

**Horse Racing Ireland Statement to the
Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Thursday, 8th July at 9.30 a.m. – 11.30 a.m. in Committee Room 2,
LH2000, Leinster House**

Chairman, Members of the Committee

Thank you for the invitation to appear before you today to discuss the issue of integrity and drug testing in Irish horse racing.

As the Committee will be aware, the equine sector is an important contributor to the rural economy with Ireland ranked as the leading exporter and seller of thoroughbreds in the world.

Despite its small size, Ireland plays a significant role globally in the horse racing and breeding industries. Ireland is the third largest producer of thoroughbreds in the world and Irish trained and bred horses compete successfully in many of the major races worldwide.

Trade in Irish bred horses is estimated at €300m per annum.

As such, the reputation and integrity of the product is of paramount importance, so the issue of drug testing is an important one with significant funds invested annually in this area.

The horse racing industry in Ireland is governed by three major pieces of legislation:-

- The Irish Horseracing Industry Act, 1994
- The Horse and Greyhound Racing Act 2001
- The Horse Racing Ireland Act 2016

This Statutory Framework sets out that the Racing Regulatory Body (the IHRB) is responsible in the first instance for anti-doping and forensics.

Section 39 of the Irish Horse Racing Industry Act, 1994 (as amended) provides that the IHRB shall:-

1. Be solely and independently responsible for making and enforcing the Rules of Racing.
2. Provide adequate integrity services for horse racing.
3. Make all decisions in relation to doping control, forensics and handicapping.

The Horse Racing Ireland Act, 2016 provides that Horse Racing Ireland is responsible for the overall administration, governance, development and promotion of the Irish horse racing industry and for guaranteeing funding to the Racing Regulatory Body to carry out its functions through an Integrity Services Budget which is agreed annually.

Horse Racing Ireland is committed to high standards in this area and our Strategic Plan (2020 – 2024) has as one of its priorities **“to enhance our domestic and international reputation through world leading standards of integrity and equine welfare”**.

Specifically, HRI sees its role as ensuring that the IHRB has sufficient resources, both financial, human and capital to carry out its responsibilities to the level expected of a major racing nation and we support the IHRB to constantly improve their capacity in this area.

In this regard, Horse Racing Ireland has

- Progressively increased its funding for these activities.
- Established an industry wide Anti-Doping Task Force to examine and make recommendations regarding best practice in this area.
- Ensured that all Irish samples are tested at an internationally accredited laboratory.
- Promoted the concept of authorised officer status to enable testing at non-licensed premises.
- Supported international best practice reviews of activities in this area.

Horse Racing Ireland works with the IHRB to ensure that its ambitions are supported in the area of doping control and the integrity services budget is subject to a formal quarterly review at executive level.

The IHRB has presented on this issue to the Board of Horse Racing Ireland twice in the last two years, while Ireland is a full signatory to Article 6 of the International Agreement on Racing and Breeding. This is a formal agreement between global horse racing authorities which commits countries to meeting best international standards in drug testing and forensics.

While drug testing is an area where you can be never complacent, Horse Racing Ireland takes assurance from the following aspects of the IHRB testing programme:-

1. All winners in Ireland are tested, focusing on the most successful performers.
2. A selection of non-winners are tested on the track, including poor performing favourites.
3. Horses are tested out of competition at trainers' premises.
4. This year, out of competition testing has been extended beyond trainers premises.
5. This means that the IHRB can inspect and test any thoroughbred anywhere in the country whether it is in training or not. This is a unique power amongst major racing countries.
6. Testing can now take place at sales, at breeding farms, at point to point meetings and at various other sites such as barrier trials and pre-training yards.
7. All adverse findings are dealt with through the IHRB disciplinary process.

A detailed Equine Anti-Doping Report is now formally presented twice yearly to Horse Racing Ireland. This was published for the first time last week and will be published every six months from now on.

Proportionally, Ireland races more horses overseas than any other country and in 2019, 1,733 Irish trained horses raced in countries as diverse as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, United States, Hong Kong, Australia and Japan and were tested under various international regimes.

These international runners represented the equivalent of 6% of the total runners in Ireland and included horses of all standards and ability. No adverse findings were returned.

Horse Racing Ireland is committed to working with the IHRB to ensure that their systems are fit for purpose and operate to the best international standards.

Our spending on doping control has increased by 27% in the last four years and Horse Racing Ireland has advised the IHRB that funding will never be an issue for meaningful initiatives to improve capability or increase capacity in this area.

I hope this is helpful and I will be happy to address any issues or questions which the Committee may have.