



Office of
Environment
& Heritage

Annual Report Commercial Crop Damage by Flying-foxes

Licence Summary 2014–15 and 2015–16 Fruit
Growing Seasons

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Contents

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Licensing outcomes | 1 |
| References | 2 |

Introduction

Three species of flying-fox in NSW: the grey-headed flying-fox, black flying-fox and little red flying-fox, are protected under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (NPW Act). The grey-headed flying-fox is also listed as vulnerable to extinction under *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*.

The Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) has a policy in place for the protection of commercial fruit crop damage by flying-foxes. This policy applies to all three flying-fox species found in NSW and advocates full exclusion netting as the only reliable method for protecting fruit crops.

In March 2011, the NSW Government announced it would provide financial assistance to eligible orchardists in the Sydney Basin and Central Coast regions to help with the cost of purchasing and installing flying-fox exclusion netting. This subsidy was expanded to cover the whole of NSW, in recognition that since the netting program began, unusually high numbers of flying-foxes have been damaging crops around Orange and other locations west of the Great Divide.

Shooting flying-foxes to mitigate commercial crop damage may be licensed under the NPW Act. However, based on recommendations from the independent NSW Flying-fox Licensing Review Panel (DECC 2009), general licences to 'harm' flying-fox have gradually been phased out and since July 2015 have only be issued in special circumstances.

This report provides a summary of the licences issued for the 2014–15 and 2015–16 seasons and includes the number of licences issued, the number of animals licensed to be harmed and those actually harmed, based on flying-fox return sheets provided by licensees. Note that this period covers the transition from the issuing of general licences to harm flying-foxes to issuing such licences only under 'special circumstances'.

Licensing outcomes

- Table 1 provides a summary of licences issued and the number of flying-foxes harmed during the 2014–15 and 2015–16 seasons.
- Between November 2014 and March 2016, seven licences were issued to commercial orchardists in NSW.
- Only two licences were issued during 2014–15. OEH believes the low demand for licences during this season may have been due to widespread flowering of angophora species along the east coast, which provided an adequate, alternative food source to the fruit available in orchards.
- Six licences issued during the 2014–15 and 2015–16 seasons authorised the culling of 872 grey-headed flying-fox. No other species of flying-fox were licensed for harm.
- One licence was issued to scare and deter 25 grey-headed flying-foxes rather than shoot the animals.
- The majority of licences for 2015–16 (three licences with 16 variations, or 90%), were issued by National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Hawkesbury Area.

- Information available since the 2001–02 season indicates the number of flying-foxes reported as being harmed under licence has been consistently below the number of animals authorised to be harmed each year (see Figure 1).
- OEH will continue to monitor long-term trends in the number of flying-fox harmed since the introduction of special circumstances licences.

References

DECC 2009, NSW Flying-fox Licensing Review Panel, Report to Landscapes and Ecosystems Conservation Branch, Department of Environment and Climate Change NSW, Sydney.

Table 1: Summary of licensed numbers vs reported numbers of grey-headed flying-foxes (GHFF) between 2014–16 (two growing seasons).

2014–15

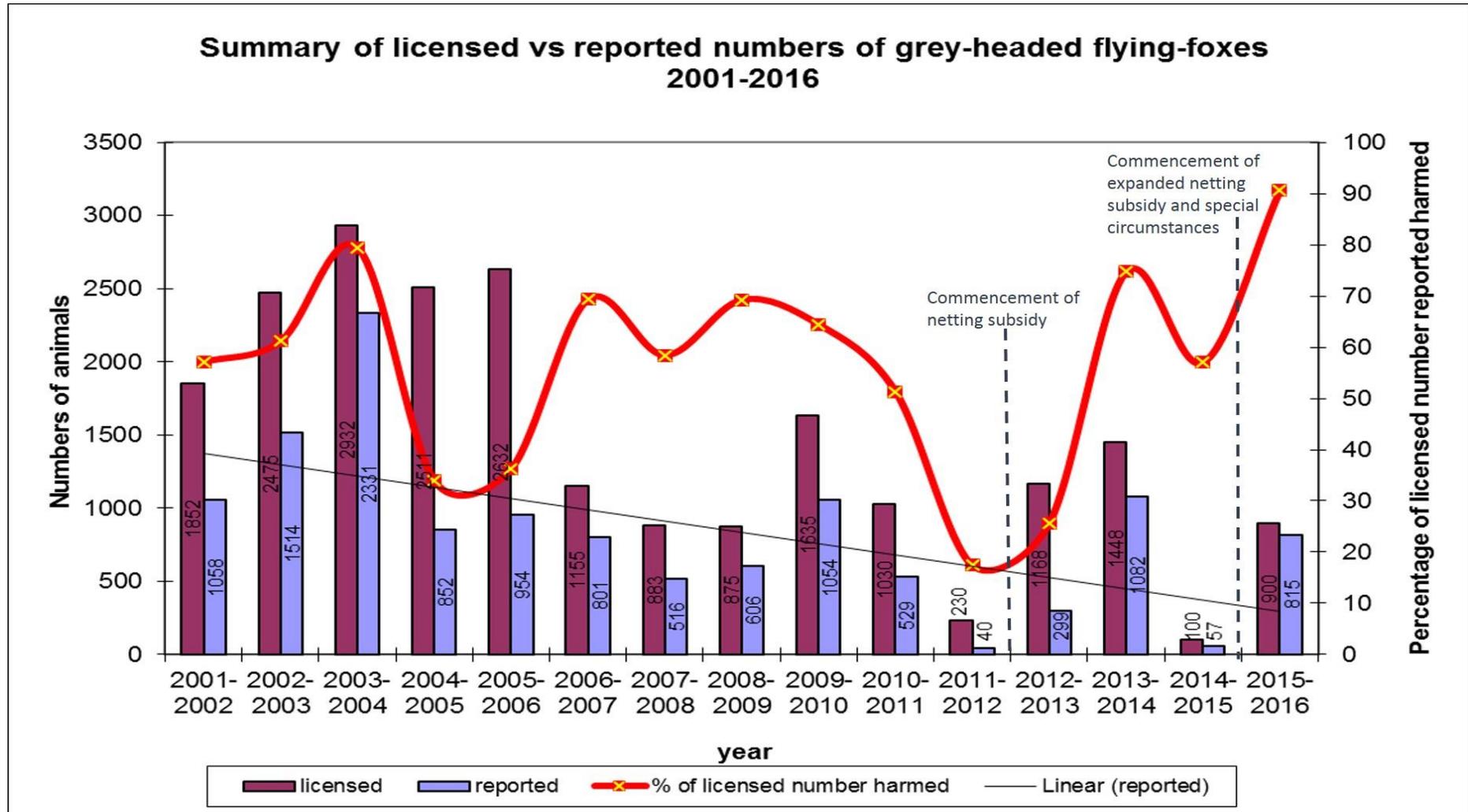
| NPWS Branch | NPWS Region | NPWS Area | Number of licences issued | Number of variations issued | Total number GHFF licensed to be harmed (culled) | Reported number GHFF culled | Number of reports returned (including variations) |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------------|---|
| Coastal | Central Coast Hunter Range | Hawkesbury North | 1 | 0 | 50 | 50 | 1 |
| Metro and Mountains | Metro North East | Valley | 1 | 0 | 50 | 7 | 1 |
| Total | | | 2 | 0 | 100 | 57 | 2 |

2015–16

| NPWS Branch | NPWS Region | NPWS Area | Number of licences issued | Number of variations issued | Total number GHFF licensed to be harmed (culled) | Reported number GHFF culled | Number of reports returned (including variations) |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------------|---|
| Coastal | Central Coast Hunter Range | Hawkesbury North | 1 | 0 | 50 | 50 | 14 |
| Metro and Mountains | Blue Mountains | Hawkesbury | 3 | 16 | 850 | 765 | 41 |
| Total | | | 4 | 16 | 900 | 815 | 55 |

The figures reported include only licences for the culling of grey-headed flying-foxes. One licence to scare and deter 25 grey-headed flying-foxes was issued in NPWS Metro and Mountains Branch, Metro South West Region, Nattai Area.

Figure 1: Summary of licensed numbers vs reported numbers of grey-headed flying-foxes years 2001–16



Note. The number harmed in any year is influenced by whether flying-fox are feeding in orchards (and therefore triggering licence applications), as opposed to there being natural food sources available. The apparent decrease in numbers harmed is not necessarily indicative of the effectiveness of the government’s flying-fox management strategies.