



Hon John McVeigh MP
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Reference: 08567/12

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Mr Neil Laurie
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Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to petition numbers 1985-12 and 2004-12 lodged with the Legislative Assembly on 30 and 31 October 2012 concerning the closure of the Tropical and Aquatic Animal Health Laboratory.

The Queensland Government's decision to consolidate the Tropical and Aquatic Animal Health Laboratory at Oonoonba to the veterinary laboratory facilities at Coopers Plains was a difficult but necessary one.

The former Government had set in train a process by which the Oonoonba laboratory was to be closed in order to accommodate residential development under the former Government's Urban Land Development Authority (ULDA). Unfortunately, the commitment to James Cook University (JCU) to establish a new laboratory at its Townsville campus was not fully funded. Funds for the new facility were not a component of any Smart State Initiative but were based on the need to sell other properties. Some of these remain unsold. Consequently, as the incoming Government, we were left with the planned closure of the old laboratory and insufficient resources with which to establish a new one.

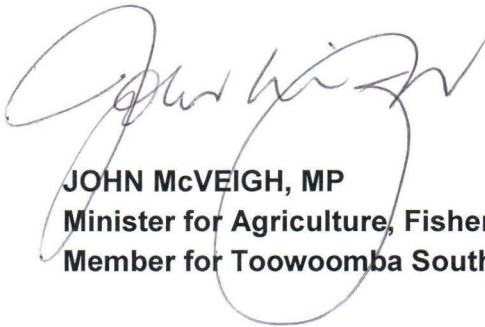
The Queensland Government recognises the value of the Queensland agriculture and aquaculture industries to North Queensland and the State and this decision will not pose any additional risks to industry. Diagnostic services will be consolidated at the state-of-the-art facilities at Coopers Plains in Brisbane.

The decision regarding the veterinary diagnostic laboratory will not affect the provision of other biosecurity services in North Queensland. Operational staff will remain in place and will continue to address issues such as Hendra virus. This decision simply means diagnostic testing will be done in Brisbane as is currently the case for many diseases including Hendra virus.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) is also currently finalising options to maintain aquatic animal services, including field staff to continue to provide on-property services, to industry.

DAFF is dedicated to achieving the Queensland Government's goal of doubling Queensland's food production by 2040. However, under the current fiscal constraints, it is essential that we rethink the way we deliver our services in order to make best use of the resources available to us.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John McVeigh', written over a large, faint circular watermark or stamp.

JOHN McVEIGH, MP
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Member for Toowoomba South