



Opening Statement
29.11.2023, Irish Horseracing
Regulatory Board

Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Wednesday, 29 Nov 2023, at 6:30 p.m. | Committee Room 3, Leinster House

Governance at Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board (IHRB)

Chairman, Members of the Committee, on behalf of the Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board, I thank the Chair and Members of the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine for the invitation to appear before you today. I am joined by my colleagues Dr Lynn Hillyer, Chief Veterinary Officer, and Niall Cronin, Head of Communications and Strategy.

Background

The Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board (IHRB) is an all-island body which was established in 2018 as the independent regulatory body for horseracing in Ireland, an industry that supports over 30,000 jobs and contributes €2.46 billion to the economy. Under the Horse Racing Ireland Act 2016, the IHRB is solely and independently responsible for the making and enforcing of the Rules of Racing, licensing all participants, and regulating horseracing, including anti-doping and handicapping. The IHRB is also responsible for the representation of Irish horseracing internationally in respect of its functions under the Act and is a member of the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities.

Governance

The IHRB exists to safeguard the reputation of Irish horseracing through robust and transparent regulatory practices, implemented with uncompromising integrity by a focused and professional team. Over recent years we have made significant advances in critical areas, including the strengthening of the organisation's board and governance and closer collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Horse Racing Ireland and other important stakeholders. This includes entering into Memorandums of Understanding with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and with the Veterinary Council of Ireland in respect of certain functions and activities.

The IHRB abides by the requirements for a Non-Commercial State Body in the *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies*. We operate under a recently revised and strengthened service level agreement with Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) and meet at least quarterly with HRI to ensure transparency and oversight of the horseracing integrity services budget.

It is the ambition of the Board and management to position the IHRB as a world class regulator for horseracing with a focus on excellence in the delivery of our core functions. Following extensive internal and external consultations with stakeholders across and outside the horseracing industry, the IHRB has developed a renewed strategy for the coming years to assure public trust in Irish horseracing, applying the highest professional standards within a robust governance framework and rigorous probity regime, as we continue to improve our efficiency and effectiveness.

Mazars Review

The Committee is aware that in late June an issue emerged which related to financial governance within the organisation. Although there did not appear to be any question of misappropriation or personal gain, it was immediately brought to the attention of the IHRB's Audit and Risk Committee, and to the Chairman and Board of the IHRB. Additionally, the details were disclosed to the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General and Horse Racing Ireland and were brought to the attention of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The Board of the IHRB, with the support of HRI, commissioned an external review to be conducted by an independent firm, Mazars. This review, which is ongoing, involves a thorough examination of six years' worth of financial and other records and interviews with relevant individuals. Once concluded, which we anticipate should be within weeks, the findings will be published and the recommendations will be acted upon.

Equine Anti-Doping

Equine anti-doping remains a top priority for horseracing and the IHRB has no tolerance for any rule breaches in this regard, as indicated by the sanctions handed down for such offences.

An independent review of the IHRB Equine Anti-Doping Programme carried out last year concluded that we "at least match international best practice ... and have made significant advances in recent years". The review made recommendations that it said were "capable of enhancing the robustness of the programme's processes, capabilities and capacities" but noted that "the implementation of some or all of these recommendations will require the provision of more funding and resources". Recommendations that could be implemented without significant cost implications have been or are being implemented. However, there are some high priority recommendations which require additional funding. Plans are in place to implement these remaining recommendations when resources allow.

Our anti-doping strategy continues to evolve, and operates on a sophisticated risk and intelligence basis, backed by rigorous processes of investigation and follow-through in the event of an adverse analytical finding. The appointment of 12 Authorised Officers allows the IHRB to gain access to any Thoroughbred in any location at any time. This enables us to take the right sample, from the right horse, in the right place, at the right time to maximise the likelihood of detecting prohibited

substances if they are there, to deter those who might be tempted to cheat through doping, and to disrupt inappropriate activities. It was through such action that the largest doping case in Irish racing history was successfully detected and prosecuted this year. We have provided a table which illustrates the scope of the IHRB's equine anti-doping programme.

Table 1: IHRB Equine Anti-Doping Statistics

PERIOD		2022 H1	2022 H2	2022 Total	2023 H1
RACEDAY	FIXTURES	178	210	388	174
	RUNNERS	16,003	18,780	34,783	15,092
	URINE	1,083	1,318	2,401	1,131
	BLOOD	337	325	662	252
	HAIR	170	106	276	56
	PRE-RACE	112	98	210	268
POINT TO POINT	FIXTURES	64	30	94	69
	RUNNERS	3,655	1,387	5,042	3,751
	BLOOD	414	184	598	438
OUT OF COMPETITION	INSPECTIONS	90	107	197	92
	URINE	0	0	0	1
	BLOOD	442	152	594	312
	HAIR	438	224	662	433
TOTAL SAMPLES		2,996	2,407	5,403	2,891
ADVERSE ANALYTICAL FINDINGS		2	9	11	5

Conclusion

The IHRB carries out its functions through a team of 25 experienced staff in the Curragh and over 100 highly trained, professional racing officials at race meetings across the island who ensure that the safety and integrity of the sport is maintained. The IHRB also relies on over 140 volunteer Raceday Stewards and committee members who lend their professional expertise to ensure Irish horseracing adheres to the rules and is properly governed at all levels.

Recent years have brought unprecedented challenges in the administration and regulation of horseracing. IHRB staff and volunteers have risen to these challenges. I thank them for their dedication, commitment and professionalism, which enable us to be an adaptable, responsive and high performing organisation, serving the horseracing community and safeguarding the €2½ billion Thoroughbred industry which supports over 30,000 jobs nationwide.

Thank you for your attention. I and my colleagues will now answer any questions the Committee may have.