



Speech by

Mike Horan

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EQUINE INFLUENZA

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (12.01 pm): Australia's horse industry is massive and provides employment for thousands of people across the nation. The racing industry is worth billions of dollars and contains about 10 per cent of Australia's horses. The other 90 per cent are working horses throughout properties and pleasure horses for campdrafting, polocrosse, trail riding, dressage and so forth. To give the House an idea of horse numbers in this state, this year the Toowoomba Royal Show had 4,400 entries. There are about three campdrafts every weekend with around 1,000 horses and there are numerous dressage, showjumping, pony club, trail riding events and so forth. We can all see how massively important to the economy the horse industry is—be it racing, be it working or be it pleasure.

Equine influenza is one of the most contagious diseases around. It will spread up to eight kilometres. It is even said to spread within the nasal passages of humans and on their clothes. It is highly contagious and has an incubation period of one to five days followed by a 14-day infectious period. This equine influenza outbreak has been a tragedy for Australia and Australia's horse industry and I fully support the independent inquiry to find out how on earth this got into our nation. Was it with Irish thoroughbreds? Was it with Irish pleasure horses? Was it with Japanese horses? Was it on clothes? Was it on the attendants who came with these horses? Was it on equipment? Just how did it get into this nation and how did it get to Centennial Park? It obviously got to Centennial Park possibly from Eastern Creek or by other means and from there it has gone to an event at Maitland on 18 August. If one looks back at the sequence in terms of 14 days infection and five days incubation—it would have been transferred from one horse to another and then that horse went to Maitland—it is easy to see that this could have got to the Ekka.

The inquiry that has been put in place—and I support AgForce in this—should be looking at not only the federal government's involvement through AQIS and Biosecurity Australia but also Queensland DPI and Biosecurity Queensland which failed dismally in the early stages of this outbreak. They both knew of it on the Wednesday. They knew of it in detail on the Thursday and they did nothing about it until 11.30 on the Sunday, by which time 15 horses had left Morgan Park and gone to Brookfield, Rosewood, Tamborine and Kenmore. Hopefully, it can be contained in those particular areas. On the Sunday after the standstill had been put in place at 11.30, horse trucks were going up and down the Warrego Highway. A horse truck went up the range, and of course the department of transport cameras were not working. There were three big campdrafts in Queensland, and you can understand everybody wanting to get home. They were all allowed to go home up to four hours after the standstill. One of those campdrafts had four horses from Warwick.

Over 200 horses and their owners left Gatton on Saturday because they had heard whispers about what might be happening. The Laidley horse sale was on but no-one at DPI knew about that. A big event at Caboolture was on with hundreds of horses. They all skedaddled. Biosecurity Queensland did not know what was happening in Queensland. It did not know what major events were on in this state. How can you have a biosecurity plan when you do not even know what is happening? The coalition and I fully support the containment and control that has been put in place at the moment and we want to see this disease

stopped and eradicated. However, the independent inquiry has to have a close look at the failure of Biosecurity Queensland.

I have spoken on many occasions in this parliament about the fact that senior executives in the DPI have been brought in from other departments with absolutely no knowledge of livestock and the DPI. Hundreds of people have been pushed out such as ex-stock inspectors and the like who have experience and know-how. They have gone. The DPI has lost its way. It does not know what it is doing and, as a result, working people in the horse industry will lose thousands because of what has happened. This is the time when we are seeing the chickens come home to roost. The stripping of the budget and the stripping of staff from DPI has led to the situation where Biosecurity Queensland after only one year of being put in place in the DPI has failed in the early stages of this process. It did not shut off the border. It did not bring in the orders quick enough for a stock standstill. As a result, this disease has spread to a number of locations—up to 19—when it should have been contained at two. That is the failure of Biosecurity Queensland and this government.

Time expired.