

The Hon. Tony Burke MP
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Opposition misleading farmers on foot and mouth disease

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The Opposition is deliberately misleading farmers and running a scare campaign on foot and mouth disease, despite being fully aware of the Government's position, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Tony Burke said today.

Mr Burke said he had made it clear, ever since the Beale Report into Australia's biosecurity system was released, that the Government would only consider importing the live virus if an outbreak had already occurred.

"We all hope that such an event never happens," Mr Burke said.

"But if an outbreak did occur, I would ask one question and one question alone: based on the best available science, what would be the most effective way to eradicate the disease?"

"If we were advised at the time that there was no need to use an imported live virus for an eradication program, then we wouldn't permit it to be imported.

"However, if we were advised that we could more effectively eradicate the disease through the importation of a pure live virus to a laboratory, then we could consider the option.

"Members of the Opposition know full well that the Government has said these are the only circumstances in which we would consider importing the live virus samples.

"It is extraordinary that the National Party is campaigning for a half-hearted eradication program to be implemented, if an outbreak of foot and mouth disease were to occur.

"However, the Government believes in consulting with the experts in the terrible event that an outbreak occurs and taking whatever steps are necessary to get rid of the disease as quickly as possible."