

Living with flying-foxes



Simon Tedder/DPIE

Flying-foxes are increasingly roosting in camps near towns which can cause residents some concern about the impacts of flying-foxes on their day-to-day lives.

Communities may be impacted by noise, odour and flying-fox droppings. These issues can be addressed by effective camp management actions and working with impacted communities.

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Management approach

Councils need an effective long-term management approach for their communities to be able to live with flying-foxes.

An effective plan for managing flying-foxes can help councils to:

- be prepared for new flying-fox camps or increase in size of existing camps

- meet State and Federal legislative requirements
- fulfil its duty of care for community members considering the possible stress and anxiety from long-term exposure to flying-fox impacts
- develop better relationships with the community
- identify and mitigate possible costly and time-consuming issues
- manage potential financial impact
- manage flying-foxes just as Council manages disaster preparedness.

Flying-foxes provide important services to our environment by traveling across large areas of Australia, feeding on native blossoms and fruits, and in turn, spreading seeds and pollinating native plants. However, they can also generate high levels of emotion for residents living near their camps.

Camps can vary in size and occupancy, with some occupied on a once-off basis for short periods of time and some on a cyclic pattern, while others may be permanently occupied. The number of flying-foxes present varies according to local food abundance at the time.

Disease risks explained

Residents may associate living near flying-foxes with risks of diseases. However, it is rare for humans to be infected with viruses borne by flying-foxes.

- **Australian bat lyssavirus** can only be spread to humans if they are bitten or scratched by an infected flying-fox. There is negligible risk if people don't handle flying-foxes and post exposure treatment is effective if undertaken quickly.
- **Hendra virus** can only be transmitted to humans from an infected horse, not directly from flying-foxes.
- **Coronavirus (COVID-19)** has not been found in flying-foxes.

Legal framework

Flying-foxes are protected in New South Wales by the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. The grey-headed flying-fox is listed as a threatened species under this Act because numbers have rapidly declined in a relatively short time.

The Flying-fox Camp Management Policy 2015 empowers land managers, primarily local councils, to work with their communities to manage flying-fox camps effectively. The main purpose of this policy is to minimise





health and lifestyle impacts of flying-fox camps on people, while at the same time, avoiding unnecessary harm to flying-foxes. In particular, the policy strongly encourages managers to prepare management plans for sites where the local community is affected.

Management actions in flying-fox camps may require a licence under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. Alternatively, councils may undertake management actions in accordance with the *Flying-fox Camp Management Code of Practice 2018*.

Advice for councillors

There are ways for council to legally and effectively manage conflict between humans and flying-foxes:

- undertake flying-fox camp management planning in consultation with affected communities
- conserve and restore habitat in low conflict areas as a long-term solution
- develop buffer zones between the camp and surrounding homes to help reduce impacts on residents
- support residents with subsidised services and equipment to reduce the impacts of living with flying-foxes.

Councillors should also be aware that:

- attempts to disperse flying-fox camps are very costly, require ongoing commitment and maintenance, are often not successful and rarely result in desirable outcomes for all stakeholders
- local planning and development decisions may affect flying-fox roosting and feeding areas
- local management approaches may impact on neighbouring councils.

Advice for planners

Local planning and development decisions may have impacts on flying-fox roosting and feeding areas. Council planners are encouraged to consider these impacts in their work.

For example, planning new housing developments near existing flying-fox camps can lead to undesirable impacts on new residents and flying-foxes.

Depending on local conditions, residents and businesses within 300 metres of a flying-fox camp may at times experience impacts such as noise, smell and droppings.

Residents can be encouraged to reduce the impacts of flying-foxes on their own properties by:

- protecting outdoor areas from droppings by installing a carport, swimming pool cover, shade cloth, marquee or pergola
- cleaning off droppings using high-pressure water cleaners
- reducing noise and odour by double-glazing windows and installing air conditioners
- removing non-native vegetation that is a food source for flying-foxes such as cocos palms.

Advice for council communication staff

Community engagement and education will be integral to council's response to flying-fox issues.

Early and effective community engagement and education have benefits for both communities and councils. These benefits include:

- improving understanding of the behaviour of flying-foxes and the ecological role they play
- demonstrating that council is taking action
- ensuring that management actions are acceptable to council and the community.

A flying-fox camp communication strategy should include the following aims:

- ensuring your community has up-to-date information about flying-foxes including health risks, camp dynamics and camp management decisions and activities
- recognising and respecting the difficulties for communities associated with flying-foxes and their camps
- ensuring that all your community's views about flying-foxes and their camp are heard and respected
- giving your community varied opportunities to learn more about the camp and to give feedback
- working with your community to devise possible solutions.

Resources

The NSW Government and partner organisations have developed some resources to help councils manage flying-fox impacts on their communities.

For guidance developing a flying-fox management plan, see the:

- NSW Flying-fox Camp Management Policy
- NSW Flying-fox Camp Management Plan template

- Camp habitat predictive model
- National Flying-fox Monitoring viewer.

For guidance on management actions, see:

- camp management case studies
- reviews of past interventions:
 - community subsidies for products and services
 - camp dispersals.

For advice on engaging with the community, see the:

- Community Engagement Framework Guide
- Media Kit for Flying-fox Matters
- Questions and Answers Kit for Flying-fox Matters
- Social Media Kit for Flying-fox Matters
- Little Aussie Battlers website at www.littleaussiebat.com.au.

For more information and access to these resources, visit our Flying-fox management webpage at www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/wildlife-management/management-flying-foxes

Photos page 3 left to right: Little Red Flying-fox, Matthew Mo/DPIE. Grey headed flying fox, Rosie Nicolai/DPIE. Black Flying-fox, Matthew Mo/DPIE.

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