




Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

Hansard Tuesday, 30 October 2012

TROPICAL AND AQUATIC ANIMAL HEALTH LABORATORY

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (10.12 pm): I have presented to the parliament a petition of 3,100 signatures and an e-petition of 655 signatures, with the support of principal petitioner Mrs Bronwyn Walker, calling for the reversal of the state government's decision to close the Townsville Tropical and Aquatic Animal Health Laboratory. The laboratory services the aquaculture, fishing, beef and other livestock industries of North Queensland. The facility provides vital front-line protection against diseases that have the potential to decimate these industries with devastating health, economic and social impacts throughout Queensland and with implications for the rest of Australia.

The decision to close this important facility has demonstrably not been fully evaluated. The minister has explained the economic reasons this decision has been made; however, there have been very few answers on how the government believes that the Coopers Plains facility will deal with the outbreak of diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease in Far North Queensland. Modelling has indicated that the response time could mean the difference between a contained outbreak in Queensland and devastation that would take the whole Australian market 10 years to recover from, costing billions of dollars.

In 2002 the DPI demonstrated that a worst case scenario would involve key beef and lamb export markets being closed for 15 months. The cost of foot-and-mouth disease incursion would be between \$8 billion and \$13 billion of gross domestic product and the consequences would be felt 10 years after the event. Even an isolated outbreak that was brought rapidly under control was estimated to potentially cost \$2 billion to \$3 billion of gross domestic product.

The minister still has not responded to my question about how the biosecurity lab transfer to Brisbane will save our prominent industries financially if there is an incursion of foot-and-mouth disease in the Gulf of Carpentaria. This is the risk of only one disease. It is an utter shame that the four members representing the Townsville region could not even stand up to the minister and this government over the closure of such an important facility.

Mr Cox interjected.

Mr KNUTH: We are all fighting for rural and regional Queensland, and you backed the push to close that important facility and move it to Brisbane.

The centralisation of this laboratory and the Toowoomba facility to Coopers Plains does not make strategic sense. It does not make economic sense either, as I have been advised that there are now difficulties with the Coopers Plains facility being too small for the equipment to work. The minister has spruikied the savings that will be made from relocating the state-of-the-art facilities to Coopers Plains; however, there has been very little mention of the need for the extension required to house the equipment and work done by the Townsville and Toowoomba labs. The minister is in the unfortunate position of having to justify his decision purely on economic concerns, because this government has demonstrated that it is not prepared to defend the interests of primary industries and is willing to expose—

(Time expired)