



Speech by

**Mike Horan**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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## **EQUINE INFLUENZA**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (12.10 pm): In the midst of the equine influenza crisis that is occurring throughout south-east Queensland, I want to speak today about two important things that need to be done—and, that is, vaccination of all horses in the red zone of south-east Queensland and a fair system to provide the vaccine to those people who own pleasure and performance horses.

Since this outbreak first occurred in Queensland on 25 August, we have gone from one or two outbreaks to 799 by Sunday evening. As at Friday evening of last week it was 626. So this is spreading like wildfire throughout south-east Queensland. To have the minister come into the parliament this morning and say in a ministerial statement that stopping the spread of equine influenza has been a tremendous success, that it only covers less than one per cent of the land mass of Queensland, and that the buffer zone around the red zone is a success, is paying no respect whatsoever to the intelligence of horse people throughout south-east Queensland. It has spread from zero to 799 properties, and it would be far greater if we knew the true extent of how many properties are actually infected.

What we have today with this crisis is a legacy of five years of the DPI budget being cut, staff and resources being underfunded and cut, and a culture of leadership developing at the top where regardless of their experience in other departments they have no experience in animal or agricultural industries. The chickens have come home to roost with many of the mistakes that occurred in this crisis, despite the hard work on the ground of underresourced staff and underfunded staff who have attempted to deal with this crisis.

With regard to vaccinations, back on 14 September I called for the department to consider vaccinating horses throughout the red zone, because all the major equine practices I spoke to said that it had to be done. They said we were the laughing stock of the world to think that we were going to stop the spread of EI throughout south-east Queensland. I spoke to practices who had vets who had worked in equine influenza areas of the UK, Europe, Florida, and South Africa. Kicking and screaming, the department was dragged to the conclusion that it would have to vaccinate.

Since then some 20,000 doses arrived in the first lot, and a bit over a week ago Queensland got just on 8,000 doses and vaccinated most of the racehorses in work and some of the horses in the buffer zone that extends from south of Gympie across to Dalby and down to Inglewood. On Friday night 130,000 doses arrived, and out of those 130,000 I believe that Queensland will get about 35,000 doses. Bear in mind that 8,000 of those doses are going to have to be used for the second vaccination of the horses which were vaccinated a week and a bit ago.

The real issue that we have is that the thoroughbred industry has approximately 25,000 horses, which means they need about 50,000 doses of vaccine. The thoroughbred industry is extremely important in this state, as is the standardbred industry but it accounts for approximately 18 per cent of the horses in south-east Queensland. There are probably 80,000 to 100,000 or more of pleasure and performance horses that require vaccination if they are to be protected. This has also become an issue of animal welfare. As the temperature rises with the hot summer weather, horses with temperatures over 40 degrees suffering these illnesses out in paddocks trying to find some shade, not able to be looked after like horses

in stables and so forth, need to be vaccinated to protect them from this sickness. The owners of these horses want to protect them from this influenza. They see that the government cannot stop it and they want to take it into their own hands and be able to provide this vaccination for their horses.

It is so important with the next lot of vaccine that has just arrived—the 130,000 doses, and in four weeks time there will be another 100,000 doses—that we have a fair system of allocating it to horses who are in all these hot spots across the length and breadth of south-east Queensland. Take a line from Brisbane across to Toowoomba and south: just about the whole area is full of EI. We need a fair system for performance and pleasure horses. It is insulting to talk about 'high-value horses', because a 24-year-old kid's pony is just as important as a breeding stallion, a brood mare or an endurance horse. We need a fair system so that those who are at most risk of getting the illness are provided with the vaccine. I call for vaccination, vaccination, vaccination and communication, communication, communication so that not only the thoroughbred industry but also the pleasure and performance horse industry can be protected.

Time expired.