



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Tuesday, 4 September 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Equine Influenza

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.55 am): The final issue I want to address today is horse flu. As we all know, equine influenza has hit Australia hard and our government is working closely with industry and horse owners. The Department of Primary Industries has undertaken more than 3,200 inquiries from the public since the outbreak commenced and I seek leave to incorporate in *Hansard* what we have done in terms of support.

Leave granted.

At this stage there remains 19 premises in Queensland infected with equine influenza.

Pockets of infection have been detected in the Brookfield/Kenmore Hills area as well as Minden, Rosewood, Tamborine and Goondiwindi.

The largest quarantine zone is at Morgan Park at Warwick where most of the 270 horses have become infected.

Myself and the Minister for Primary Industries visited Morgan Park last Tuesday.

I was very impressed by the positive approach shown by the horse owners despite the difficult circumstances.

The Warwick horses are still eating quite well, despite having the flu, and DPI vets are working with private vets and owners to make the horses as comfortable as possible.

The cost of keeping the horses contained at Warwick under the current quarantine notice is being met by the Queensland Government.

In addition, I announced funding of \$20,000 to help meet food and incidental costs for people stranded on the site.

Of course owners are welcome to come and go but many are staying with their horses and we are doing all we can to make them as comfortable as possible.

Mr Speaker,

Equine Influenza is a highly contagious disease, which can affect all horses but poses no risk to humans.

Every horse owner in Queensland has a responsibility to do what they can to stop the spread of this disease.

There are about a quarter of a million horses in Queensland and at this stage only a tiny fraction are directly affected by the flu outbreak.

It is important horse owners monitor their horses closely, restrict the likelihood of them coming into contact with other horses and report any signs of Equine Influenza immediately to the Department of Primary Industries on 132523 or their local veterinarian.

Mr Speaker,

Our Government has mobilised significant resources in response to this outbreak.

This includes providing a range of services to ensure the welfare of animals affected by the virus, providing financial and non-financial support for industry, individuals and communities, and continuing to control the spread of the virus.

Emergency Management Queensland is co-ordinating the government's local responses, with the Department of Primary Industries being the lead specialist agency.

Many people have also come forward to assist, including private veterinarians and members of the State Emergency Service.

On behalf of the Government, I extend our thanks and with their cooperation we will do all we can to stop the spread of this disease.

It is clear that the Commonwealth government, however, has failed the horse industry and the thousands of families who have horses and ponies in their backyards. The public record shows that the federal agriculture minister, Peter McGauran, knew there was an outbreak of this highly contagious exotic disease—the first ever on Australian soil—on Wednesday, 22 August. What did he do? He put out a one-page press release after lunch. He did not adhere to the established protocols. He did not even warn the country's chief veterinarians. He sat on his hands and over the next two days horses and their owners travelled across Sydney, throughout New South Wales and into Queensland. The chief vets did have a telephone hook-up on the Thursday, but they were told the disease was contained to Sydney's Eastern Creek quarantine station.

It is Queensland's strong belief that had the federal government exercised the extreme caution it should have in the face of this fast-spreading disease the people currently living in difficult conditions in Warwick could have been spared all of this. The vast majority of competitors arrived on Friday, 24 August. If the Commonwealth government had done its job—activated the national AusVet plan, designed to help manage just such an outbreak—when it first knew there was a problem, we would not be faced with a situation where hundreds of people's lives and incomes are being severely disrupted across Queensland and New South Wales.

The time line of the Howard government's failure to protect Australia's horse industry is this. On Wednesday, 22 August federal agriculture minister, Peter McGauran, issues a press release at 1.24 pm—a media release. No advice is given to Queensland authorities of the outbreak. On Thursday, 23 August chief vets have a phone hook-up and are told that equine influenza is confined to the Eastern Creek quarantine centre. No action is taken to prevent horse movements. On Friday, 24 August New South Wales authorities begin to receive reports of positive tests to the virus. No action is taken to advise Queensland authorities of the likely spread. On Saturday, 25 August the Queensland racing industry becomes aware of rumours of the New South Wales outbreak and contacts Queensland authorities. No action is taken by the federal government until 11 am that morning. By then, hundreds of horses and their riders had travelled from New South Wales to Queensland for the Warwick event and the outbreak is well underway.

The national plan should have been put into place on Wednesday, 22 August. It could have been put into action as late as Friday, 24 August and still saved an enormous amount of heartache and massive economic loss to this vital industry.

A government member: And they want to run our ports.

Mr BEATTIE: These are the people who want to run our ports. These are the people who want to run Australia. They want to run our hospitals and our schools. They cannot even run a system to protect our horse industry. I would not put them in charge of a family barbecue.