

**Opening Statement Ms Caroline Ball, Principal Officer,
Department of Agriculture Food and Marine
Joint Oireachtas Committee for Agriculture Food and Marine
1 June 2022 regarding issues related to the horse racing industry**

Chairman, Members of the Joint Committee,

Introduction

I am pleased to attend the committee today to provide further information following on from the Committee's Report on Horse Racing in Ireland, accompanied by my colleagues Michael Sheahan and Tim Drea.

Over the last two years, a number of reports emerged in the media alleging malpractice with regard to integrity issues in Irish horse racing. These reports naturally raised concerns in an industry that is hugely valuable to the rural economy. On foot of these reports, your Committee invited officials from this Department and executives from Horse Racing Ireland (HRI), the Irish Horse Racing Regulatory Board (IHRB) and the Irish Racehorse Trainers Association to a series of meetings in July 2021 to discuss anti-doping processes and systems in horse racing.

Following these meetings, your Committee issued a report in November 2021 titled Horse Racing in Ireland with 11 recommendations. The Department welcomes the report, as indeed do HRI and IHRB, and thank you, the Members, for the considerable work invested in it and we note that the report is broadly positive in content.

The Department, as well as the other bodies, was heartened to see the regime of testing and anti-doping measures received a favourable analysis in the Independent Review of the IHRB Equine Anti-Doping Programme conducted by Dr Craig Suann. He was broadly satisfied that the IHRB processes 'at least match international best practice in most respects' and that the body 'has made significant advances in recent years'

The recommendations in the Joint Committee Report have been carefully considered by the relevant bodies in parallel to those made by Dr Suann in his report.

The Department will continue to work with other relevant stakeholders to ensure the highest standards of integrity and welfare are maintained. The people of Ireland will not support horse racing if it is seen to be tainted with integrity concerns. The efforts to counteract the issue of drug taking in any sport, including horse racing, are part of an ongoing integrity development processes.

Organisation of Horse Racing .

Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) is a commercial state body established under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001, and is responsible for the overall administration, promotion, and development of the horse racing industry. It falls under the aegis of the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine.

As from 1 January 2018, the Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board (IHRB) is the statutory regulatory body for all horseracing in Ireland. Its role is provided for in the Horse Racing Ireland Act 2016 and subsequent statutory instruments, however, the body itself remains a private entity.

The Horse Racing Ireland Act 2016 provides for a funding mechanism to be in place under which the costs of integrity services provided by the IHRB are guaranteed by HRI annually.

Exchequer Funding for Horse Racing

Section 12 of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001 provides for exchequer support to given to the horse and greyhound racing industries through the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund. €88m was allocated to the Fund in Budget 2022, of which €70.4m was allocated to HRI.

The Department's Role in Regulation

The Department is the principal regulator of the Agri-food Sector, whilst the IHRB regulates horseracing as outlined above.

There are compliance issues of interest to both regulatory bodies; these specifically relate to the use/supply of illegal substances in racing and the inappropriate use and/or supply of veterinary medicines for use in equines. Animal welfare is another such issue.

Certain areas where DAFM has regulatory responsibilities may involve prosecution through the courts. In these cases, DAFM authorised officers lead or advise on investigations, prepare

prosecution files and liaise with the Chief State Solicitors office/Office of the DPP to see cases through the court system.

DAFM IHRB Memorandum of Understanding

In August 2020 the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine formally signed a Memorandum of Understanding between DAFM and the IHRB providing for officers of the IHRB being given powers as authorised officers by the Minister under section 10 of the Animal Remedies Act 1993 as amended, thus enhancing the IHRB's investigative powers with regards to the use of animal remedies.

The MOU aims to advance the already collaborative working arrangements between DAFM and the IHRB to improve the oversight, investigative and enforcement powers of the horse racing industry to support animal welfare and to strengthen domestic and international confidence in its 'brand'. Whilst extending the powers of the IHRB officers, the MOU does not alter the criteria or sanctioning process of the IHRB. Related prosecutions will remain at the discretion of the Department.

Response to the Committee's Report on Horse Racing

The Committee will have received a letter from the Minister earlier this week, setting out the Observations of the Department, HRI and IHRB to the recommendations in the Committee's Report and providing an update on actions or activities undertaken.

Thank you for your attention – my colleagues and I are available to provide any further clarifications and to take any questions that Members may have.

Thank you.

ENDS//.

