



Speech by

**Hon. Kate Jones**

**MEMBER FOR ASHGROVE**

Hansard Wednesday, 2 September 2009

---

### **MOTION: HENDRA VIRUS**

**Hon. KJ JONES** (Ashgrove—ALP) (Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability) (6.26 pm): I stand in support of the amended motion. I also want to put on the record my deepest sympathies for Alister Rodgers's family, friends and colleagues. Recently at the last sitting I spoke at length to John Brady, the owner of the property involved. I want to particularly acknowledge him and give my sympathies to him as well.

Tonight we have heard numerous members of the opposition call for the reintroduction of damage mitigation permits here in Queensland. The current prohibition on the granting of damage mitigation permits under the Nature Conservation Act 1993 to shoot flying foxes is based on a finding by the Queensland Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. This finding was based on their assessment that the shooting of flying foxes with shotguns for fruit crop protection is inhumane.

**Mr Seeney:** What would you expect them to find? What about the death of four Queenslanders? Is that humane? What about the seven people who are in hospital?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Resume your seat, Minister. Stop the clock. I call the minister.

**Ms JONES:** This finding was based on a number of key points, one being that it was very hard to get a direct hit to the head or heart of these animals given they are so small. They also found it was very difficult to get a direct hit during low light and also because shotguns are quite indiscriminate.

Under the Nature Conservation Act, the director-general of the Department of Environment and Resource Management is not able to issue a damage mitigation permit if the method of take is considered to be inhumane. This is the law in Queensland.

I know that this is a very distressing time for the family and friends of Alister Rodgers, and every member of this House has expressed their deepest sympathy during this most difficult time. But allowing the inhumane shooting of flying foxes with a shotgun for the protection of fruit crop growing would not eradicate the Hendra virus. In fact, at the time the government made this decision last year, only a low number of growers were still applying for damage mitigation permits. As the member for Condamine said in this House tonight as part of this debate, he thinks that if we reintroduce the permits that would only amount to one per cent of flying foxes in this state. Clearly, shooting one per cent of flying foxes would not reduce the risk of Hendra virus.

As the Minister for Primary Industries has already outlined to the House tonight, the state government is working with industry representatives to find ways of protecting our crops from flying foxes in a humane way. Non-lethal fruit crop protection techniques, such as netting and scaring devices, have been considered best practice for a long time, and non-lethal control measures represent the most sustainable way forward for industry and the environment.

Flying foxes are a native animal which make a significant contribution to environmental health and the economy by pollinating and dispersing seed. For example, flying foxes are a major pollinator of eucalypts and many eucalypts have evolved to produce higher quantities of nectar at night to attract nocturnal pollinators such as flying foxes. Flying foxes are also the main long-range pollinator, travelling up to 50 kilometres a night, and they therefore play a critical role in maintaining genetic diversity.

Furthermore, flying foxes are an indicator species—their fate is an indicator of the broader health of forest ecosystems due to their important role as a pollinator and seed disperser. The management of flying foxes in Queensland, therefore, needs to be responsive to the social and economic needs of the community while protecting the flying fox population and, with it, the long-term environmental benefits it provides.

I can advise the House that Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service wildlife rangers surveyed the known permanent and transient flying fox colonies in the Rockhampton and Gladstone areas. They met with flying fox researchers from Queensland Biosecurity and provided the current information on the flying fox colony locations to test flying fox waste for Hendra virus. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service is providing assistance to Biosecurity Queensland as requested.

The challenge of resolving human and wildlife conflict is a large one. This government is committed to finding solutions which are responsive to industry and the broader community, while ensuring that our state's unique biodiversity is safeguarded. This is a tough issue and I absolutely support the position of the state government here. We are working closely with industry to ensure that we move forward in this regard.