

Change is never easy.

Discussion on the national harmonization of Equine Canada membership, 2010

November 1 - Equine Canada e-letter, introduction from Equine Canada CEO Akaash Maharaj

It is unfortunate, but perhaps inevitable, that great change - even change for the better - rarely occurs without great tumult. Ultimately, all the organisations involved in the Canadian equine system will rightfully be judged not by their words but by the extent to which they serve the interests of the membership. EC will continue our work of serving Canada's horsepeople throughout this time of trial, and we are grateful for our members' patience as the reform process unfolds.

**October 20, 2009
Equine Canada e-news
CEO Akaash Maharaj**

Dear colleagues,

I hope this note finds you well, and enjoying the approach of autumn. This edition of the Equine Canada e-news is intended to let you know about our national reform and modernisation agenda, why it will lower total costs and improve service to you, and how it will enforce higher standards of accountability in the governance of Canada's equine sector.

This is perhaps the most significant moment in our evolution as Canada's national governing body for equestrianism and horsemanship, and represents a long-awaited leap forward in our determination to forge a Canadian equine system worthy of our country's name.

What will change in 2010?

The heart of the national reform agenda is a new alliance between Equine Canada (EC) as the national equestrian federation, and each of the ten provincial equestrian associations. In a country of our scale and diversity, the nature of this partnership will naturally vary from province to province.

Any provincial association that wishes to act as the agent for Equine Canada's national services - e.g., the sale of EC national credentials, such as EC Sport Licences, EC Horse Passports and Licences; the management of the EC national competition system; the administration of the EC coaching and learn-to-ride programs; the oversight of the EC Equine Medication (anti-doping) procedures - will only be permitted to do so if it signs a service agreement, open to the full glare of public and member scrutiny. The service agreement will require both Equine Canada and the provincial association to meet national standards of service, of financial transparency, and of accountability to Canadians. More importantly still, it will represent a binding covenant with Canadians to uphold the integrity of the national equine system.

For 2010, the provincial associations for British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, and New Brunswick - which together represent the majority of our nation-wide membership - have chosen to join Equine Canada in a new Canadian membership model. A resident of one of these provinces will continue to receive membership in Equine Canada by joining his or her provincial association for a single fee, and will now enjoy mutually guaranteed levels of service and all the benefits of both organisations.

For 2010, the remaining provincial associations have chosen to remain outside of the new Canadian membership model. Residents of those provinces who wish to join Equine Canada can do so by joining our national association directly; at \$25 per person, and coming with Canada's best rider liability insurance, this will be the most economical equestrian membership in the country. These provincial associations will not be permitted to compel Equine Canada's members to purchase a separate membership in their associations or to extract unnecessary levies from them, as is currently the case.

In provinces that are part of the new Canadian membership model and that sign a service agreement, the provincial association will administer many of Equine Canada's national services on our behalf. In the remaining provinces, Equine Canada will administer our services directly. In all cases, Equine Canada will guarantee that our members will receive services on time, on budget, and meeting national standards.

Why is this controversial?

Sadly, but perhaps predictably, there has been a great deal of misinformation spread abroad by opponents of reform. Dramatic change can be unsettling, and some of our fellow organisations have found the requirements for higher standards and public accountability difficult to accept. Reform means that all organisations involved in Canada's equine sector - local, provincial, regional, and national - must put aside narrow self-interest to serve the greater good of our country, and to remember that we exist to serve our members, and not the other way around.

Currently, provincial associations that administer Equine Canada's

services on our behalf do so without signing a service agreement, and have therefore been able to act without meeting national standards or reporting to the Canadian membership. There are hundreds of thousands of dollars of our members' fees unaccounted for in the provincially-administered Equine Medication program alone, and the reform process will require an immediate accounting to Canadians.

Canadians who wish to join our country's national equestrian federation are currently barred from joining Equine Canada's national association directly, and are instead forced to subscribe to a provincial association or other third-party, paying those associations fees that can escalate without limit. No part of those forced membership fees support the national system. Equine Canada is forced to give away its membership, and the provincial associations are able to keep our members captive, not permitting Equine Canada to know even the identity of our own members. The new Canadian membership will change this, and create a direct relationship of accountability between Canadians and the Canadian federation.

What happens now?

The reform process has been nearly a decade of national-provincial negotiations in the making, but we are at long last moving from the realm of words to that of deeds.

Equine Canada will shortly send out our renewal forms for 2010 EC Sport Licences and 2010 EC Horse Passports and Licences. Residents of British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, and New Brunswick will receive renewal forms that are little changed from previous years. These Equine Canada members will continue to obtain their national membership through their provincial associations.

For the second year running, Equine Canada has held the line on the costs of EC credentials, and there will again be no increases in these fees.

Equine Canada licence holders living in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland will receive forms that will enable them to join Equine Canada's national association directly as part of the 2010 licence renewal process, without being compelled to pay an additional provincial subscription - a new and substantial economy for those members. In addition, Canadians living in these provinces who do not wish to hold EC licences but do wish to acquire rider liability insurance will, for the first time, have a choice of providers: Equine Canada's new insurance package or the provincial association's existing package.

Equine Canada licensed officials have been receiving direct correspondence on the landscape of the competition system for 2010 and beyond. In the face of the disinformation our officials have been receiving from some associations, it is important for us to reassure them that as the national federation, Equine Canada is the sole body responsible for accrediting all EC officials, and Equine Canada is therefore the sole authoritative source of information on rules and procedures for the officials programs. Our officials will have an undiminished ability to officiate at EC sanctioned events in every province. EC officials should be cautious about advice from non-EC associations on their professional responsibilities and obligations, as only EC sets and enforces their rules and code of conduct.

EC sanctioned equestrian competitions will shortly receive

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information on 2010 accreditation, and the significant new benefits available to them from next year onwards. Regrettably, some associations opposed to reform have expressed an intention to undermine the national Canadian equestrian competition architecture, by persuading competition organisers to leave the national accreditation system. We have faith in the judgement of competition organisers to recognise that the best interests of their competitors and their competitions lies in standing together as part of a pan-Canadian system.

The future of Canadian equestrianism

This is both a tremendously exciting and a difficult juncture in the affairs of Canadian equestrianism.

Equine Canada has always drawn its identity from the very genius of our country. Canada is a great nation because, in all our diversity and fractious differences, Canadians from coast to coast to coast can achieve infinitely more when we stand together, than we ever could if we stood apart. Similarly, the cause

of Canadian equestrianism is best served when all parts of the national equine movement find the courage and resolve to forge ahead as one, rather than dissipate our strengths by struggling on separately.

In this context, it has always been Equine Canada's hope that reform, renewal, and modernisation would be possible through a single unanimous and simultaneous collaboration with all the provincial associations and all our other parts. However, we would do our members, our sector, and our country a terrible disservice if we were to allow the ideal to become the enemy of the possible, and through endless delay, permit Canadian equestrianism to stagnate and decay.

We remain committed to working with each of the provincial associations in our shared mission. Provincial associations who are not part of the new Canadian membership and who do not sign a service agreement will nevertheless remain corporate members of Equine Canada. We hope that ultimately all provinces will join us in the modernisation of the Canadian federation, and we are grateful to those provinces who have already taken this step.

However, no one should be in any doubt: Equine Canada was created to answer a higher calling and a broader mandate than any of our constituent parts, and as the Canadian federation, we are unashamed and unhesitant in exercising national leadership for our sector. We are committed to taking the difficult decisions necessary to turn our ideals into reality, in the knowledge that if we do not move forward and move on to serve the interests of all Canadian equestrians, there is no one else in Canada who can or will.

If you have any questions or concerns, I invite you to contact the Equine Canada office or to visit our web site, at www.equinecanada.ca. On behalf of the Canadian equine community, I thank you for your patience during this time of transition, and look forward to serving you through our modernised and reformed federation.

With best wishes,
Akaash Maharaj
CEO, Equine Canada

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What does this mean to you as a rider?

British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick

These provinces have accepted in principle Equine Canada's proposal. Riders who renew their memberships with the Provincial Sport Organisations (PSOs) of those provinces will continue to be national members of Equine Canada (EC). A \$5 EC membership fee in 2010 and a \$10 membership fee in 2011 will be added to their PSO membership fee.

They will continue to access EC Sport Licences and EC Horse Passports and Licences as at present at no increase in cost. They will also continue to receive all the added benefits of their PSO such as liability insurance, coaching programs etc.

Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island.

These provinces either have declined Equine Canada's proposal or have intimated that they will not participate until their boards have been able to come to a decision. Riders in these provinces will be able to join Equine Canada directly without having to be a member of their PSO, and may purchase liability insurance direct from EC. Current Equine Canada licence holders in these provinces will be mailed with renewal documents for their licences. Equine Canada does not have membership information for past PSO members in these provinces so will not be able to advise them directly of their options

Other comments

Regardless of province or territory, Equine Canada will continue to be source of accreditation for EC officials and the ruling body on rules and procedures of the officials program., coaching programs etc. Only provinces which opt-in to the full EC membership will be able to offer EC products and services such as EC coaching

program, Learn to Ride program, national drug testing program etc.

The current PSO membership of EC may change during the course of the year. For instance, Manitoba Horse Council (MHC) has informally indicated to EC that it will continue to work with EC to remain part of that organisation. However, MHCs structure requires a formal Council of Clubs meeting to change the by-laws of MHC.

Nationally, PSOs are managed by volunteer boards so changes in board structure may affect decisions in the future. All PSO members and interested riders are urged to check with their PSO and Equine Canada's website for their current status. The harmonization proposal is a developing situation and information is being issued on a regular basis.

Why is the strength of Equine Canada important to the horse community as a whole, and not just the competing element?

The answer is: the viability and strength of the horse industry throughout Canada.

Without a national body which has direct communication access to all its members (which is not the case at present) Equine Canada has a limited voice when lobbying government for funds, for supporting international riders to attend the Olympic Games, the World Equestrian Games and other FEI events. EC also has a limited voice when representing riders on new projects such as Federal legislative and policy campaigns centres on taxes, access to federal lands and trails for pleasure riders, universal ID and humane horse transportation, expansion of the Equine Welfare initiative. The European Union for instance, has advised the Canadian government that within three years, Canadian horses must comply with lifetime horse tracking protocols or Canadian horses may not be sold to Europe.

There are many other projects on the table which are limited due to lack of a united national commitment. ☹

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