




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MACKAY

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AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (12.13 pm): I, too, would like to contribute to the debate on report No. 24 on the inquiry into the Hendra virus EquiVac vaccine and its use by veterinary surgeons in Queensland. I would like to thank my fellow committee members on the Agriculture and Environment Committee and also the member for Mirani for his time and input into the inquiry. It was very valuable. I would also like to thank the parliamentary secretariat for their support working through about 17,000 pages of material related to this inquiry. It was a huge and heavy workload for Rob Hansen, Paul Douglas and Colette Carey.

This inquiry was a very emotional issue for veterinarians and horse owners. Horse owners not only make a financial commitment to their animals; they also have an emotional commitment, as anyone would with a loved pet. The committee considered the development of trials and the approval process for the Hendra vaccine; the incidence and impact of adverse reactions in horses following vaccinations; the reporting of adverse reactions; the economic impacts of the vaccine; and the guidelines for veterinarians attending horses that are not vaccinated against HeV.

The committee found that there was a loss of trust between some horse owners and their veterinarians. Given the vaccine is new, horse owners were blaming any adverse medical condition experienced by a horse after the vaccination on the vaccination. This happened even months after the vaccination was given. Veterinarians, on the other hand, must keep themselves and their assistants safe from a virus that is fatal to humans when treating horses that are not vaccinated. There needs to be a safe workplace for all based on scientific grounds, not on emotion.

The committee has made 11 recommendations and, importantly, recommendation No. 9 is that the vaccination not be made mandatory. There are many horses in the regions, and the committee has made a recommendation that the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries investigate the feasibility of a Hendra virus exclusion test capability in Townsville or Cairns to process samples from North Queensland more quickly than sending samples to Brisbane for analysis. This is important because the virus spreads quickly.

We also came across a lot of farmers out in the field who were giving vaccinations to their horses themselves. Recommendation 3 is that temperature indicators for vaccinations could be put on the packs so that the farmers know whether the vaccination is actually kept at the right temperature and they are giving a horse a vaccination that is still valid. We believe that all of the different manuals out there that are used as guidelines for this virus and other viruses for horses need to be collated so that there is a one-stop shop for veterinarians and farmers to go to in order to get the right information to keep their animals safe.

At the end of the day, the most important thing for horses and for the vets is workplace health and safety. We need to make sure that vets are kept safe and that they keep their assistants safe. We hope that the recommendations in this report are considered and that this is the beginning of mending that rift between horse owners and their veterinarians. I commend the report to the House.