Todays report from Dr. White.. Published by Dr Mark White.

Pigeon Rotavirus Sydney... To Race or Not to Race, That is the Question

The pigeon fraternity has been hit by two new viruses in the last few years. Its a terribly unfortunate thing to have happened and very undeserved. But what can we do but play the cards life deals out? With Rotavirus there are arguments for and against racing this year in Sydney. Most of these arguments on both sides have some sort of merit.

The downside to not racing mainly relates to the damage this would do to the sport through loss of participants, leading to an acceleration of what is already a slow decline, possibly even to the point of threatening its long term viability. There is also the issue of how to handle the unraced youngsters born in 2016. Although we are working with others to do our best to make sure an effective vaccine is ready in time for next year, its not really possible to be absolutely sure that will happen. One year off racing is bad. Two years would be so much worse.

The downside to racing mainly concerns the health and welfare of the birds. There is the obvious risk of spreading the disease between infected and uninfected lofts during racing, and even during training to some extent. Since the disease affects adults as well as young the deaths would likely include valuable birds like imports, stud birds, particular blood lines, rare breeds of fancy birds etc. There is also the risk of spreading the virus far and wide into new locations during racing. That could happen for example through lost birds who are recovered from the disease, but still carrying the virus, finding their way into other people's lofts. Its effect on other bird species is also unclear at this stage. The resulting aggro, bad feeling, divisions and adverse publicity would damage the sport and possibly bring down regulatory or even legal action. Pigeons are not very high on the cuteness index to most people but that doesn't matter so much to the authorities.

Its probably possible to reduce the effect of the disease to some extent with various medicines and additives along with crop feeding. But the value of these is still hard to gauge as the disease itself is so variable from loft to loft. Essentially we are dealing with a viral infection that causes acute liver damage and gut problems and for which there is no really specific treatment.

Its a bit of a rock and a hard place for the pigeon federations. Damned if you do race and damned if you don't. Luckily we don't have to make that decision here......................... But when pressed for our advice we can only come down on the side of not racing..................................... The risks of not racing are bad but probably reasonably predictable. The risks of racing seem very unpredictable and potentially could be quite large. There would be a gauntlet of risks to be run. The fallout from all of that could reduce participation in the sport even faster than not racing. The wild card is that the virus is yet to be tested in chickens. Most likely it will be harmless to them but if it turns out it causes any problems in chickens it might be made a notifiable disease, which would give the authorities more power to ban pigeon movements including racing anyway if they wished.

The best we can do is push on with the vaccine ASAP and look forward to a time when the current difficulties fade into the background