

Is the Second Coming of HSI Coming?

In June it will be two years since the Indecon Report was published on behalf of the Department of Agriculture. The Minister then established an Indecon Implementation Committee, and during that period he made increased allocations totalling €1 million to Horse Sport Ireland to implement the several recommendations made in the report. And now the Implementation Committee Chairman's consulting firm, Kotinos Partners Ltd, has been rewarded by HSI for his efforts with a contract to conduct a 5-year strategic plan for the company.

By my reckoning all of the Indecon recommendations have been implemented except one: the spinning off from HSI of all studbooks it manages. Why the delay?

According to internal documents leaked to WSI, the Department wants the studbooks spun off. A chairman of HSI spoke authoritatively that the studbooks will be spun off, and the process will be through a public tender. And even the Irish Horse Board's directors recognised that the studbooks will be spun off.

Recently a member of the Dáil's Agriculture Committee submitted a parliamentary question to the Minister asking when a public tender will be announced for the licenses to manage the studbooks now operated by HSI. The Minister's response was that the future of the studbooks is to be determined by the HSI Board and not by his Department, which ignores the reality that the Minister is the *de facto* owner of the Irish Sport Horse Studbook and Irish Draught Horse Studbook. Apparently the Department officials who write answers to parliamentary questions for the Minister are not speaking to the official who oversees the Department's Livestock Breeding, Production and Trade division.

Do we really expect the new Board of HSI to voluntarily surrender the €3 million in unauthorised State Aid the company will receive in 2019 from the Department? Most of this money will be spent to underwrite the operating costs of the HSI Breeding Department and bloated general overhead expenses of the company; less than ten percent will be spent to support and develop the competitiveness of our non-Thoroughbred breeding industry. Of course if the Breeding Department is closed then the huge costs and inefficiencies of HSI's studbook business also will be gone. And the money each employee of the HSI Breeding Department loses for the company will be saved as well. But it would take a wise and astute Board to recognise that the Breeding Department and the studbooks have been a cancer in the organisation, that like earlier Boards they cannot resolve the inherent conflicts of interest that have bedeviled the Breeding Department since HSI's founding in 2008, and that the studbooks are the source of huge distraction from HSI's core mission to be the national federation for equestrian sport.

On 1 July HSI's licences to manage the ISH Studbook and Irish Draught Studbook expire. A previous ex-Minister's misguided experiment of having a national equestrian federation manage studbooks has been a complete failure. It is time for the Department and HSI to state publicly what they say privately and has been revealed in leaked documents: the studbooks must go via a transparent public tender.

Only by doing so will we have any hope of the ISH Studbook and ID Studbook being brought back to their former glory and global influence. And only then will HSI be able to get on with the mission of developing leisure, amateur, and professional equestrianism in Ireland to world-class standards. We await the Second Coming of HSI.

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