



Speech by

**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE**

Hansard Wednesday, 2 September 2009

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### **MOTION: HENDRA VIRUS**

**Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—LNP) (6.01 pm): I proudly support the motion moved by the shadow minister for health. I believe, as would all members, that the most important issue that would ever come our way for debate is the health and quality of life of our community. I believe it is very important that we as parliamentarians prioritise these principles. Otherwise we should not be here and would not be fit to govern.

The question that has to be asked is: why is it that year in, year out the quality of life of residents across this state is ruined because of plagues of flying foxes residing above homes? The best the state government can do is fine residents \$100,000 for disturbing those flying foxes. There must be something wrong with this system if people who have had flying foxes flapping around their homes year in, year out are fined \$100,000 for removing them. I am speaking on behalf of the residents of Charters Towers, Yungaburra, Cairns and right across Queensland. The frail, the nursing mums and the families are putting up with the filth, stench, parasites and ticks day in, day out—not to mention lethal viruses such as the Hendra virus and the lyssavirus.

Lyssavirus is a rabies like virus. It has already killed one Queenslander. It has killed a number of residents of New South Wales. In relation to the lyssavirus, if one bat dropped its placenta on the ground and a child walked on it with a cut foot, that would be the end of that child. The Hendra virus has recently claimed four horses. The latest confirmed outbreak means that there have now been 12 Hendra virus incidents since 1994 involving 42 horses. There have been seven confirmed human infections, all in Queensland. With the very disappointing news of the death of Alister Rodgers, the number of deaths has reached four.

The time has come for the government to stop being sympathetic to the flying fox and start putting the quality of life of residents before these screeching pests. I will read out something that goes back to 2005. It is an article in the *Northern Miner* headed 'Health fears rally residents'. It states—

The frustrations of residents living with the bat colony were evident, with emotions running high several times during the meeting.

It goes on to state that a resident said that since the arrival of the flying foxes in her trees she had needed to use her asthma medication more than twice the usual amount. The resident said she was gravely concerned about the diseases, including Australian bat lyssavirus, which could be carried via the bat ticks. She said it was time permanent action was taken as health risks and other damage being done to the city were unacceptable. The bats are still there. The question is: does the minister have the guts, the intestinal fortitude, to solve the problem? This has been going on for seven years right across Queensland. Another article, headed 'QPWS tells locals: Time to move out', states—

Local residents are being advised to move out of their homes if they don't like living near the flying fox colonies. Cambridge Street resident David Wilson said he was advised by Cairns Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to seek emergency housing with a charity organisation, or simply rent somewhere else if he didn't like living next door to the bats.

...

He said he had two children, the youngest less than three months old, and living next door to the flying foxes had him fearful of the safety of his children.

The bats are still there. Where are the guts, the intestinal fortitude, to get up there and solve this problem? A week ago this article appeared in the *Weekend Post* under the heading 'Flying fox colony drives town batty'—

A flying fox colony at Yungaburra has sparked fresh demands on the state government to move them over growing fears of bat-borne diseases. Lakeside residents say a colony of bats, which moved into the area following Cyclone Larry, are noisy, stink and could be putting lives at risk. The Hendra virus outbreak in Rockhampton that has claimed the life of four horses and left vet Alister Rodgers on life support—

he has now lost his life—

has sparked anxiety in the Tableland communities.

No wonder it has raised anxiety! The article quotes a resident who has lived there for 25 years who says that the bats have turned a quiet neighbourhood into a noisy, stinking place overridden by flies. He says that the stench is terrible and the sleep deprivation because of the noise is unbearable. He said—

If we had dogs barking all night the owner would be prosecuted but because it's bats we have no rights.

He said—

They are a health hazard ... Apart from the disease they carry, in tick season thousands die and all those dead bats add to the smell.

*(Time expired)*