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To Whom It May Concern,

The Australian Veterinary Behaviour Interest Group (AVBIG), a special interest group of the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA), wishes to express its concern about the use of restrictive nosebands on horses in the sport of dressage.

Nosebands that are placed tightly prevent the horse from opening its mouth and evading the pressure of the bit. Evidence from studies that have been undertaken make it clear that horses wearing tightly fitted nosebands may experience significant pain on application of rein pressure. If the nosebands are very restrictive, even without rein tension they will push the cheek against the teeth, risking lacerations, and potentially create bone deformities arising from chronic pressure¹.

It is the belief of AVBIG that horses should only be used in sport if their welfare is not compromised. AVA policy 7.6 on equine competitive events, subsection xi. states that 'any aids should comply with industry standards to ensure no damage to the horses'². Similarly AVA policy 7.10 on the use of horses for entertainment states that 'equipment or gear used during training or performance should not cause distress, pain or injury to the horse on which it is used'³. The current use of restrictive nosebands in the sport of dressage conflicts with both of these policies.

AVBIG recommends training methods for animals that do not cause pain, distress or discomfort. For this reason, the use of positive reinforcement-based training is encouraged wherever possible. If negative reinforcement training is required, the aversive stimulus applied should be as mild as possible to achieve the desired effect. This translates to 'light aides' described in horse riding.

In dressage competition, one of the key attributes of performance is 'the acceptance of the bit with submissiveness/thoroughness without any tension or resistance' as stated in the FEI (Federation Equestrian Internationale) rules⁴. Restrictive nosebands prevent the horse from showing resistance and therefore enable riders that use painful levels of bit pressure to avoid penalty during competition.

The negative welfare aspects of nosebands on horses could be addressed by compulsory measurement of tightness using a non-subjective measuring device prior to competition. AVBIG would like to join the International Society of Equitation Science (ISES) in recommending that the FEI adopt these measures to ensure optimum welfare of horses participating in the dressage competitions they regulate.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Katrina Ward
President
Australian Veterinary Behaviour Interest Group (AVBIG)
A special interest group of the Australian Veterinary Association

¹Casey V, McGreevy PD, O'Muiris E, Doherty O. A preliminary report on estimating the pressures exerted by a crank noseband in the horse. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* 8 (2013) 479-48

²<http://www.ava.com.au/policy/76-equine-competitive-events-other-jump-races-and-ropes>

³<http://www.ava.com.au/policy/710-use-horses-entertainment>

⁴http://www.fei.org/sites/default/files/DRE-Rules_2015_GA%20approved_black.pdf p10