting you know what has transpired.

For some time, the Equestrian Federation of Australia, Victorian Branch, through its President, Mr. T. Luxton, had been making strong representations to me and my Department to have the restrictions relaxed in order that horses from prohibited countries would be able to compete at the Games in Melbourne in 1956. Mr. Luxton stated that his organisation had been given the task of organising the equestrian events at the Games.

The Director of Veterinary Hygiene of my Department had advised me that the equine disease position in overseas countries was such that considerable risk to the animal po-

pulation, and in some cases to the human population, would be incurred if there was any alteration to our present strict control.

However, the representations were persistent, and as it happened that the Biennial Conference of Commonwealth and State Principal Veterinary Officers under the chairmanship of the Director of Veterinary Hygiene was to meet in April, the subject was included in the agenda of the Conference.

I received the Conference report on this item, in which it was unanimously recommended that:

« In view of the serious animal health risks which would ensue if any exceptions were made to the existing prohibition on the importation of horses from all countries except Great Britain, Ireland or New Zealand, it is imperative to maintain the present quarantine restrictions, and no exceptions should be made to enable horses to enter Australia for the purpose of taking part in the Olympic Games or for any other purposes. »

The recommendation was based on the following reasoning:

« Australia is free from all serious contagious diseases of horses and despite much mechanisation, the major livestock industries of sheep and cattle raising are dependent on the use of horses for mustering, droving, etc. Also thoroughbred and trotting horses, together form an industry of no mean order.

» With the exception of Great Britain, Ireland and New Zealand, all other countries have one or more serious horse diseases such as Infectious Equine Anaemia, Equine Encephalomyelitis, Surra, etc. to a greater or lesser degree. No clinical or scientific tests exist to determine with certainty the presence or

absence of these diseases in equines, and thus the use of collecting centres for Europe and America for examination and testing would not give the safety necessary with horses from any country in which these diseases occur.

» It would not be possible to hold horses from prohibited countries under quarantine conditions in Australia, because of the more serious diseases are spread by insect vectors which cannot be controlled. A single animal carrying any one of these infections could be

capable of introducing a disease which could be spread by insects in the same spectacular manner as myxamatoxis has been spread in Australian rabbits. »

I feel sure that in view of this very definite recommendation, any relaxation of our Quarantine laws to permit horses to enter Australia for the Olympic Games would involve our livestock industries in a serious risk which would be quite unwarranted.

Yours sincerely,
(Signed) *Earle Page.*
