



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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HENDRA VIRUS

 **Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (11.47 am): While a vaccine for the Hendra virus is being developed at the CSIRO's Australian Animal Health Laboratory, Queensland is dealing with a serious animal and public health issue as we speak. Indeed, the outbreak of Hendra virus at several locations across the state simultaneously is unprecedented. Yet since it became clear that the current outbreak of Hendra virus cases was not following the previous pattern of being contained to a particular geographic area, we have seen no effective policy responses from the Bligh government to tackle this new challenge. The community has come to realise that the Bligh government has no real understanding of the seriousness of the animal and public health risks of the Hendra virus situation unfolding across the state.

Biosecurity Queensland does not have the resources to effectively respond to all of the confirmed Hendra virus outbreaks dispersed across Queensland. As a result, private vets have found themselves on the front line responding to suspected new cases and taking the risks associated with that work. The Australian Veterinary Association recently called on the federal and state governments to reimburse vets the cost of personal protective equipment required to safely respond to suspected cases of Hendra virus, and I table that media release.

Tabled paper: Media release, dated 8 July 2011, from the Australian Veterinary Association titled 'Vets need proper protection from Hendra virus' [\[4965\]](#).

The AVA estimates that a national scheme would cost \$500,000 a year and would ensure there are professionals with the capacity to respond to suspected cases of Hendra virus across the state. In view of the anxious circumstances of many communities across the state and the increasing animal and public health challenges involved, common sense suggests this would be useful. Not the Bligh government! It has repeatedly refused to support private vets, rudely and ignorantly dismissing the AVA's plan simply as an expense incurred by vets as a commercial cost of doing business.

The protective suits needed to stop the risk of cross-infection are not used every day and with the community relying so much on private vets to deal with the current Hendra virus cases it is unbelievable that the Bligh government has its head in the sand. The LNP supports the AVA's proposal for vets to be reimbursed \$250 for each horse tested for the Hendra virus to cover the cost of testing and personal protective equipment. In view of the massive amounts of money wasted by the Beattie and Bligh governments, this is a small price to pay for ongoing professional surveillance of the Hendra virus across the state in response to what is a serious animal and public health issue.

Before the current unprecedented circumstances, the difficulties with the management of flying fox colonies has more commonly been associated with the bats roosting in urban areas and causing extensive damage to horticultural crops. In September 2008 the Bligh government ceased issuing damage mitigation permits involving lethal deterrents for controlling flying foxes. As a result, any deterrent currently used for crop protection purposes must be nonlethal. These deterrents are often ineffective and extremely costly.

DERM's fact sheet on non-lethal damage mitigation states that the most effective method of crop protection from flying foxes is netting. Nets also exclude birds and may protect against insect pests and hail damage. The costs of netting can be offset by improvements in fruit quality and yield and shorter

sorting and packing times. The Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority will accept applications for low-interest loans from growers who want to install exclusion netting for the control of flying foxes.

While farmers who have erected netting do report productivity gains against not only damage from flying foxes but also birds such as lorikeets and parrots, erecting netting is very expensive. While the capital cost must be considered over the life of the nets, a further complicating factor is that netting can be badly damaged by severe storms, hail and cyclones and some growers have found it difficult to secure insurance for the nets when they are damaged. As such, netting is not a practical choice for all farmers.

An LNP government is committed to working with peak agricultural industry groups to make farmers aware of the availability of low-interest loans as a long-term, sustainable solution to mitigating flying fox damage and increasing productivity. An LNP government will continue to make those loans available through QRAA. An LNP government will encourage farmers to use nets and other non-lethal methods of deterring flying foxes to protect their crops. However, in recognition that many farmers simply cannot take on any more debt, even at low interest rates, and that netting and other non-lethal deterrents will not work in all situations, an LNP government will reintroduce damage mitigation permits to farmers to use lethal deterrents where non-lethal deterrents have failed. The LNP is committed to supporting the agricultural sector and protecting jobs in regional communities.