

## **Sports Forum 2023**

### **Opening Speech FEI President Ingmar De Vos**

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman,  
Dear colleagues and friends,

Welcome to the FEI Sports Forum 2023!

It's spring in Lausanne and it's that time of the year when we come together to have our annual dialogue with our community, with the equestrian family.

We have a busy agenda ahead of us with a wide range of topics and I am pleased to say that we are almost at full capacity here in Lausanne with many also following online.

This is a sign of a very healthy sport and a healthy community. So before we go any further, I would like to thank all the participants – here and online - and all the panellists - for your commitment and for the contributions you will make over the next two days. This is a forum for dialogue, and we are truly grateful for your time, for your willingness and for your expert input.

I see also a big delegation from group VII and I wonder if Endurance has something to do with this but in any case thanks for coming during your holidays and Happy Eid.

The IOC President once told me that our Sport and Federation is by far the most complicated one in the Olympic Movement.

We have two athletes, six different sports and consequently the biggest variety of stakeholders that have a keen interest in what the FEI does. So having an open dialogue with all parties involved is key for the success of our sport and to make sure that what we decide is relevant.

It is hard to quantify just how much influence the Sports Forum has had since it was launched in 2012, but there is no doubt that COMMUNITY CONSULTATION has become the norm. We have had a lot of important discussions in this room here in IMD that have gone on to become important decisions.

But this is just the tip of the iceberg, because behind the scenes, we are constantly talking with our member federations and stakeholder associations, and we are regularly reviewing, discussing and developing new initiatives with specific stakeholder groups on very specific topics.

I believe we can say that we are in a constant “state of consultation”. It became an integral part of how we operate, and this is probably also why the FEI is considered to be a leader in governance, but also why we as a sport have been able to overcome challenges so effectively.

Just to illustrate this state of consultation, I looked at the list of the different seminars, forums and consultation meetings the FEI has held or contributed to so far in 2023 alone and the list is quite remarkable:

- Dedicated Eventing and Driving in-person FORUMS in January and April – accumulating over 280 participants.
- An online Vaulting Forum for 120 participants in February.
- A second meeting of the Longines FEI Jumping Nations Cup Task Force with around 40-50 participants preceded by two online meetings with the National Federations.
- In-person Meetings at FEI HQ with representatives from IJRC, IDRC, IDTC and IDOC and our new Athlete Representative Chair.
- In-person and follow-up online meetings with the International Jumping Officials Club, Jumping Owners Club, International Jumping Riders Club and Equestrian Organisers in March and April.
- Attendance and contributions to the annual Forum for the International Jumping Officials Club, in January in Lisbon where 200 officials were present.
- Attendance and contributions to the Dressage Level 4/5\* Judges Course in Rome in February with around 50 participants.
- Visits and participation at annual regional meetings such as the Asian Equestrian Federation GA in January!
- Regular input and attendance at Veterinary seminars on the question of horse movement and animal health law as well as consultation with stakeholder groups on rules and prohibited substances.
- Weekly meetings with different National Federations on the topic of Solidarity and development programmes.
- Monthly catch ups with the Grooms Working Group
- And the list could most likely go on.

Of course there is always more WE can and should do. There are still some frustrations and I can guarantee that we hear these frustrations. I believe it's important as representative bodies – be it federations or associations of stakeholders - that we acknowledge the concerns of our community when they feel they have not been consulted.

As mentioned before we have processes in place and there is certainly a lot of consultation happening, with a lot of information being circulated, but clearly it does not always reach its final destination. So let's continue to work together to further improve the dialogue and the representation of our organisations.

So I ask this question to all of you – which I want you to reflect on over the coming days - how can we – TOGETHER – ensure there is an honest, open and constructive dialogue. We don't have to agree on everything but the dialogue certainly contributes to a better understanding of each other's positions and concerns. And being heard is not the same as getting what you want.

We need to accept and support the outcomes from the different consultations, because it is ultimately OUR collective ability to join forces and to adapt to changing environments that will help secure a successful and sustainable future for OUR sport.

And if you look at recent events over the past twelve months, with all the different initiatives and achievements, we are clearly pulling together and in the same direction:

- We had a couple of EHV-1 outbreaks earlier this year, and we were ready. Our Organisers, our Athletes, our veterinary processes and preventive measures were on point and were instrumental in helping to minimise the spread.
- Thanks to thorough consultation, we have re-imagined and set the wheels in motion to strengthen our oldest and most prestigious team Jumping Series.
- We have published a new edition of the FEI Sustainability Handbook for Event Organisers – based on comprehensive feedback and actionable items.
- Just last week we published our first ever edition of the Accessibility Handbook to assist Event Organisers with improving accessibility for athletes, staff and spectators with disabilities, ensuring that everyone can enjoy equestrian events regardless of their disability and mobility levels.

- And also in the past week, we have developed a new equine and welfare hub on FEI Campus, to provide the community with education content around welfare.

We should be proud of these important milestones. And there are more to come in the next two days as we discuss our future and the values which underpin our sport, our commitment to the horses in our care, the standards of our Events, Endurance Rules and something we all have on our radar – the latest plans and arrangements around the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games!

I won't delve into the details of the sessions coming up today and tomorrow as I believe they will be expertly covered by all our presenters, but I just want to highlight the importance of the Session with the Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission.

Confirming and strengthening our Social Licence to Operate is probably the most important challenge of this century. If our relationship with horses and consequently our sport wants to remain acceptable in broader society, and if we want to ensure a sustainable future, we need to re-explain and re-establish the essence of our relationship with horses.

This relationship which has grown and developed over thousands of years, is unique and it is also interdependent - it's a bond where the one cannot exist without the other.

We need to re-explain this to an urbanised society that may have lost connection with nature and is more easily swayed by misinformation generated by activists through fake news on social media.

But we need to be honest and strong towards our own community as well. The future of our sport and the success of the equine industry depends on all of us individually and collectively taking our responsibilities and demonstrating in everything that we do that we value this relationship above all and will always prioritise the health and happiness of our horses - above all.

We will need to have the courage to review our rules and related sanctions to enforce the credibility of our events, but also to look at how we raise the bar and the expectation of what happens during the other 23 hours or at home.

So I am really looking forward to this interim report but even more to your input and engagement in this discussion that is so important for the future of our sport.

So thank you already for your pertinent and concerted feedback on all topics.

Thank you to all our presenters, and to the team at HQ for ensuring we can have these discussions in the very best conditions. And lastly thank you to IMD for welcoming us once again.

Collectively, everyone in this room and online, we are the guardians of equestrian sport and it is OUR responsibility to apply due diligence for every decision we make.

Only by working together we can make progress and find our strength.

And on that note, it gives me great pleasure to hand the floor to Prof. Cairns-Lee, who is an Affiliate Professor of Leadership and Communication, and is known for her award winning research on learning and leadership including the development of self-awareness, authenticity and sense making.

As the Sports Forum is very much an exercise around consultation and communication but also relies on our collective leadership skills in order to bring the community together around a shared vision, I am sure there is a lot we can learn from Professor Cairns-Lee.

I hope all of this made sense to you :-)) and thank you for your attention.