



Speech by

Mike Horan

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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STOCK INSPECTORS

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (12.14 pm): One of the most important tasks of the DPI is biosecurity, particularly in this era of the threat of foot-and-mouth disease and bird flu, the incursion of fire ants and so forth. The front-line troops of biosecurity are stock inspectors. Under the Beattie Labor government and the previous Goss government we have seen a gradual and continual run-down in the number of stock inspectors throughout Queensland. Stock inspectors are the troops who are on the ground. They know people, they know the roads, they know the movements of stock and they are able to provide all the important advice that local communities and districts need regarding the transport and movement of animals and the various regulations that apply with regard to disease control.

Recently, we saw a mock simulation of a disease outbreak involving 80 to 100 police with some of those police coming from over the border in New South Wales. It was based upon a report of a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak. In this mock exercise the outbreak was identified at the Toowoomba saleyards. The exercise then moved out to Millmerran. Millmerran is a very important place. There are over one million birds there. One of the biggest intensive poultry industries in Australia is based there. Lo and behold, the exercise highlighted the disgraceful situation that a stock inspector is not stationed at Millmerran.

This is the problem we are seeing occur right across southern Queensland. Places such as Clifton, Pittsworth and Millmerran, which are the centres for the feedlot industry, the intensive poultry industry and the intensive piggery industry, do not have stock inspectors. The community is much less safe in its fight against an outbreak of these exotic diseases because of this lack of stock inspectors.

Not only that, we are seeing an increased number of lifestyle and hobby farms throughout southern Queensland. The people involved in them should be aware of the regulations in terms of what they can and cannot do and what is best practice in the raising of their livestock in terms of animal welfare, chemical application, plant biosecurity or animal biosecurity. At the same time there has been a massive increase in the number of horses throughout southern Queensland. But southern Queensland has been virtually denuded of stock inspectors. Of course, it is well known that shortages of stock inspectors have occurred elsewhere in the state. Even the tick line has been forced to have third-party inspectors. Vacancies for stock inspectors have existed for long periods throughout the state.

The way in which the DPI budget has been cut is an absolute disgrace—some \$39 million over the past three years. We have seen cutbacks in staff numbers from 32 stock inspectors in the early 1990s down to 20 on the Darling Downs and in the southern Queensland area. We are losing the front-line troops. But this government does not care. DPI and rural Queensland just gets the crumbs off the table. The DPI is seen as a milking cow by which funds can be taken out of that very important department in order to prop up programs that have failed because of the government's mismanagement, such as what has happened in Health and the former department of families.

I call on this government to vastly increase the budget for the DPI and also the number of stock inspectors. Certainly, when we get into government at the next election we will bring about the vast improvement that is needed. I urge people in rural and regional Queensland to phone a friend and tell

everybody they know throughout Queensland—the people they know in business, the people they know in the schools, their friends and their relations that they have throughout Queensland—about the way in which the Beattie government has treated people in rural Queensland. People should spread the word about the budget cuts and the lack of stock inspectors. They should also spread the word that the coalition will reverse all of that and bring about an improvement.

Under the Beattie Labor government the DPI has lost its way with regard to service. It has become top heavy with administration and bureaucracy. Someone has just been put in place to control the financial management of stock inspectors. That just means more cuts and fewer stock inspectors. It is about time the front-line service of the DPI—the stock inspecting service—was improved through extra funding and a boost in staff numbers. It is about time that this government gave some due recognition to the \$11 billion a year primary industries of Queensland and stopped simply cutting and slashing. It is so disgraceful that even when a number of mayors of south-east Queensland had a meeting to find out how this foot-and-mouth exercise went there was not a representative from the DPI there—only someone from Queensland Health. That is how short of staff they are and that is the way they treat primary industry in Queensland and this serious problem in southern Queensland.