



Speech by

**Peter Lawlor**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT**

Hansard Wednesday, 5 September 2007

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## **EQUINE INFLUENZA**

**Mr LAWLOR** (Southport—ALP) (11.50 am): I am an unsuccessful punter and have been one for most of my life. I do not punt as much these days as I once did, but I am still interested in horseracing. I have owned some moderate performers and I have been on the board of the Gold Coast Turf Club for 14 years. I go to the races most Saturdays, and I did so last Saturday at the Gold Coast where a phantom meeting was held—that is, no racing but betting on Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. There was no racing in Queensland and New South Wales. It was sad to see the impact of equine flu on a huge industry. But in addition to the direct and visible impact on trainers, jockeys, stable hands and feed merchants, there is an indirect impact on racecourse, TOTE and TAB employees, racebook printers and so on. When one considers that the Spring Carnival in Sydney has been cancelled—and I believe Melbourne will be next to be cancelled—hundreds of millions of dollars will be lost. What about the recreational riders, pony clubs, the Olympic equestrian team and the breeding industry? What about the poor people confined with horses to Warwick? What will it cost them?

All of this is as a result of the equine flu and all of it is as a result of the negligence of the Howard government at the Eastern Creek quarantine facility. Notwithstanding that horseracing in Japan was suspended due to equine influenza on 19 August, Mr McGauran, the federal minister for primary industries, said—

Australia will not take any risk with horses being imported from countries where equine influenza is present.

At about the same time a thoroughbred stallion was being tested for equine flu, which was about to be spread throughout the horse population of New South Wales and Queensland and possibly and probably the rest of Australia. Although this is a disaster of major proportions, it could have been worse. What if it had been foot-and-mouth disease that had been released from a quarantine station? What do the graziers of Australia think about the federal government's quarantine protocols? In 2003 and 2004 the Australian Racing Board wrote to then federal primary industries minister Warren Truss warning that exactly the equine flu scenario which has now occurred would eventuate as a result of the downgrading of the quarantine protocols at Eastern Creek. As Andrew Harding, the CEO of the Australian Racing Board, has said, they were virtually patted on the head and told, 'Don't worry. It'll be okay.' South African racing was shut down for three months, as was Japan, due to the equine flu. So there have been numerous warnings, but the federal government was asleep at the wheel. I have every confidence in the ability—

Time expired.