



## MEDIA RELEASE

### Queensland Ombudsman releases report on Hendra virus

Thursday 3 November 2011  
For immediate release

Queensland Ombudsman Phil Clarke today released his report into the handling of Hendra virus incidents in Queensland from 2006 to 2009.

The *Hendra Virus Report* details systemic failures across several government agencies, including:

- outdated and inconsistent policies and procedures
- dated and overlapping legislation addressing similar issues which lead to inconsistent quarantine practices
- inadequate communication with vets and horse owners
- inadequate frameworks for ex gratia payments and compensation
- failure to implement recommendations contained in previous internal and external reviews
- inadequate training and resources for agency staff, contractors and property owners
- inadequate records of decisions.

State government agencies have important roles in responding to Hendra virus incidents, including:

- managing biosecurity risks
- controlling diseases in stock, including horses
- regulating public health concerns
- regulating the safe disposal of potentially harmful material
- managing workplace health and safety issues
- communicating with vets, horse owners and members of the public.

The investigation primarily focused on the administrative actions of Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries, and to a lesser extent, Queensland Health and Workplace Health and Safety Queensland.



The report details an exhaustive two-year investigation into the handling of six Hendra virus incidents between 2006 and 2009. In 2010-2011, a further 11 Hendra virus incidents were detected in Queensland. This report does not consider the later incidents in any detail as the Ombudsman's investigation had already provided sufficient evidence for this report.

The Ombudsman's investigation involved more than 50 interviews with senior government officers, private veterinarians and people affected by Hendra virus incidents. The investigation also examined thousands of pages of internal government documents and emails, consulted scientific experts and conducted site visits.

Mr Clarke made 74 recommendations, some of which were designed to rectify "systemic failures".

"I found evidence that systemic failures hampered the way government agencies responded to Hendra virus incidents," he said.

"The lessons from this investigation will help government agencies respond more effectively in future. My recommendations are designed to improve the way the public sector manages Hendra incidents and other significant biosecurity threats.

"An important part of my role is to help public agencies improve their administrative practices. This investigation revealed numerous systemic issues that have application beyond the response to the Hendra virus."

The agencies concerned have already made significant progress, as demonstrated by improved communication and coordination during the most recent Hendra virus incidents. However Mr Clarke said there was still room for significant improvement.

"While much work has been done by the agencies concerned and the response systems are rapidly maturing, more needs to be done as a matter of priority before the next Hendra incident," he said.

"We need an effective, timely and coordinated approach to the management of Hendra virus in Queensland. Full implementation of my recommendations will aid that process."

The Queensland Ombudsman is an independent officer of the Parliament and is not answerable to the government of the day.

The Ombudsman ensures public agencies make fair and balanced decisions for Queenslanders by investigating complaints and conducting own-initiative investigations to tackle broader, systemic concerns.

The Ombudsman has jurisdiction over state government agencies, local councils and universities.



However, under the Ombudsman Act, the Ombudsman has no jurisdiction to investigate or express any opinions in relation to any decision or action of government Ministers, private veterinarians or private industry bodies.

The Hendra Virus Report has been tabled by the Speaker and is available at:  
<http://www.ombudsman.qld.gov.au/>

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