




Speech by

Bruce Young

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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HENDRA VIRUS

 **Mr YOUNG** (Keppel—LNP) (2.55 pm): As we know, historically flying foxes were a nuisance to the fruit-growing industry. However, the whole dynamic changed in 1994 when horse trainer Vic Rail was infected with the Hendra virus and tragically passed away. Fourteen of the 20 horses at the complex died. HeV—Hendra virus as we know it—has a low infectivity rate but a high mortality rate. In 1996 flying foxes were identified as the natural host. All four species in Australia have been found to carry the virus.

In all cases to date the infection has been transmitted to humans from bats via an intermediate equine host—that is, horses. Laboratory studies have shown that horses may excrete the virus for a period of 72 hours without showing any clinical signs. To date, seven people have been infected with Hendra virus, HeV, causing encephalitis. Tragically four of these people have died.

In 2009 at an outbreak at Cawarral, located between Rockhampton and Yeppoon, Rockhampton vet Alister Rogers, who treated the horses, died after he contracted the disease. Biosecurity Queensland identified the strain of the virus responsible for the death of the Rockhampton vet from a colony of bats located in Yeppoon. Further investigations found flying foxes also transmit lyssavirus, the brother to rabies. The treatment for lyssavirus is the same as that of rabies and since 1996 has claimed two lives.

As I speak now, we have two Hendra outbreaks in Queensland—one in my home seat of Keppel. Last year, 2011, was a major year for the detection of spillovers of HeV, Hendra virus, into horses, with 18 events notified. Australia is experiencing an unprecedented spike in the number of Hendra virus cases which seems to grow each year. CSIRO maintains a significant program of research on bat-borne viruses including Hendra virus research, with 25 scientists working in this critical area. The policy of flying fox management has recently been changed. The Newman government will consistently look at the problem with flying foxes as we monitor the serious disease of Hendra.