

Submission to the Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy into Flying fox management in the eastern states . 11th November, 2016

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I have had involvement with Flying fox management since 1996, as a wildlife carer with WIRES , a founding member of Flying fox information and consultation network (FFICN), and as a member of the Maclean Rain forest Reserve Trust during the 1996- 2001 dispersal period, and have monitored the movement of flying foxes in the Clarence area for many years. I have had an article, titled 'Contemporary issues in managing flying fox colonies camps: a publicly documented conflict from Maclean on the North Coast of NSW, published in the Royal Zoological Society of NSW 'Managing the Grey headed Flying fox as a Threatened species in NSW.'September, 2002.

In regards to your terms of reference, I shall briefly comment on the circumstances by which flying foxes are listed and delisted as a threatened species.

I am not aware of any studies which have changed the listing criteria since the original listing. The issue of fatal heat stress events, not mentioned in the original listing, has now become more of an issue, and needs to be factored into any review.

The interactions between the state and Commonwealth regulatory frameworks are inadequate, as there are no Recovery plans in either area to give a basis for comparison.

Strategic approaches to managing such a mobile species at a regional scale have not been defined or funded, so no data exists to base any decisions.

There is a huge amount of research needed if any strategies are to be scientifically valid., and will expose the species into sites less viable, leading to more population decline.

In the past, funding for such studies have not been made available, except for research into Hendra infections. David Westcott's CSIRO Grey headed Flying fox population counts have indicated that original counts were valid. Neither of these studies have carried over to camp management.

There is one aspect of flying fox management that needs to be given top priority, and that is that flying fox issues always happen in a community context, so that planning needs to be able to separate the legal issues regarding the protection of a vulnerable species from the social and political issues. There needs to be clear guidelines which define the rights of native species under the EPBA legislation, as well as the rights of the community and the State.

The second important aspect to consider is the nature of flying fox survival. They are intelligent, socially structured, mobile, long lived, have excellent memories and show a great degree of site fidelity. Camps need to be within a radius of 20 to 30 kilometers of their ever changing food source. Their camps need room to expand and contract, a reasonable amount of humidity, and protection from strong wind. So sites that have these criteria – camps of national significance – will be very difficult to move in a way that satisfies any community need for quick action.

The success or otherwise of management actions in the Maclean NSW area has been my area of involvement since 1997.

I'd like to present part of the time line of the flying fox issues at Maclean, in an attempt to illustrate the unsatisfactory consequences of poor planning. You might like to think of how this would play out in your electorate.

Maclean is one of those camps of national significance. I use the word 'is', because the disturbances begun in 1997 and formalised as dispersal in 1999, have not changed the position of the campsite in any meaningful way. The Maclean colony site has a recorded history of use since the 1800's

In 1997, Maclean Rain forest Reserve was managed by a Trust of community volunteers. There had been conflict between the local High School and the Trust, as changes in legislation had removed the usual management tools of banging metal, licensed shooting and burning fires under the colony in order to move them on.

In July 1997, construction of a \$1.3 million Food Technology block, within 3 metres of the colony, was commenced by the NSW Department of Education. The Development Application, not publicly available, had been approved the year before, during a period of high public conflict.

In June 1998 the school used a starting pistol intensively during their athletics carnival, which put flying foxes in the air for a prolonged period. This led to a very public outcry from the school's Parent and Citizen body, then to the local media.

Later that month, Harry Woods, the State Labor representative, was publicly denigrated by the State Opposition for doing nothing.

The Federal National Party rep, Ian Causley, then stepped in asking for culling.

Later in June, the students of Maclean High held a public protest meeting, with calls to Alan Jones in talk back radio, and state wide media coverage.

NSW Labor then organised a meeting between involved parties to develop a Draft Action Plan, which was to be licensed as a scientific study. Bob Carr, the NSW premier supported the plan in the local media.

July 1998, the Animal Care and Ethics Committee of NPWS rejected the dispersal plan on the grounds of animal cruelty.

November 1998, Steve Cansdell, the National Party candidate, called for a cull.

January 1999. the RSPCA took legal action on the grounds of animal cruelty, and lost. The One Nation candidate for the upcoming state election called for the Maclean Rain forest Reserve to be bulldozed.

February 1999, the Maclean Rain forest Reserve Trust was dismissed and an administrator appointed.

March 1999, the North Coast Environment Council took out an injunction on the grounds of political interference, but withdrew when legal aid was denied.

April 6th, 1999, disturbance commenced, nine days after the State election.

Some consequences of the dispersal.

- The colony moved 500 meters, to a new campsite in a timbered gully, in a residential area which it used for 3 years.
- The major dispersal actions had to be called off after a week when mothers and newly volant young became separated

- Rehabilitation of the Reserve, funded under the Draft Precinct Management plan, didn't happen
- \$16,5000 was spent of the purchase of a nearby site, to be the new campsite, but it wasn't used as a maternity camp.
- After several years, the flying foxes left the Maclean Gully area, and moved to a number of short term sites, then settled in mangroves at Iluka, 5 km from the original site. The residents were not impressed, and threatened to sue Council if they continued their Maclean dispersals.
- Currently, the Maclean flying fox colony is back near the school and the residential gully areas. A committee, the Maclean Flying fox Working group, consisting of government departments, Clarence Valley Council, community representatives, and School representatives has developed a management plan which does not involve dispersal. They have just received a government grant to plant and maintain buffer zones between the flying foxes and residents. This seems to be working well.

The sad thing about this cautionary tale is that divisions in the community are slow to heal. At the time, there were other options. There was a large area of land to the south of the camp, used by the school as an agricultural plot. It would have been much more productive to re-vegetate this area and move the colony slowly into it. It was not close to residential areas.

This was not able to be discussed because many people don't put a value on flying foxes. They resist the information about their value as a timber pollinator, producing healthy rainforest and eucalyptus forests, which in turn support native forest industries, other flora and fauna, prevent run off helping produce clean water and diminishing floods.