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Professor Paul McGreevy
President International Society for Equitation Science
Room 206, R.M.C. Gunn Building (B19)
Faculty of Veterinary Science
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Dear Professor McGreevy

Tight nosebands on equines

I am writing on behalf of the committee and members of the Animal Welfare Science, Ethics and Law Veterinary Association about our real concerns over the use of certain types of nosebands used in competition horses. We support calls from the International Society for Equitation Science (ISES) for changes in the type and use of nosebands in competition.

We are a body of veterinarians, animal welfare scientists, philosophers and ethicists, and lawyers all with a common interest in understanding and improving the welfare of animals. In a recent meeting one of the speakers, Ben Mayes, President of the British Equine Veterinary Association commented on the welfare problems of over tight nosebands used in training and in competition horses.

Such nosebands clamp the mouth onto the hard metal bit as well as pressing the cheeks against the molar teeth. The result is damage to the soft tissues of the mouth and considerable discomfort and pain. Physiological and neurological distress is also measurable.

Our Association sees no justification for the continued use of 'cranked' nosebands in training or competition horses. Indeed information from the British army veterinary corps tells us that it is standard practice for all army horses to be ridden in a cavesson noseband with a two finger laxity in all situations, including battle. Surely dressage horses should need no more rider force than those used in battle, and if they do, then all the more reason to question the practice. Riders in events like dressage lose points for signs that a horse is resisting, such as an open mouth, or 'crossing the jaw'. This rule was introduced to improve training and welfare but has in fact made the situation worse, and restricts natural behaviours and movements of the mouth.

The FEI used to have a two finger rule to assess the tightness of nosebands, but it was found too subjective and abandoned. Fairness and objectivity could be achieved by stewards using a standard taper gauge at competitions as recommended by ISES. It would also enable the

provisions of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to be fulfilled under UK law. Such a change would be effective and proportionate and result in a welfare improvement for horses. It would also address the argument that equipment such as the cranked noseband is unethical and unnecessary.

Yours sincerely

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Chairman