

Ian Gaskell

Flying-Fox

Trim No.: 14/87137

4 December 2014

Flying-fox Camp Management Policy Review
PO Box A290
SYDNEY SOUTH NSW 1232

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Draft Flying-fox Camp Management Policy 2014: Consultation draft

Council appreciates the opportunity to comment on this Draft Policy. In providing this submission, Council acknowledges the complexity of this issue. Nevertheless, Council has concerns with aspects of the draft Flying-fox Camp Management Policy. While Council understands there is a need to manage the conflicts arising from urban bat colonies, Council considers the draft Policy to have an in balanced focus on the disruption to flying foxes rather than promoting sustainable management and the protection of roost sites as is promoted on OEH's webpage. Council feels that education should form a significant part of the finalised Policy.

Please, find detailed below areas of concern to Council:

1. Health_Risks

The draft Policy states "*The overriding purpose of this policy is to minimise health impacts of flying foxes on people*". However, the draft Plan fails to provide any information and/or detailed scientific analysis to determine what the health risks are.

Council understands the main health issues associated with flying fox is the transmission of lyssavirus and Hendra virus to humans. In this regard, the NSW Health webpage (accessed 24/11/2014) states:

"Flying-foxes can carry the Australian bat lyssavirus and Hendra virus; however, transmission to humans is extremely rare."

and

"Human infections with these viruses are very rare and when there is no handling or direct contact with flying foxes, there is negligible public health risk."

Likewise, the OEH webpage (accessed 24/11/2014) states:

"Australian health authorities suggest that lyssavirus, a virus similar to rabies, poses a low public health risk. Evidence suggests it can only be transmitted to humans in saliva from an infected flying-fox via a penetrating bite or scratch. Coming into contact with flying-fox urine or faeces reportedly poses no risk."

and

“There is no evidence that Hendra virus can spread directly from bats to humans. Spill-over infection from horses to humans is a very rare event”.

and

“The CSIRO has recently launched a Hendra vaccine for horses, which is now available to all horse owners in Australia and can be administered by accredited vets. The [Australian Veterinary Association](#) recommends that all horses in Australia are vaccinated against Hendra.”

According to the above webpages in Australia a combined total of seven people have died from lyssavirus and Hendra virus. In the same period of time the NSW Transport webpage confirms a total of 8431 people have been killed in NSW as a result of car accidents.

Based on the above, Council queries what health issues bats pose to humans and why the draft Policy would require land managers to conduct cost prohibitive management programs that are not underpinned by any significant health issues.

2. Legal Requirements of Developing and Implementing a Camp Management Plan

The draft Policy fails to consider the ecological setting and/or the legislative requirements that complicate and/or prevent the initiation of the Management Actions contained in the draft Policy. For instance, within Ballina Shire the main bat colonies are located within SEPP 14 listed vegetation communities and/or lowland rainforest. Lowland rainforests are afforded a level of protection pursuant to the Threatened Species Conservation Act (1995) and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999).

Council also notes that to comply with the EPBC Act (1999) the Federal Government's web page states:

“Activities that are likely to have a significant impact on a nationally threatened species need to be referred to the Australian Government to ensure they are consistent with national environment law. In regards to nationally-listed flying-fox species, this may include proposals to disperse camps, move or shift camp boundaries, or clearance of important roosting or foraging habitat.”

and

“Measures can also be implemented to deter colonies from establishing in inappropriate areas by using noise and visual methods. However, once a camp is established at a site, disturbance using noise and visual methods may result in a significant impact and may require a referral to the Australian Government.”

Based on the above information, it is likely any proposal to conduct a Level 2 and/or 3 Management Action of a roost site containing Grey-headed Flying foxes would require Council to obtain the approval of the Federal Government thus increasing the regulatory and financial impositions to Council.

Council is of the opinion the draft Policy needs to be amended to concisely identify and address these legislative limitations.

3. When is a Camp Management Plan (CMP) Required?

The language used throughout the document tends to infer that Council will be required to prepare and implement a CMP. Page 6 of the draft policy states:

“Where flying-fox camps are in close proximity to urban settlements and are causing issues through noise, odour, prevalence of flying-fox droppings, or health impacts (including mental health), proactive management of camps is recommended.”

Based on the above criteria, even with minimal health risks, the public will expect Council to develop a CMP. In reality, to overcome issues such as noise and odour Council would be required to implement Level 3 camp disturbance or dispersal plan. Council notes relocation programs are cost prohibitive, have unintended outcomes and tend to relocate conflicts elsewhere.

For instance, Roberts et al (2011) estimated the cost of dispersing the Maclean bat colony (in northern NSW) was in excess of \$400,000. To Council's knowledge the relocation program was largely unsuccessful.

The draft Policy needs to develop a criteria threshold that clearly determines when a CMP is required. Council suggests a risk based assessment should consider the ecological, legislative, financial constraints and health risks for each roost site.

4. Management Actions

Council questions the relevance and the scientific basis of some of the management actions. These issues are discussed below:

Routine Camp Management (Level 1 actions)

The legislative zoning of certain land parcels such as SEPP 14 Wetlands may prevent Council from implementing a range of the actions contained in the Policy. For instance, to clear vegetation within a SEPP14, wetland Council would be required to obtain the concurrence of the Director General via an Environmental Impact Statement.

Council also questions how understorey clearance can be seen as a management action given bats roost in the canopy. It is also considered that large commercial mowers and tractor drawn slashers that are used by Council are likely to create a major disturbance to roosting flying foxes and, as such, this action requires further attention.

Creation of buffers (Level 2 actions)

As mentioned above legislative regulations (SEPP14) and/or ecological significance of the vegetation will prevent vegetation clearance to create the nominated buffers.

The draft Policy uses the Kareela Reserve at Sutherland as a Case Study to demonstrate the success of creating buffers to flying fox roost sites. Council notes

the vegetation cleared at the reserve was primarily non endemic weed species. As previously mentioned, this is not the case in Ballina Shire LGA given our flying foxes roost in High Conservation Valued (HCV) vegetation. It is Council's view the Case Study oversimplifies issues associated with native vegetation removal.

Council also notes, conflicts at Kareela Reserve are ongoing and that Sutherland Shire Council is proposing to spend \$415,000 addressing the matter which may ultimately involve the removal of the majority of the roost site and the preparation of a Species Impact Statement (SIS). For further information, please refer to Sutherland Shire Council's Business Paper dated 1 December 2014.

Level 3 actions (Camp disturbance or dispersal)

This section of the Policy is unclear and contains conflicting information. For instance, this section of the draft Policy states:

"Camp dispersal can be a successful way to remove impacts on local communities and is supported by this policy."

However, the following text confirms;

- *it can be expensive and can have uncertain outcomes.*
- *dispersal may result in relocating the animals rather than resolving the issue. Past disturbances in Australia have sometimes failed to remove flying-foxes from the area or have resulted in flying-foxes relocating to other nearby areas where similar community impacts have occurred.*
- *disturbing flying-foxes may have an adverse impact on animal health.*
- *the cumulative impacts of flying-fox camp dispersals may negatively impact on the conservation of the species and the ecosystem services flying-foxes provide.*

In terms of success Council notes the work of Roberts and Eby (2013) which assessed flying fox dispersal actions undertaken in Australia between 1990-2013. The work concluded;

- "1. In all cases, **dispersed animals did not abandon the local area.***
- 2. In 16 of the 17 cases, **dispersals did not reduce the number of flying-foxes in a local area.***
- 3. **Dispersed animals did not move far** (in approx. 63% of cases the animals only moved <600m from the original site, contingent on the distribution of available vegetation). In 85% of cases, new camps were established nearby.*
- 4. In all cases, it was **not possible to predict where replacement camps would form.***
- 5. **Conflict was often not resolved.** In 71% of cases conflict was still being reported either at the original site or within the local area years after the initial dispersal actions.*
- 6. **Repeat dispersal actions were generally required** (all cases except extensive vegetation removal).*
- 7. The **financial costs of all dispersal attempts were high** ranging from tens of thousands of dollars for vegetation removal to hundreds of thousands for active dispersals (e.g. using noise, smoke etc)."*

These conclusions are further reinforced in the published work of Roberts *et al* (2011). Council also notes the nationally recognised Australian Bat Society, INC. does not support flying fox dispersals.

Council considers the Case Study (Albury Botanic Gardens) demonstrating that relocation is a successful management tool and may oversimplify the process of relocation given:

- flying foxes had no historical fidelity to the site
- the small population size
- the roost comprised of exotic species
- given the abundance of alternative suitable habitat nearby.

Unfortunately, these environmental parameters are absent from Ballina Council LGA.

Consequently given the above issues and the published scientific text, Council questions how camp dispersal can be defined in the draft Policy as successful? For your convenience, please find attached copies of the previously referenced scientific publications.

5. Financial Costs of the Preparation of CMPs

Council notes the costs of developing a CMP, which may include a Level 3 Action (dispersal), are cost prohibitive. For instance, Roberts and Eby (2013) identified bat dispersal costs ranging from \$28,000 to \$3 million dollars. Web based searches undertaken by Council revealed relocation programs undertaken by numerous government agencies cost in excess of \$100,000.

Council does not have the financial resources to undertake such an expensive program where the results cannot be guaranteed. It is expected Council would formally seek financial monies from the State Government to prepare and undertake any CMP required by this draft Policy.

6. Conclusion

Council is firmly of the view that any Policy that requires Council to expend significant amounts of public monies should be based on robust scientific rationale that demonstrates proposed management actions are viable and legislatively achievable long-term options. Proposed actions should also have limited impacts to biodiversity and should not simply transfer existing conflicts to adjacent residential areas. It is considered the draft Policy fails to achieve these outcomes.

If you have any queries in regard to this matter please in the first instance contact Council's Environmental Scientist on (02) 6686 1254.

Yours faithfully

Rod Willis
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