

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**  
**No. 1556**  
**Asked on Thursday, 30 November 2006**

**MR HORAN** asked the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries (MR MULHERIN)-

**QUESTION:**

With reference to the outbreak of the Hendra Virus in Northern New South Wales, together with the failure of the department's Hendra Virus notification system as shown in the independent review of an equine case of Hendra Virus infection at Peachester and, in particular, the suspected Hendra Virus case following the report—

- (1) What changes has he made to restore public confidence and safety in the Queensland reporting system?
- (2) What procedures does he have in place to have adequate numbers of veterinary surgeons on duty and on call throughout the summer holiday period?

**ANSWER:**

The independent review of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F) response to the Peachester Hendra virus case does not reveal any significant failure of the DPI&F emergency response system. Extracts from that review are included below:

*"The actions of DPI&F staff in responding to the concerns of the private veterinary practitioner have been found to be in accordance with information provided in the Hendra virus guidelines including compliance with relevant workplace health and safety obligations."*

*"DPI&F staff were found to have reacted appropriately and responsively to the concerns raised by the private veterinary practitioner. The efforts of staff from DPI&F and from Australian Animal Health Laboratory in responding to the concerns of the private veterinary practitioner over possible exposure of the private veterinary practitioner and owner to infectious material by initiating urgent testing of samples and in attempting to resolve the Hendra status of the case as quickly as possible, are to be commended."*

*"There is little evidence to support any claims by the private veterinary practitioner concerning difficulties in contacting appropriate authorities through the Animal Disease Watch Hotline (1800 675 888), a number that is also answered by operators within the DPI&F call centre. There were 3 unsuccessful calls made to this number from the Peachester exchange and all were made on Thursday 15 June. These three calls are considered likely to have been made by the private veterinary practitioner. There were no calls to the Animal Disease Watch Hotline on Wednesday 14 June 2006 from any phone number originating in Queensland."*

In regard to your specific questions:

- (1) DPI&F has an ongoing public awareness program to ensure members of the public are aware of emergency disease reporting procedures. A minor change was made to the DPI&F business information centre procedures following the Peachester incident to ensure that disease hotline calls are immediately placed at the top of the call queue.

It is important that people use this system so that all disease emergencies are reported. A lack of reporting could have drastic outcomes for primary producers due to late disease notification and lead to diseases, such as foot and mouth disease, being far more widespread and difficult to eradicate than they would have been if reported earlier.

- (2) The same response procedures will be in place over the summer holiday period as are in place for the rest of the year. These procedures were outlined in my response to Question on Notice No. 1311 asked by you on 31 October 2006. DPI&F maintains a comprehensive after hours list of veterinarians so that priority calls can be attended to.