

**SENATOR SUSAN MCDONALD**

**LNP SENATOR FOR QUEENSLAND, SHADOW MINISTER FOR NORTHERN AUSTRALIA, SHADOW MINISTER FOR RESOURCES**

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**What we wish we had done to combat Foot and Mouth threat**

Shadow Minister for Northern Australia, Senator Susan McDonald has suggested suspending flights from Bali should be considered, saying an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Australia would unleash a crisis of “biblical proportions”.

Senator McDonald said a Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) incursion would at the very least cost the nation billions of dollars in management and eradication, not to mention the destruction of cattle, sheep, goats and pigs at a time when food security is a critical issue in the world.

The identification of FMD in Australia would have catastrophic impacts on Australia’s ability to export high value products into premium markets and would mean devastating financial pain in the agricultural and value-add industry.

Senator McDonald said it was not clear that the Federal Government and industry had responded quickly enough and adequately to an outbreak of foot-and-mouth in Bali, and believes suspending Bali flights should be investigated.

“We saw a swift closing of borders with Covid, and I believe similar measures should be discussed for foot-and-mouth, and if not flight suspensions, then quarantine for returning passengers,” she said.

“Some people will say this is an overreaction and will adversely affect the Indonesian economy, but the devastation of a foot-and-mouth outbreak in Australia would be widespread to not just producers but consumers and taxpayers as well. It is truly difficult to comprehend how bad this would be which is why it is critical that we do not allow FMD into Australia.

“Australian tourists in Bali are walking through cow dung and bringing soiled shoes and suitcase wheels back home but anyone who flew back in the past week could already have brought the disease into Australia,” she said.

“An emergency declaration the moment Indonesian authorities raised the alarm would have been an appropriate response because infected animals could have been carriers for two weeks before showing symptoms.

“More sniffer dogs won’t find the disease on people’s shoes.

“It is disappointing that the introduction of physical measures like flyers and warning announcements on outgoing and incoming flights for people to not bring soiled items back to Australia took four days to be introduced given that we are told that biosecurity enforcement steps had been ‘war gamed in advance'.

“The impact on our near $80 billion protein and dairy herds would be indescribable - imagine mass burials of euthanised animals and years of virtually no domestically available meat, cheese and milk.  Apart from the shocking animal health outcomes, imagine also the mental health impacts for farmers having to destroy healthy animals within quarantine zones.

“This is beyond politics, this is about doing absolutely everything possible to protect a crucial industry that feeds us and the world.

“Grazing families would be forced off the land and we would all be paying exorbitant prices for sub-standard imported meat in our supermarkets and butchers.

“After talking to meat industry figures and hearing how worried they are, I believe the Federal Government should immediately canvas suspending Bali flights and consider sending biosecurity and veterinary staff to Bali to administer vaccines, help the Indonesian authorities address the outbreak and ensure the disease does not enter Australia.”

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