



Speech by

Mark Ryan

MEMBER FOR MORAYFIELD

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MOTION: HENDRA VIRUS

Mr RYAN (Morayfield—ALP) (6.16 pm): I rise in support of the amendment. Like other members of this House I would like to publicly convey my sincere condolences to the family and friends of Dr Alister Rodgers, the veterinary surgeon from Rockhampton who sadly passed away today after being exposed to the blood of a horse infected with Hendra virus. His death is a great tragedy for the Rockhampton community specifically and the Queensland veterinarian community generally. Sadly, four of the seven people who have reportedly contracted Hendra virus have died and I take this opportunity to remember, in addition to Dr Rodgers, the horse trainer who passed away in 1994, the Mackay cane farmer who died in 1995 and the Brisbane vet who died last year.

This debate is about how the Queensland government is working with key stakeholders and the Queensland community to protect Queenslanders from the impact of Hendra virus and the impact of flying foxes on primary industries. The Hendra virus was first identified in Queensland in September 1994. I understand that Queensland is the only place in the world to report outbreaks of Hendra virus. Whilst flying foxes are the natural hosts of this virus and humans and horses are susceptible to the disease, from reports released by Queensland Health I understand that Hendra virus does not appear to be very contagious and that human infections have only resulted from direct exposure to horses infected with Hendra virus. I also understand that there is no evidence of human-to-human transmission.

Nonetheless, suspected outbreaks of Hendra virus are treated very seriously by the Queensland government. In instances where an outbreak of Hendra virus is suspected, I am pleased to hear that, through Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries, the Queensland government is prepared to respond quickly and effectively. Government agencies, including Biosecurity Queensland and rapid response teams, assist in the whole-of-government response to suspected outbreaks. As already stated, the most recent outbreak of Hendra virus occurred at a property located near Rockhampton. On being notified of this outbreak I understand that the relevant Queensland government agencies responded decisively.

The relevant agencies quickly quarantined the property and the infected horses. In fact, the property was quarantined on day one, and departmental officers from the relevant government agencies immediately commenced testing and tracing of all horses that had come in contact with the property. The Queensland government treats suspected outbreaks seriously and cautiously. The acting chief veterinary officer, Dr Rick Symons, was recently reported as saying, 'We take a very cautionary approach to these cases. We are really concerned that we continue to protect horses and other humans.'

Whilst any case involving contraction of Hendra virus by humans or horses is distressing for all involved, it is important to not equate those specific emotions with a general attack on the native flying fox species in Queensland. A recent jointly published report by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, along with Griffith University and the Rainforest CRC from the James Cook University, called *Ecology and management of flying fox camps in an urbanising region*, says—

Flying foxes are important pollinators and seed dispersers of many plant species. They play important roles in the reproduction, regeneration and dispersal of plants within rainforests, eucalypt forests, woodlands and wetlands.

I am encouraged to hear that the Queensland government is working with the Flying Fox Working Group to investigate ways of reducing the impact of flying foxes on primary industries. This is about getting

the balance right—getting the balance right about the value of the vital role of flying foxes in relation to our environment's biodiversity.

Recently the Flying Fox Working Group held a research and development forum with world renowned flying fox experts and growers who have successfully developed non-lethal management options. I understand that Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries has committed significant resources to exploring effective non-lethal methods of management where existing practices such as netting are either impractical or cost prohibitive. I welcome the direction, and congratulate the working group on its general interest in working towards getting the balance right between preserving our environment's biodiversity, supporting our primary industry sector and protecting our communities from Hendra virus. I commend the amendment to the House.