

# CLARENCE VALLEY CONSERVATION COALITION Inc.

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Flying Fox Camp Management Policy Review

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## **Submission on Flying Fox Camp Management Policy Review 2014**

The Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition Inc (CVCC) is a community group based in Grafton in the Clarence Valley. A major concern of the CVCC is the long-term viability of flying fox species because of the important ecosystem services they provide – services which are essential for the health of our native forests. The widespread loss of both foraging habitat and appropriate roosting sites for these creatures is a matter that needs to be addressed to ensure their survival.

In our Local Government Area there are a number flying fox camps including some in urban areas which have resulted in problems – particularly on the Lower Clarence in the vicinity of Maclean and the towns at the mouth of the Clarence River (Yamba and Iluka).

The CVCC makes the following points in relation to the proposed policy:

### **1. RELOCATION OF FLYING FOXES**

#### **(a) Relocating Maclean Flying-foxes**

The history of the attempts to relocate flying-foxes from the Rainforest Reserve adjacent to Maclean High School from the end of the 1990s should serve as an example of unintended consequences which occur as a result of short term ("knee-jerk") solutions. The attempted relocations led to shifting the problem from close proximity to the school up a nearby gully close to a residential area as well as to the township of Iluka 16 km north-east of Maclean.

The CVCC notes that there have been poor results in other areas where relocation has been tried. A study by Billie Roberts and others of the Maclean relocation attempts ("The outcomes and cost of relocating flying-fox camps: insights from the case of Maclean, Australia") show how difficult and uncertain this strategy is.

### **(b) Cost of Relocation**

Relocation is a costly exercise and the fact that it does not always lead to the desired result makes the expense very questionable. It is of note that the expense for such an exercise under this proposed policy would be the responsibility of the land manager, which some in local government would no doubt see as the State Government engaging in cost-shifting to local councils. (Some information on costing is provided in the Roberts' study mentioned in (a) above.)

### **(c) Maclean Flying-fox Management Strategy 2010**

Further attempts to shift the Maclean flying-foxes after 2000 led eventually to the formation of a working party with school and community representatives, including conservationists, as well as Council and Government representatives to develop a strategy for flying-fox management. This resulted in a strategy in 2010 which was never implemented - reportedly because of the opposition of the school and Department of Education and Training representatives.

In 2011 instead of proceeding with the strategy, the school applied to OEH for a licence to disturb roosting flying-foxes using noise. In objecting to the application, the CVCC stated in its letter to Gary Davey, Director North East EPRG:

We are well aware that dispersal efforts since 1999 have been a waste of time and money, and have just shifted the problem to the wider community, including the residents near Maclean Gully. We were heartened to find that this was one of the key findings of the Maclean Flying-fox Management Strategy (the Strategy), which has been endorsed by several NSW Government departments.

We were therefore disappointed that the Department of Education and Training, representatives of which endorsed the Strategy, has submitted an application to use noise once again to try and disperse flying-foxes from the vicinity of Maclean High School. We are even more disappointed and slightly puzzled as why the Office of Environment and Heritage is actually considering the application when it is clearly designed to undermine the implementation of the Strategy.

Instead of dispersal, the Strategy identifies a number of priority actions for the school, including covered walkways, air-conditioned classrooms and trimming nearby vegetation. These actions will abate the disruption caused by the bats and make dispersal unnecessary.

The Strategy considered the option of dispersal but identified this as a non-feasible option, based on past experience that most attempts of dispersal in Maclean and elsewhere in Australia have had limited success in permanently moving the flying-foxes to new sites. In the few cases where flying-foxes have moved camps, the new sites have been in unanticipated and undesirable locations.

This refusal to implement the agreed strategy was shameful on the part of the school and the DET. What a waste of time, energy and money for those who made a positive contribution to the process.

#### **(d) Relocation Examples in the Draft Management Policy**

The two examples of relocation (Sutherland and Albury) given at the end of the policy document describe events in 2014 – far too recent to be seen as successful examples of relocation. At best using these examples is disingenuous; at worst it is deceptive given the chequered record of relocation attempts.

## **2. HABITAT**

As indicated in the first paragraph of this submission, the CVCC regards appropriate habitat for flying-foxes as critical to their survival.

Obviously fly-foxes need regular, year-round food sources in native forests. Unfortunately this is not always available because of the extensive clearing of native vegetation – clearing that still continues.

And they need appropriate roosting areas in trees close to rivers. Lack of appropriate roosting habitat away from human residences/buildings is the reason that policies such as this Urban Camp Management Policy are needed.

In Maclean around 15 years have been wasted – years in which planting could have taken place to expand the roosting area possibilities away from the school and the residential area. Quite obviously this lack of foresight has occurred elsewhere. It is time that those government officers with responsibility for wildlife protection – and the politicians who are so keen on knee-jerk "quick fix" solutions – to face up for the need for some effective action on this matter. Obviously these government officers need to be properly resourced in order to undertake this. Far too often those in the environment sections of government are deprived of appropriate funding, making it very difficult for them to look after our natural heritage.

We as a species need flying-foxes – and we need to ensure that they have the habitat they need.

The CVCC endorses the adoption of a long-term objective to support habitat creation (p. 11). However, we do want to see action on this rather than just words.

## **3. PLANNING ISSUES**

Many of the current conflicts between humans and fly-foxes have resulted from poor planning decisions. The CVCC endorses the need for recognition of historic roosting sites and keeping development well away from them. (p. 11)

## **4. MONITORING**

A major issue in ensuring that the regulations made by governments are adhered to is the standard of compliance monitoring. While it is necessary to have appropriate controls for our protection and wildlife protection, an effective monitoring system is needed. How will these management plans – and in particular any relocation exercises – be monitored? What reporting will be done on their effectiveness and their cost?

## 5. A QUESTION

What happens if Level 3 is utilised and fails ? (As has already happened with Maclean High School – although it didn't try the other levels.)

Leonie Blain  
Hon Secretary  
Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition Inc

## REFERENCES

Billie J Roberts, Peggy Eby, Carla P Catterall, John Kanowski and Gillian Bennett - "The outcomes and cost of relocating flying-fox camps: insights from the case of Maclean, Australia" , pp. 277-287 in *The biology and conservation of Australian bats*, 2011.

*Maclean Flying-fox Management Strategy Final*, Geolink, 2010.