

Annual Report

**Policy and Procedural Guidelines for the Mitigation of
Commercial Crop Damage by Flying-foxes**

2008/09 Fruit Growing Season

**Department of Environment, Climate Change and
Water**

October 2009

Executive Summary and Recommendations

The following is a state-wide summary of licensing activity in 2008/09 under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* and the 'Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) policy and procedures for the mitigation of commercial crop damage by flying-foxes'.

- Licences were issued to 29 properties. In total, the 29 licences plus two variations (at one property) authorised the harm of 875 GHFFs.
- The majority of licences (63%) were issued in the Sydney North Region.
- Several regions did not issue any licences (Northern Rivers, Northern Tablelands, Hunter, Sydney and South Coast).
- Flying-fox Record Sheets (FFRS) were returned for 97% of licences (including variations) issued.
- The number of GHFFs actually harmed, estimated from Flying-fox Record Sheets is 606 animals.

1. Introduction

The Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW), has had a policy in place since 1998 with respect to mitigating the damage caused by flying-foxes to commercial fruit crops. This policy advocates full exclusion netting as the only reliable method for protecting fruit crops, but also made provision for the issue of licences under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* to permit fruit growers to harm limited numbers of flying-foxes.

Grey-headed Flying-foxes were listed by both the NSW Scientific Committee and the Commonwealth Government as a threatened species in 2001. Since that time a national working group coordinated and chaired by the Australian Government has set a national limit on the number of animals that can be culled. Under this system, NSW has a national cull limit of 3040 Grey-headed Flying-foxes per year (0.95% of the minimum population estimate).

In 2007, the Australian Government advised the states that the national approach has ceased. DECCW has undertaken to continue to issue licences for the 2008-09 season in accordance with the former cull limit, but will review its policy prior to the commencement of the 2009-2010 season.

In NSW, the Flying-fox Consultative Committee (FFCC) which comprises government, non-government, industry, science and conservation members of the community, provides advice into NSW policy with respect to licensing and recovery planning for flying-foxes.

The licensing program for flying-foxes is currently coordinated centrally by the DECCW Parks and Wildlife Group Wildlife Licensing and Management Unit (WLMU) and administered by local Area Offices. Recovery planning and policy development for the department, with respect to GHFF management and conservation, is coordinated by the DECCW Landscapes and Ecosystems Conservation Branch (LECB).

In 2009, LECB coordinated an independent review of flying fox licensing policy. Government is currently considering the recommendations of the review. Further information on the review is provided in section 6 of this report.

An annual report on licence applications and licences issued has been prepared by WLMU each year since 2001. This report includes a summary of data and a brief analysis of trends and comparison with previous years and is made available to stakeholders and the public via the DECCW internet site.

2. Licences issued for 2008-2009

A breakdown of the number of licences issued for the 2008-2009 growing season is provided in Table 1. The data shows that all of the licences issued were from DECCW Central Branch offices. Approximately 29% of the quota i.e. 875 animals allocated to NSW were licensed to be harmed in 2008-2009 and 606 GHFFs (20% of the quota) were reported killed from returned Flying-fox Record Sheets.

3. Licensing trends 2001-2008

The number of licences issued to harm flying-foxes during 2008-2009 declined from that of the previous season with reductions particularly in the Blue Mountains and Central Coast Hunter Regions (Table 2).

There was also a decline in the number of GHFFs licensed to be harmed but a small increase (90) in the number of animals reported harmed at the end of the season.

The overall trend continues to show a decline in the number of GHFFs licensed to be harmed. The number of licensees has also declined since the 2003-2004 season.

The decline in licensing is possibly due to a greater abundance of native food resources for the animals in recent years. This can be corroborated by evidence that the reproductive output of flying-foxes over the last few seasons has been stable. There may also be a change in attitude of some growers toward the effectiveness of shooting, or that some growers are choosing not to acquire a licence. In addition, reports indicate that a number of growers have left the industry.

Table 1: Summary of licensing data for the 2008-2009 growing season

PWG Branch Name	Region	Allocation of cull limits at start of 2008/09 Season	Number of licences issued	Total number GHFF licensed to be harmed	Number FFRS returned	Reported Number GHFF harmed
Northern	Northern Rivers	25	0	0	-	-
	North Coast	50	0	0	-	-
	Hunter/Mid-North Coast	132	2	?*	2	16
Central	Central Coast Hunter Range	350	2	100	2	71
	Sydney North	900	17	410	17	269
	Sydney	25	0	0	-	-
	Sydney South	700	7+2 Variations	360	7+2 Variations	250
	Blue Mountains	250	1	5	0	0
Southern	South Coast	0	0	0	-	-
Western	Upper Darling Region	0	0	0)	0	0
TOTAL			29 + 2 Variations	875 GHFFs	30	606 GHFFs

* Data not provided by Area office

Table 2: Trends in Grey-headed Flying-fox licensing from 2001/02-2008/09 showing the number of licences issued each season with the number of GHFFs identified in brackets.

PWD Branch	Region	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Northern	Northern Rivers	5 (250)	5 (205)	2 (15)	1 (12)	0	0	0	0
	North Coast	1 (10)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Hunter	0	0	1 (30)	0	0	0	0	2 (0)*
	Northern Tablelands	2 (55)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Central	Central Coast Hunter Range	10 (616)	11 (900)	12 (923)	3 (150)	4 (200)	3 (150)	5 (215) 120	2 (100) 71
	Sydney North	22 (590)	26 (828)	25 (850)	13 (435)	16 (535)	11 (300)	14 (320) 177	17 (410) 269
	Sydney	1 (21)	1 (35)	1 (20)	0	0	1 (?)	0	0 0
	Sydney South	4 (155)	9 (380)	7 (389)	6 (195)	18 (555)	9 (630)	6 (210) 97	7+ 2 (360) 250
South	Blue Mountains	7 (115)	9 (107)	6 (121)	4 (60)	3 (30)	8 (75)	8 (138) 122	1 (5) 0
	South Coast	1 (20)	1 (20)	1 (20)	0	0	0	0 0	
TOTAL		54 (1852)	62 (2358)	53 (2331)	27 (852)	41 (1320)	32 (1155)	33 (883)	29 + 2 Variations (875)

* Data not provided by Area office

6. Review of Flying fox Licensing

In June 2008 the then Minister for Climate Change and the Environment gave a commitment that DECCW would undertake a review of the NSW licensing system prior to the 2009/10 fruit-growing season.

DECCW convened an independent panel to conduct the review. The review terms of reference required the panel to consider whether:

- The animal welfare issues that result from shooting are acceptable legally and ethically;
- Shooting of the threatened Grey-headed Flying-fox is impacting the viability of the species;
- Shooting is effective in reducing levels of crop damage, in comparison to other available, non-lethal techniques (including full exclusion netting); and
- Industry has the capacity to solely rely on netting.

The panel comprised Dr Alice Woodhead (social and agricultural issues), Dr Len Martin (expert in flying-fox ecology and biology), Mr David O'Shannessy (RSPCA Chief Inspector and expert in animal welfare issues), and Mr Ed Biel (farmer representative).

The panel completed its deliberations and produced a final review report in May 2009.

On 11 August 2009 the NSW Government released the final report of the NSW Flying-fox Licensing Review, and announced an interim response to the report's findings. Key elements of that response are:

- The review report to provide input into the development of a new policy for the management of flying foxes;
- In the interim, licensing arrangements are to be maintained and the following measures put in place;
- The development and implementation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for licensed shooting, in consultation with orchard growers and animal welfare groups. The SOP is to be put in place during the 2009/10 fruit growing season;
- The development of targeted compliance strategies for licensed and unlicensed shooting, to be implemented during the 2009/10 fruit growing season;
- A detailed economic analysis of policy options for managing the impacts of flying foxes on orchards;
- Clarification of legal issues associated with the provisions of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*; and
- Establishment of a high level working group comprising representatives from the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) and the Department of Industry and Investment (DII), to oversee the economic analysis, legal matters, and any other outstanding issues raised in the Panel's report.