

As a veterinarian in Qld working with bats, I continue to be horrified by the stupidity of governments at all levels to endanger the public.

There are repeated attempts to convince the public that there is severe danger from bats. There are constant comments about the health risks associated with bats. This is perpetuated by the media. In the last 17 years, there has been one death from flying foxes. This coincidentally came just after the Qld government decided to remove the protections on bats and allowed lethal DMPs. Lincoln Flynn resided approximately 25 km from one of these lethal permits. The Qld government allowed this to occur during birthing season and continue to allow this to occur despite Lincoln's death. The Qld government confused the issue saying Lincoln came from Cairns but they failed to identify that he was residing in Bowen, not Cairns. Qld Health refused to comment on this.

When bats are dispersed particularly during birthing season, they are invariably driven into properties, not away, where they come in close contact with people. This does not occur if they are left to their own devices. There are no other health risks associated with bats apart from Lyssavirus. Driving flying foxes into yards increases the risk of coming in contact with the 0.5% of flying foxes that may have Lyssa. The act of dispersal under any mechanism is counterproductive and life threatening to residents. The same can be said from Hendra virus. All known cases of Hendra virus have occurred in areas where it is known that flying foxes have been interfered with. The Qld government refuses to identify where these locations are. In Qld the government and particularly the environment minister has advised communities that the government has no intention of pursuing persons who take the law into their own hands.

In Qld, dispersals also resulted in the first cases of Lyssavirus in a new species. After an aggressive dispersal in Pittsworth, 2 horses subsequently were identified with Lyssavirus nearby. This had never happened before.

Any epidemiologist will tell you that dispersals are extremely dangerous from two points of view. Firstly, a newly emerged lethal disease kills itself off as the animal dies. Forcing these animals into smaller areas of increasing population allows the disease to continue to multiply. The multiplication of disease is not an arithmetic increase, but a logarithmic increase. This means, as you destroy one colony, the chance of Lyssa increases four-fold. Secondly, as a result of the disease not dying off, the virus then has an increased chance to mutate. This is basic Epidemiology 101. In the case of Lyssavirus, should the virus mutate to a more aggressive form that can be transmitted by aerosol for example, this will result in a serious spread of disease. One only has to look at the Ebola outbreak in West Africa to see what destruction of habitat can lead to. If you don't have advisors telling you this now, you need new advisors.

So the questions I ask of you are, will you accept responsibility for another individual getting bitten and contracting Lyssavirus after a government sanctioned dispersal? Will you accept responsibility for a child contracting Hendra from an unvaccinated horse because you authorised "land holders" to continue to destroy flying fox populations? Or will you tell the NSW people the truth about flying foxes?

Regards
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