




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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ADJOURNMENT

North Queensland, Feral Pigs

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (11.44 pm): As members are no doubt aware, in recent weeks there has been a second outbreak of Panama disease tropical race 4 on the Mackay family's banana farm at Tully. Panama TR4 is a devastating disease that has the potential to wipe out the banana industry in North Queensland. To put that into perspective, this is a \$600 million industry that provides 95 per cent of the bananas sold in Australia, which equates to 393,000 tonnes a year. Importantly, 400 B-double trucks transport this produce south each week with these trucks backloading into North Queensland for companies such as Coles and Woolworths. What does that mean? It means that if the banana industry in North Queensland is wiped out freight charges on everyday grocery items will skyrocket which will be subsequently passed on to customers.

The question of whether TR4 can be eradicated is a difficult one. Whilst I appreciate that banana growers and Biosecurity Queensland are doing everything they can to prevent the spread of this soil-borne disease, the longer term ramifications are unknown. What we do know is that it is vital appropriate measures are put in place to prevent the transfer of soil from one property to another and this is where the issue of feral pig control becomes relevant.

The number of feral pigs in the Tully-Innisfail area has exploded in recent years, which is not surprising considering the location and the ad hoc approach to feral pig control. As members would appreciate, feral pigs can easily travel 20 to 30 kilometres in a single night and the risk they pose to farmers in terms of spreading TR4 disease is substantial. I am told the local council has 18 traps and that DAF have produced a guide to landholders on how to trap pigs, but it needs to be much more than that. There needs to be a coordinated and sustained effort to eradicate feral pigs from this area and the government needs to take a lead role in organising and managing this program. This is a task beyond the capacity of local pig hunters and a few banana growers.

Given that the gestation period for a pig is around four months, this is not something that can be done sporadically. There is a need for a well-organised and funded program to be initiated and I am calling on the agriculture minister to step up to the plate and urgently implement an ongoing program aimed at eradicating this pest.

At a recent meeting with banana growers in Tully they specifically asked me to come down here and address this issue in parliament and call on the minister to assist them with the eradication of feral pigs in this area. Banana growers and Biosecurity Queensland staff are doing their best to contain the latest outbreak, but one has to question the effectiveness of their efforts when we have thousands of feral pigs roaming around the area. For the sake of our banana industry this issue needs to be addressed and it needs to happen now.