

Inquiry into flying-fox management in the eastern states

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Submission from South East Region Conservation Alliance (SERCA)

Before European settlement, flying foxes were able to move up and down the east coast in search of food, usually flowering eucalypts. There was continuous forest along the whole east coast. Now, after logging and clearing of forest for agriculture, sawn timber and woodchips, the forest habitat is much more fragmented, forcing the flying foxes to spend more time in longer term camps, often in urban areas or country towns.

On the NSW South Coast the Grey Headed Flying Fox ('GHFF') is a key note species. What this means is they are:

Highly significant to the health and maintenance of many ecosystems in eastern Australia. The species performs the ecosystem services of pollination and seed dispersal for a wide range of native trees, including commercially important hardwood and rainforest species. It thus contributes directly to reproduction, regeneration and the evolutionary processes of forest ecosystems.

A camp at Batemans Bay has been controversial with some residents.

Unfortunately, industrial logging of habitat (including logging of nursery areas particularly around Brooman State Forest, north of Batemans Bay) has increased pressure on more residential areas. Ceasing further logging of habitat and taking account of their needs when considering development proposals would be helpful in reducing the problems they currently cause in residential areas.

For many years now there has been a flying fox camp in the middle of Bega. The bats visit regularly, depending on when and where eucalypts are flowering in nearby forests.

The population size varies, but can be as high as 30,000 animals.

In Bega the bats have been regular long term visitors and are not controversial.

Their roost area is in trees at the lagoon adjacent to the Show Ground where horse events are regularly held. There are also residential areas in the same streets.

One of the neighbouring residents, directly opposite the main roost has been an active organiser of a monitoring program to track the number of bats and the directions in which they fly each evening in search of food.

Bega has shown that flying foxes, humans and horses can co-exist in harmony.

We are horrified that there may be a delisting of the threatened status of these animals for questionable purposes and are writing this submission very quickly, having just learned of the Parliamentary Committee inquiry and the imminent deadline

Where flying foxes are viewed as a problem it is usually because the available habitat and food source has been fragmented over years due to land clearing for agriculture and forestry.

We would like to impress upon the Committee that flying foxes are a valuable part of the far south coast ecology and perform important ecological services, particularly pollination of forest trees.

The numbers of threatened species, threatened populations and ecological communities has increased significantly since Regional Forest Agreements were signed and many threatened and endangered flora and fauna species are now at extreme risk from current logging activities. The greatest threats to Australia's biodiversity are caused by broad-scale land clearing and forestry activities, yet these industrial forestry activities continue to remain exempt from legislation: National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity (1996).

A recent report by Professor Richard Kingsford, Professor Brendan Mackey and a thirteen eminent scientists stated that:

Loss and degradation of habitat is the largest single threat to land species, including 80 percent of threatened species.¹

The result of these activities is reflected in numbers of threatened and endangered species rising in line with the increase in forests logged.

We would be pleased to expand on any matters if the Committee wished to have more information.

¹ R T Kingsford et al, "Major Conservation Policy Issues for Biodiversity in Oceania" (2009) 23(4) *Conservation Biology* 834 <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1523-1739.2009.01287.x/abstract>>.