




Speech By
Glenn Butcher

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

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AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE: REPORT, MOTION TO TAKE NOTE

 **Mr BUTCHER** (Gladstone—ALP) (12.28 pm): I am back. I do get a little bit excited in the House after three hours sleep. I move—

That the House takes note of the Agriculture and Environment Committee report No. 24 titled—*Hendra virus EquiVac® vaccine and its use by veterinary surgeons in Queensland*, tabled on 21 October 2016.

The report presents the findings of the committee's eight-month inquiry into the Hendra vaccine this year. I thank the committee members for their work on this very difficult inquiry. I also thank the member for Mirani, who participated in several of our public hearings.

I would also like to acknowledge the assistance provided by the officers of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland Health and Workplace Health and Safety Queensland. We heard from many equestrian groups, horse owners and veterinarians during the inquiry. We sincerely thank everyone who contributed their views. We accepted 293 written submissions. Many of the submissions were detailed and quite heartfelt. In addition to these submissions, we received dozens of emails from horse owners and interested groups who tracked our work throughout the inquiry. We also thank everyone who took an interest in that inquiry.

Hendra virus remains a risk for horses and for the people who come into close contact with those horses wherever there are flying foxes in Queensland and New South Wales. A total of 77 horses and four people have already died from the virus since it was discovered. Of the 97 horses infected, 77 actually died from the virus; the other 20 were actually euthanased. All Hendra incidents have occurred in New South Wales or Queensland. There have been no reported cases in any other state of the country. Thankfully, so far this year no horse specimens have tested positive for Hendra virus at the Biosecurity Queensland lab at Coopers Plains. I am pleased to advise that no humans have been infected with Hendra virus in Queensland since 2009. Horses that get infected with the virus generally die. If people get the virus from infected horses, they will likely die, too, and there is no cure for this disease. Vaccinating against the virus remains the most effective option for preventing horse and human deaths according to all of the experts to whom we spoke. If people stop vaccinating their horses, we will again see deaths from Hendra virus in Queensland.

The committee made 11 recommendations from our examination of the submissions and the evidence given in our hearings on the inquiry. We have recommended changes to workplace health and safety laws to limit the liability of our veterinarians when treating horses that may have this virus. The committee has also supported the rights of veterinarians to refuse treatment of unvaccinated horses. The committee's other recommendations included: the revision of biosecurity guidelines for vets to clarify requirements to wear PPE equipment for low-risk and high-risk treatment of horses; a feasibility study to examine whether exclusion testing for the virus can be performed in North Queensland as well as Brisbane to give quicker test results for North Queensland samples; support from the government

for development of a rapid stall-side testing of the virus; temperature indicators on vaccine packaging to show whether it has been stored correctly, reminding vets of their obligations to provide horse owners with information about the vaccine and risks of adverse reactions; more reporting of adverse reactions to the vaccine by horse owners to the regulatory body, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicine Authority; and a campaign by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries to promote vaccination against Hendra virus. The committee also recommended the inclusion of the equine industry representatives in future meetings of the Hendra Virus Interagency Technical Working Group that provides technical advice to the government.

I have no doubt that some horse owners would be disappointed by the committee's inquiry and the findings from it. However, I do believe that the committee's recommendations are balanced and reasonable and will serve the best interests of everybody involved with horses in this state. I would also like to make mention of our trip to Townsville where the member for Gympie took time out to wear some of the equipment that is used by vets in those stages when a horse is suspected to have the virus but is not treated—

Mr Perrett: Cairns.

Mr BUTCHER: Cairns, sorry. I do take the interjection from the member for Gympie. I appreciate the effort that the member for Gympie went to in order to see what the vets in Queensland have to go through. I commend the committee's report to the House.