

INTERNATIONAL STUD BOOK COMMITTEE REPORT 2023

Preamble

The Committee meets three or four times a year and once in person, this year on 27th and 28th September in London. The first day is the technical meeting, considering stud book compliance, and the second day is the strategic day. The ISBC welcomed the IFHA's Senior Technical Advisor, Dr Craig Suann, to the meetings for the first time.

Presentations over the two days included processes and planning required to transition new technology for parentage verification (Romy Morrin-O'Donnell), work underway on gene-doping detection and deterrence (Natasha Hamilton) and welfare challenges to the thoroughbred breeding industry (Paull Khan).

1. Day One - Technical Meeting

The status of all 69 stud books in the 4 regions across the world are reviewed annually at the Technical meeting (with the assistance of the ISBC's 14 Regional Reviewers) comprising 18 in the Asia and Oceania Region, 35 in the Europe and Africa Region, 7 in the North America and Central America Region, and 9 in the South America Region. There are 12 Emerging Stud Books (looking to become Approved) the most recent applications being Jordan, Libya and Malta.

The focus of discussions was on Approved stud books encountering difficulties and stud books Under Assessment in each region (status categories are: Approved, Under Assessment, Emerging and No Longer Approved). Current Stud Books Under Assessment are: Portugal, Uzbekistan and Panama. Colombia is currently being assessed for possible down grade.

2. Day Two - Strategic Meeting

2.1 Pregnant Mares Raced Beyond 120 Days

The ISBC has looked at instances of horses racing over 120 days of pregnancy and agreed that while some countries provide regulators with monthly coverings, those stud books which do not are putting their regulators at a disadvantage. It was agreed that the latter group should look to move to monthly reporting to the regulator only. The ISBC is working with the Technical Advisory Committee on this.

2.2 Samples – Racing Authorities

Discussions around gene-doping focused again on the importance of stud book ownership of parentage verification samples in the stud books rules. Sample collection, chain of custody and storage processes and procedures for the purpose of supporting gene doping offences was also discussed at length with a view to stud book-racing authority

memoranda setting out cooperation between the two bodies to combat any attempts to perform gene-doping.

2.3 Falsification of Microchips and Horse ID

False microchips is a problem being encountered more widely. Microchips can now be ordered online and are inserted to override the originally registered chip to match a passport which was not issued to that horse. It was agreed that sole reliance of microchips is not encouraged and a more holistic approach applied, which includes markings, DNA, photographs, colour, gender etc.

2.4 ISBC Protocols and Planning during Transition from MS to SNPs

The ISBC considered the recent approval of an equine panel by ISAG and the anticipated move by laboratories from microsatellite (MS) to single nucleotide polymorphism (SNPs) for a wide range of genotyping purposes including parentage verification. The ISBC has considered and agreed previously the status of horses imported, temporarily and permanently, from an SBA using SNPs to an SBA using MS and vice versa and points a stud book should consider in advance of transitioning from MS to SNPs including re-profiling breeding stock before the first SNP parentage verified foals are on the ground, namely active mares (produced a foal) and stallions for the last 3 or 4 years using the stud book's existing biobank samples - new samples should not be required; a new sample should be taken only in the event the existing biobank sample is not sufficient.

The ISBC has previously agreed that any decision on changing the method of parentage verification is the decision of each stud book and it must align with the ISBC's purpose: *'to develop and promote the highest standards of Stud Book operation to safeguard the integrity of the Thoroughbred breed.'* It is anticipated MS to SNPs will be a quicker transition than from bloodtyping to MS but it is also accepted this will be a staggered process which might require some flexibility from stud books and the ISBC and, possibly, other stakeholders during transition.

It was agreed to set up a working group to work through protocols and planning during transition from MS to SNPs and to review the 2024-2025 ISAG comparison tests to determine a way forward which will not disadvantage any stud books keen to adopt the new technology earlier than others.

2.4 Horses with DSD / Clause 3 of Article 15 of the IABRW

A working group, which included the ISBC, presented a revised draft of clause 3 of Article 15 of the IABRW and some guidelines for stud books and racing authorities on horses of ambiguous gender. The working group debated whether to use the term 'Disorders', which is used in contemporary human and veterinary literature and describes more accurately a developmental disorder versus its negative connotations and, as such, whether this should be 'Differences'.

The ISBC approved this draft and the working group has now submitted this in draft form to the International Group of Specialist Regulatory Veterinarians (IGSRV) and the IFHA's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) for approval.

2.5 Guidance in Relation to Stud Books Placed Under Assessment

The ISBC recommended a revision to the 'Guidance – Stud Books Placed Under Assessment' document, which clarifies procedures for Racing Authorities when faced with an entry from a country whose stud book is currently Under Assessment. This addition makes clear that it is the responsibility of the racing authority to decide whether a horse can race, not the decision of the ISBC's Regional Reviewer or the stud book of the exporting country.

2.6 Inbreeding Research

Several Stud Books have completed or are currently analysing their breeding stock to identify the level of inbreeding within their population for the long-term health and welfare of the breed including Britain, Japan, France, USA and Australia. Most of these studies are genealogical. Several peer reviewed population genetics studies published within the last 20 years have supported the position that the thoroughbred has increased levels of inbreeding and reduced levels of genetic diversity compared with some other domestic horse breeds. The addition of timeline analysis has demonstrated a steady increase of inbreeding over the last three decades coinciding with a smaller number of stallions and an increase in the size of stallion books, together with selection towards favourable athletic traits.

Simon Cooper
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