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Sent: 21 February 2025 06:20
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Subject: Urgent: Photographic Evidence of Equine Welfare Concerns

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please accept our apologies - the URL links to view the photos are included in the word document **attached to this email**.

Thank you.

I hope this message finds you well. Please find attached a document detailing our research team's recent findings on equine welfare concerns in competition sport horses. Our evidence, which includes photographic documentation with confirming metadata, highlights serious issues related to the use of double bridles in dressage events. We believe these findings warrant immediate attention.

Given the critical nature of this information, we kindly ask that you forward this email and the attached document to the team responsible for equine welfare. We would appreciate confirmation of receipt and are available to provide further details or discuss our findings at your convenience.

In addition, we will be reporting our concerns via the FEI's online Reporting Hub.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter and for your commitment to safeguarding horse welfare.

Best regards,

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Document attached to email.

23rd February 2025

Dear Equine Welfare Team,

We wish you well in your endeavours to safeguard the welfare of competition horses.

We are writing on behalf of our research team, currently preparing a report on equine welfare in competition sport horses. In the interest of transparency and ensuring that evidence of potential horse abuse is provided expeditiously, and in the expectation that you would wish act on this evidence promptly, we have made it available to you as evidentiary photographs, with metadata to confirm that they are temporally linked and not simply "moments in time".

Our research includes a large number of images from the Amsterdam Horse Show, held on 24 and 25 January 2025, featuring seven horses and riders who placed in the top 12, as well as from Neumunster Horse Show held on 14 and 15 February 2025.

These images reveal considerable welfare concerns related to the use of double bridles in dressage events, that we understand would have been approved for use by the stewards at the events. Although the bits in use apparently did comply with the regulations, the photographs show that the combination of the bits, curb chains, nosebands, and rein tension cause severe and sustained compression of the oral and cranial tissues and appear to contravene the regulations of the 26th Edition of the Dressage rules, updated 1 January 2025, Article 434, section 2 "Nosebands" Section 2.1.7 which states

> "*A double bridle must have a cavesson noseband and bridoon and curb with curb chain… Neither a cavesson noseband nor a curb chain may ever be as tightly fixed so as to harm the Horse*. "

and section 3 "Bits", which states that the bits of the double bridle (curb and bridoon),

> "*must not place mechanical restraint upon the tongue"* and should not "*hurt the horse"*

The images presented here clearly demonstrate the competitors' bits causing prolonged deformation of the tongue, as well as marked compression of the tongue, the periosteum of the bars, and distortion of the lips.

Such compression, as documented by Mellor (2020), is extremely painful due to the high tactile sensitivity of oral structures (Haggard et al., 2014).

In many of the images, the compression is so severe that it appears to substantially reduce or halt blood flow rostral to the bit, potentially resulting in ischaemic pain—an intensely noxious condition.

Previous research has shown that bits compress the tongue (Engelke and Gasse, 2003; Clayton, 1985; Benoist and Cross, 2018; Anttila et al., 2022). Several studies have reported bit-related lesions (Tuomola et al., 2019; Tuomola et al., 2021; Tuomola et al, 2022; Uldahl and Clayton, 2019; Uldahl et al, 2022); found an association between high rein tensions and increased risk of oral lesions (Tuomola et al., 2024; Björnsdóttir et al., 2024; Mata et al., 2015; Swoboda, 2021; Tell et all, 2008); and shown that bit pressure in the periosteum of the bars can cause severe pain without causing lesions (Cook, 2014).

The temporally linked series of images that we have reviewed alongside video footage available via the FEI's subscription TV channel suggest that winning performances in dressage subject horses to significant pain. We are concerned that practices that harm the oral structures are not only going unnoticed but are being rewarded.

We feel compelled to share this evidence with you in the expectation that your response will align with the FEI's stated commitment:

> *"Everyone involved in our sport has the innate right to be safe and treated with respect. The FEI will not tolerate any forms of abuse or misconduct as this goes against the best interests of our sport. The same applies to horses and it is our collective responsibility to be the guardians of horse welfare within equestrian sport.*
>
> *"Horse Welfare is the foundation stone of the FEI, and the collective responsibility of everyone involved in equestrian sport. Just like humans, horses have a right to be safe and treated with respect, and the FEI is committed to ensuring that these principles are upheld at all times. This is why, we encourage everyone to speak up and report any suspicion of horse abuse."*

In light of this, we trust that the evidence provided here will assist you in protecting horses within the sport. Accordingly, we include the links to the relevant photographic folders for the eight horses in question who were competing and placed at **Amsterdam** and **Neumünster.**

- Amsterdam 2025 folder: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/cc5c33fspv3ba78qc1zuk/AHDJ2MkDCtK94HOfdkMJLV8?rlkey=gxu3bysbxkjbubip4sx2uip4u&st=80xhrfqz&dl=0

- Neumünster 2025 folder: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/iirnfadaeqwyjk91mqrh8/AAK9VwRm4H5kGYRsiuoBmnk?rlkey=39el8csqjzc1dljiigyw82cpz&st=3knyx8az&dl=0

In the interests of full transparency, we note that all members of our research team have complete copies of the photographic evidence as a backup in case of loss or for independent verification of the evidence provided, should that be necessary.

Please acknowledge receipt of this information and contact us immediately should you require any further details or wish to discuss our findings.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for your ongoing commitment to the welfare of horses in equestrian sport.

Yours sincerely,

Cristina L Wilkins, Paul D. McGreevy, Cathrynne Henshall, David J. Mellor, Crispin Parelius Johannessen, Kati Tuomola, and Amy D. Lykins.

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