



## VICHANSARD

### Whole Speech (Daily Hansard - Proof Version Only)

Title **Responses**  
House **ASSEMBLY**  
Activity **Adjournment**  
Members **BATCHELOR**  
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### Responses

[Mr HELPER \(Minister for Agriculture\)](#) -- I thank the member for Benalla for raising the issue of support for shows and other non-racing sectors of the horse industry affected by the [equine influenza](#) (EI) outbreak in New South Wales and Queensland. The first thing I wish to stress to the house is that of course Victoria does not have [equine influenza](#) in this state. In saying that I do not want to report the bleeding obvious, but I do want to take the opportunity to actually thank a lot of people who have made our risk exposure to EI much less than in this state than it would be otherwise.

Firstly, if I may take this opportunity to thank officers of my department, the Department of Primary

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Industries, for their incredibly hard work. The department is headed by the chief veterinary officer who, immediately after the outbreak was reported in New South Wales, set up a control team to put in place a movement lockdown of horses in this state and the biosecurity measures that really go to reducing the risk of an EI outbreak in Victoria.

The issue that the member for Benalla raised was that of shows and other non-racing horse sectors suffering significant inconvenience, loss of opportunity and suffering as a consequence of the EI outbreak. I am sure the member for Benalla would join me in applauding the efforts of each and every one of those organisations in voluntarily restricting and reducing movement and following on a whole very worthwhile biosecurity measures.

I certainly take every opportunity that I can to recognise the magnificent contribution that the racing industry has made in this state to reducing the risk of an EI outbreak, but also the unfortunately less publicly acknowledged contribution made by the recreational horse sector -- the myriad of non-racing horse sectors that we have in this state.

The member for Benalla raises the issue of the cut-off point for the support package that the state has put in place, which amounts to a funding commitment of \$500 000 out of a \$2.2 million package that we announced for increased border security as well as support to non-racing voluntary horse organisations. He wishes that cut-off time of 31 October for events to be eligible to be supported under this package to be drawn out. I know the member for Benalla understands that there has to be a line somewhere that poses a cut-off point. The government certainly thought that 31 October was a practical cut-off point.

I understand that the Benalla show, as reported by the member for Benalla, suffered a 30 per cent to 40 per cent reduction in attendances as a consequence of choosing not to hold horse events, and I applaud their choice in doing so. Over the weekend, on Saturday, I attended the Stawell show and on Sunday I attended the Ararat show. I think it is fair to say that both of those shows made gallant efforts at overcoming the lack of horse events at their shows. I think it is fair to say that their

patronage would have suffered as a consequence. I do not think I would quantify it as being 30 per cent to 40 per cent, but that will vary from area to area.

In response to the issue raised by the member for Benalla, I will certainly consider it, and I appreciate that he recognises that somewhere along the line there has to be a cut-off point to any particular funding arrangement put in place.

I am sure I am joined by every member in this house when again I applaud the efforts not only of the racing sector but very much of the non-racing sector also in playing a constructive role in reducing the risk of an [equine influenza](#) outbreak in this state.

I turn to the issue raised by the member for Brunswick, who sought the Brumby government's ongoing support for the initiatives announced in the Time to Thrive statement concerning the small business sector in Victoria. I assure him that the Time to Thrive initiative is meeting and exceeding many of its milestones and will continue to receive strong support from the Brumby government. The Time to Thrive statement was a directional support document for the 470 000 small businesses in Victoria. Those small businesses play an incredibly important role, not only in Victoria's economy but in Victoria's community life.

A number of initiatives that were highlighted by the member for Brunswick were the new workforce skills assistance. This service is about free workforce planning advice and training assistance grants being available for businesses to tackle their skills shortages.

A second initiative under the Time to Thrive statement is the hugely successful Energise Enterprise small business festival. I came into the small business portfolio in August, and August is the month of the Energise Enterprise small business festival. As a very new minister I had the opportunity to familiarise myself with this vibrant sector through this very vibrant festival.

There were many events held -- some 370 events -- and some 26 000 people attended. The pleasing thing, with my rural and regional background, was that almost half the number there came from outside of Melbourne, so I am also very pleased with the regional engagement of the Energise Enterprise festival.

There have been more management workshops. There have been some 200 Under New Management workshops and seminars, and that is indeed above the 130 workshops that were anticipated in the Time to Thrive statement. That is clearly exceeding the target that the statement put down, and it shows the highly successful engagement between the state government and the small business sector and the support that we lend to each other.

In terms of the less-red-tape initiative that the member for Brunswick referred to, there has indeed been a database established of businesses that are willing to be consulted about regulatory changes. This has been created to cut red tape and to inform government on where regulatory efficiencies can be gained,

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particularly from the perspective of small business. I am sure every member in this house would welcome that initiative also.

The final program that the member for Brunswick referred to is the expanded Small Business Mentoring Service. I encourage all members of this house to become aware of the Small Business Mentoring Service. It is an absolutely fantastic service where people who are, on the whole, retired from a business life with varying expertise make themselves available at cost price to small businesses to run through all of those issues that from time to time face small businesses and to mentor them through the issues that are associated with growth and prosperity for small businesses as well as to mentor them through the very difficult times that may at some stage result in advice being offered by the mentor to the small business person that their business may not necessarily be all that viable in the long term and options are being provided for how to move forward from there.

It is a service that I take every opportunity to promote around the state, because it is just an absolute monte for providing a fantastic facility for small business operators to look over the

horizon, to look at their business in an objective manner and to see where the opportunities lie in the future.

In conclusion, I welcome the support of the member for Brunswick for the Time to Thrive statement, I welcome the support of the member for Brunswick for small business in his electorate and indeed small business throughout the state, and I assure him that the ongoing support for a number of specific initiatives that he raised under the Time to Thrive statement is an ongoing priority for the Brumby government.