



Craig Whittaker MP

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The Central Equine Database, Horse Welfare and EDM 1138

Thank you for contacting me about the Central Equine Database (CED).

As a Government Whip I cannot, by convention, sign EDMs.

Defra consulted on changes to reflect the new EU Equine Passport Regulation in spring 2017. The legal provisions are fundamentally the same as those that have been in place since 2009. The Regulation is primarily a human health measure, to make sure that horses do not enter the human food chain if they have been treated with medicinal products not authorised for food producing animals. One of the key changes is the requirement that all Member States have a national Central Equine Database (CED) containing important information about the identity and status of equines.

Since the consultation closed, Defra has made good progress establishing the CED. The CED will contain up-to-date information from all Passport Issuing Organisations allowing enforcement bodies to verify the food chain status of every animal and help locate owners of horses that are abandoned, lost or straying.

I was pleased to read that usability testing of the CED has been successfully completed and, at the time of writing, two thirds of all PIOs have provided data for the CED. Enforcement bodies including local authorities and the Food Standards Agency are already able to search records. I am able to inform you that the database will be fully operational for PIOs by the spring.

As far as enforcement is concerned, I am grateful to my colleague, Julian Sturdy MP, for introducing the Control of Horses Act. By granting local authorities and landowners further powers to rescue and re-home fly-grazed horses, and making those responsible liable for any costs incurred, this Act will go a long way towards safeguarding the welfare of horses.

In addition to the Control of Horses Act, it remains illegal to be cruel to an animal, so the Animal Welfare Act can still be used to prosecute someone for abandoning a horse. Owners or keepers must ensure their horses have an adequate diet and are protected from pain or injury. This legislation is reinforced by the *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and their Hybrids*, which is frequently used in court to demonstrate neglect.

Enforcement of welfare laws is the responsibility of local councils, which are also responsible for upholding the horse passport regulations more generally, mostly through their Trading Standards or Animal Health Officers.

I would of course expect these bodies to fulfil their obligations, but if you have concerns over their performance I would urge you to raise them with the responsible authority. If it appears that urgent action is required to protect a horse, reports can also be made to the RSPCA.

As you might be aware, all horse passports issued since July 2009 must include a microchip number. This measure, together with others and the introduction of the central database were described by the Equine Sector Council as *"a triumph for Britain's horse sector and Defra"*, so I am confident that this will go a long way further along the path of helping to protect the nation's horses.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Craig Whittaker', with a stylized flourish above the name.

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