

Cross-Party Group on Scottish Horseracing & Bloodstock Industries

Tuesday 15th June – 6pm

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Miles Briggs MSP
Stephanie Callaghan MSP
Siobhian Brown MSP

Invited guests

Jack Barton, British Horseracing Authority (BHA)

Non-MSP Group Members

Delly Innes, Scottish Racing
John Burns, World Horse Welfare

Apologies

Mark Griffin MSP
Rachael Hamilton MSP

Covid-19 and the Horseracing Industry

Representatives from the British Horseracing Authority and Scottish Racing will update the Group on how the horseracing industry in both Britain and Scotland can recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Delly Innes highlighted that the racing industry across Britain took the decision to suspend all racing activity on 18th March 2020 as the country was moving into the initial full lockdown, following advice from the governing body's Chief Medical Advisers regarding the pressures that were being applied on the NHS at that time.

Horseracing covers many varying sectors of the economy and impacts a multitude of industries. Racing can be found in the rural economy sector, the business sector, tourism, sport, hospitality, and as such, the impact of Covid has been immense.

Racing in Scotland would normally generate £306m for the Scottish economy and as the country's second largest spectator sport with over 300k visitors to our courses every year and with an employment figure of 3,400 people across the industry.

Racing has worked closely with both the UK and Scottish Governments to develop detailed protocols and bio-secure measures to allow the sport to return, and this reflected the outdoor nature of horseracing and the fact it is a non-contact sport. Scottish racing could safely return to work, albeit behind closed doors, from 22nd June 2020, holding 54 fixtures under strict protocols for the remainder of the year.

Racing has continued without adding undue pressure on the NHS and has provided entertainment to millions of people watching our major events on both terrestrial and subscription television.

Return of Spectators

When the Scottish Government introduced the lifting of restrictions in mid-May, racecourses worked hard to implement new measures according to their size and layout. With a phased approach across all courses and following approval from individual local authorities, spectators were able to return to watch live racing for the first time in 15 months.

Central to the COVID recovery plan for 2021 is the return of spectators in more sustainable numbers to racecourses as soon as it is safe to do so.

Racing is already a highly regulated industry and we are very used to keeping any potential health and safety risks to an absolute minimum. The racing industry is working with Public Health officials to minimise any potential risks to returning spectators and the local communities in which race meetings take place and are fully prepared to welcome spectators in a strictly controlled environment which fully comply with all the requirements of governmental and racing industry bodies.

Financial impact

The financial impact of the pandemic on Scottish racecourses has been significant – with a loss of income of over £12.5 million, 56% of income, from the absence of spectators – and this is likely to be felt for years to come. This has led to a significant amount of cost-cutting activity at the five courses, which has then in turn reduced the flow of funds to both racing's participants and has led to wider impacts in the rural Scottish communities in which a large part of the industry is based.

The £2m grant funding from the Scottish Government has made an enormous difference to racing's capability to keep businesses running and incentivise owners, trainers, jockeys and stable staff to remain in the sport. The closure of betting shops had a very negative impact on income from media rights and racecourses have tried to mitigate some losses with additional races on ITV, which in turn has driven higher sponsorship and increased online income.

Scottish racecourses are working to navigate their own way through recovery from the pandemic to enable the sport to flourish again, both nationally and internationally. Whilst the country is seeing the positive effect of the vaccination process, spectator numbers are still restricted well into the summer, and courses are still unable to open

up other income streams, such as conferences, music nights and weddings, many of which are Summer based. With restrictions now in place for another three weeks, this recovery now becomes more of a challenge.

Equine welfare: Maintaining high standards

British racing's equine welfare strategy "A Life Well-Lived" was released in early 2020, in which the independent Horse Welfare Board set out a series of recommendations aimed at building on the already high welfare standards in British racing.

Throughout the pandemic, a high quality of care has continued to be given to thoroughbreds across the industry by 10,000 dedicated stud and stable staff, whilst the establishment of the Racing Relief Fund ensured no horses' welfare was compromised by owners no longer being able to afford to pay for their upkeep.

National Racehorse Week

National Racehorse Week will run from 12th – 19th September, whereby Trainers across the country will be encouraged and supported to open their doors to the public to show the high levels of care given to racehorses. The week-long event will be held across Britain and will feature the existing ARC Malton Open Day and the Henry Cecil Open Weekend in Newmarket, as well as the Epsom and Middleham Open Days. Racing yards across Scotland will also be welcoming members of the general public for a look around and will be on hand to ask any questions that people may have.

During the week, there will also be a programme of virtual events and a showcase of other parts of the industry and their contributions to the care that racehorses receive throughout their lives.

Questions

Miles Briggs asked if it would be possible for additional fixtures to replace those which had been lost during the pandemic. Jack Barton replied that the funds were not available for replacement fixtures and John Burns added that training programmes for racehorses were built around specific race meetings on particular dates.

Any Other Business

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 23rd November at 6pm

