



Speech by

Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard 23 March 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Japanese Encephalitis

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries) (9.56 a.m.), by leave: As I address the House this morning, a Brisbane-based Department of Primary Industries officer is joining an international team of scientists to investigate a serious disease outbreak in Malaysia. The disease outbreak has claimed more than 50 lives. Malaysian authorities have confirmed some of the cases to be Japanese encephalitis. Japanese encephalitis has also been recorded in pig farming communities, and Malaysian authorities have commenced destroying pigs to control the outbreak.

There is now evidence that a Hendra-like virus has infected patients who were first thought to be victims of Japanese encephalitis. The Hendra virus, formerly known as equine morbillivirus, was first isolated in the suburb of Hendra here in Brisbane in September 1994. Two humans and sixteen horses have died from the Hendra virus. The Hendra virus and Japanese encephalitis are completely different diseases, yet both produce similar symptoms in humans in the form of brain inflammation. From the Department of Primary Industries' animal research institute at Yeerongpilly, Dr Hume Field has led the department's team researching the Hendra virus and lyssavirus. Dr Field's involvement in this outbreak has been sought directly by the Malaysian Director-General of Health.

The call for Dr Field's expertise in this international effort is testament to the excellence in scientific research conducted by the department and it is testament to Dr Field's skills and professionalism. As the Minister for Primary Industries, I have ensured Dr Field was able to join the international team as quickly as possible. Dr Field's role in the Malaysian outbreak will be to assist in confirming and clarifying the role of the Hendra-like virus involved, including the identification of natural reservoirs of this virus. Dr Field will be working alongside experts from the United States Centre for Disease Control. I am sure the members of this House and all Queenslanders would like me to convey our thoughts and best wishes to him and the people of Malaysia at this difficult time.
