



Speech by

Hon. Andrew Fraser

MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA

Hansard Tuesday, 4 September 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Equine Influenza

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport) (10.20 am): On 25 August the Beattie government, in conjunction with Queensland Racing Ltd and the Queensland Harness Racing Board, acted quickly and decisively to halt all horseracing across the state after 10 horses from the Centennial Park stables in Sydney tested positive to equine influenza. After advice during the early hours of Saturday morning we acted swiftly. The threat of this virus to the industry cannot be underestimated. Already we have witnessed firsthand the devastating impact on the thoroughbred racing and harness racing industries in Queensland.

We have seen the pace at which the outbreak can progress. To date 27 thoroughbred meetings have been lost since the lockdown, along with six harness racing meetings. The industry itself estimates attendance figures are down by some 40,000 people and \$26.5 million has been lost to the thoroughbred industry in wagering in the last week of August. It is estimated that a further \$2 million has been lost in thoroughbred prize money between 25 August and today and \$1.5 million has been lost to harness racing clubs through on-course wagering agreements, catering, sponsorship and gate takings. There has also been a significant impact on other equestrian pursuits and sports.

Racing is a multimillion-dollar industry in Queensland. Thousands of people derive income from racing on either a full-time, casual or part-time basis. Thankfully, the virus has not yet found its way to horses within the state's valuable thoroughbred and standardbred industries. But already, after just 10 days, the impact is more than just a ripple. Queensland Racing Ltd and the Queensland Harness Racing Board will continue to monitor the spread of equine influenza on a continuous basis.

As of today there are now 40 thoroughbred training venues up and running under strict conditions that include a continuing ban on the vehicular movement of horses and requirements for wash down and recording of all movements. That means 3,000 registered thoroughbreds now have access to training facilities across Queensland.

I inform the House that Queensland Racing, with the approval and on advice from experts at the department of primary industries, has scheduled a TAB meeting tomorrow on the Gold Coast. This is an important step on the road to recovery from this outbreak. Further race meetings will resume on Thursday on the Sunshine Coast, Friday at Toowoomba and on Saturday at Eagle Farm. Each of these meets will be staged with only essential staff on track. A limited program for horses within the Cannon Park precinct is planned for the Cairns Amateurs.

What we know is that one week ago equine influenza did not exist in this country. What we also know is that there is a string of letters, including one from my predecessor as the racing minister, to the federal government warning of this outbreak. I join with the Premier and the minister for primary industries in welcoming the independent inquiry because there are many questions to answer and there will be a day of reckoning on this front. I table the letters for the benefit of the members of the House.

Tabled paper: Copy of a letter, dated 11 May 2005, from the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing (The Hon Robert Swarten MP) to the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (The Hon Warren Truss MP) relating to post-arrival inspection of imported horses.

Tabled paper: Copy of a letter, dated 17 June 2005, from the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (The Hon Warren Truss MP) to the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing (The Hon Robert Swarten MP) relating to post-arrival inspection of imported horses.

Tabled paper: Copy of a letter, dated 24 September 2004, from the Chairman of the Australian Racing Board Limited (Mr Andrew Ramsden) to the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (The Hon Warren Truss MP) relating to post-arrival inspection of imported horses.

Tabled paper: Copy of a letter, dated 6 May 2005, from the Chairman of the Australian Racing Board Limited (Mr Andrew Ramsden) to the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (The Hon Warren Truss MP) relating to post-arrival inspection of imported horses.