

From: LNP Media [LNP.Media@opposition.qld.gov.au]
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Member for Hinchinbrook

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Hendra response a long-term Labor disaster

THE Bligh Labor government had let down Queensland horse owners and equine industries by failing to develop sound responses to Hendra outbreaks, the LNP said today.

LNP Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Food and Regional Queensland Andrew Cripps said the State Ombudsman had found serious long-term deficiencies in Labor's Hendra virus responses – from policies, to response coordination across departments and with local vets, to communicating the health risks to the public.

Mr Cripps said the tired, 20-year Labor government had failed in so many key areas.

"The State Ombudsman has found deficiency after deficiency with Labor's Hendra response," Mr Cripps said.

"The executive summary is particularly damning – stating the investigation into the Hendra outbreak at Redlands was inadequate, there was a lack of coordination between key government agencies and private vets and the public about the serious risk of human infection."

Mr Cripps said Labor's long-time Agriculture Minister Tim Mulherin had some serious answering to do.

"We need to hear from Tim Mulherin exactly how and when he intends to implement the recommendations from the Ombudsman, especially those improve response procedures.

"The Ombudsman has investigated all the Hendra responses and procedures back to 2006.

"It's clear that the government has failed to learn much in the past five years and has failed, in the Ombudsman's words, to finalise policies and procedures to guide its officers in their responses to future incidents.

"It's hardly a surprise the Ombudsman found departmental staff were worried about the level of training and procedures, given the way that Labor and Tim Mulherin have cut professional staff and resources to the former Department of Primary Industries that is the lead response agency through Biosecurity Queensland."

"The Ombudsman also found the government's record-keeping was poor – and that key decisions taken by senior staff were not supported by adequate records and that important records were not properly managed or stored.

"That finding alone should be ringing very loud alarm bells across government and across the equine industry, not just in Queensland but across the nation."

Mr Cripps said the Minister also needed to answer the Ombudsman's criticism that ex gratia payments totalling \$220,000 were made without adequate reason or records.

"The LNP will restore accountability to government in Queensland," Mr Cripps said.

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