



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (6.30 p.m.): We must ask ourselves, 'What is the worst thing that could have happened that affects regional and rural Australia?' Somebody said, 'The election of the Labor Party.' But I said, 'No, that is not the worst thing that could happen. The worst thing that could happen to regional and rural Australia would be the introduction of foot and mouth disease.' Some people said, 'What's the second thing?' I said, 'Maybe that is the election of the Labor Party in Queensland.'

I believe that we have a very, very serious problem here. There are something like 23.5 million beef cattle in Australia, 3.1 million dairy cattle, 116 million sheep and, of course, 2.4 million pigs that are already in active production. We do have a very big agricultural industry that, in fact, is at serious threat of foot and mouth disease here in Australia. We must ask ourselves, 'How are we going to manage that threat?'

First of all, we must tighten up restrictions on entry ports into Australia and, secondly, we must do some simulated exercises. I know we did one twenty years ago out in western Queensland because I was involved in it. They tagged the pigs and cattle which were then taken and sold at the Blackall saleyards. Within two days—even then, twenty years ago—some of those stock were down in Victoria. So we need to be able to do some simulated exercises to make sure that we can do something if foot and mouth disease spreads to Australia.

Since then we have allocated an extra four per cent of national park and conservation areas in the state. Management of the park system has been run down in the last few years. So we need to have something in place so that we can control, say, feral pigs in those particular places. I will just run through the sizes of a couple of national parks that harbour these pigs. For instance, Lakefield National Park is 537,000 hectares—and these are old figures, too—Jardine River, 237,000 hectares; Thrushton, 5,600 hectares; Idalia, 144,000 hectares; Bartle Frere, 80,000 hectares; and Carnarvon, 251,000 hectares. These are the types of large areas that we do have here in Queensland that harbour a lot of feral animals.

We also have the World Heritage areas, the conservation zones, the Starcke property in the north and a lot of Aboriginal settlements that used to run cattle but where now there is none. All of those areas in the north have been depopulated and we have lost many of our unpaid coast watchers from many of those areas. There are probably hundreds of thousands of wild pigs out there—potential carriers of foot and mouth disease. Honourable members should ask themselves, 'How on earth are we going to control foot and mouth disease if it gets into those areas?' It is such an inhospitable area, and we desperately need to act now.

Time expired.
