



## Family reels as yet another beloved pet falls victim to deadly bat virus

Andrew MacDonald

IF PROOF was needed of the devastating impact of the Hendra virus, one need look no further than the Fearon family of Mt Alford.

Neil, Liz and their two boys, aged nine and 11, were thrust in to the middle of a nightmare on July 1 when a second sick horse on the property, Magic, was found to have contracted the disease and was put down.

The other animal had died about two weeks earlier, while a third horse belonging to the Fearons was also euthanased on July 4 after also testing positive to Hendra.

At the time, Mr Fearon said it didn't get much tougher than putting down Magic, his youngest son's prize horse.

"Luckily he wasn't here because he's been away on camp but it's been tough on him and tough on me," he said at the time. "He has his moments because it was such a bond they had."

'It's been an awful thing to deal with and this has just added a whole new twist to things'

Liz Fearon

Things may get tougher yet for the Fearons after the State Government yesterday confirmed one of the family's three beloved pet dogs – a 2½-year-old kelpie named Dusty – had tested positive to Hendra antibodies in what is believed to be the first instance of the disease in a canine, outside laboratories, in the world.

The family also is facing a wait of about three weeks to learn if they are free of the disease.

Mrs Fearon last night said her primary concern was for her boys and how to break news of the loss of another beloved family pet.

"It really is difficult at the moment," she said. "It's been an awful thing to deal with and this has just added a whole new twist to things."

"To have to tell our children that this is going to happen, is really awful."

Mrs Fearon said Dusty remained on the property in isolation from the family's other pets.

**TRAGIC TIMES:** Neil Fearon (above) and his wife, Liz, at their Mount Alford property which has been hit by a new Hendra scare after the virus was found to have spread to one of the family's dogs.

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