



AUSTRALASIAN BAT SOCIETY, INC.

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MEDIA STATEMENT 11 November 2015

NSW Office of Environment and Heritage in breach of its own policy in Avalon Bat Dispersal

The Australasian Bat Society (ABS) was disappointed to learn of the actions taken by Pittwater Council last week in lopping flying-fox roost trees at Cannes Reserve in Avalon, on Sydney's Northern Beaches. Not only did these actions risk harm to threatened Grey-headed Flying-foxes, but they also damaged the canopy of a declared Endangered Ecological Community.

The NSW Flying-fox Camp Management Policy recommends against actions that cause dispersal of flying-foxes between August and May, because this compromises the welfare and survival of pregnant female bats and dependent young during those months. When Pittwater Council failed to complete the dispersal by August, an extension from OEH was requested to complete the action.

"The policy, which recommends against conducting dispersal activity between August and May was drafted by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH), so it is inappropriate that the OEH approved the extension to allow removal of roosting areas during that period. They are in breach of their own policy." said ABS President Dr Kyle Armstrong.

"As far as we know, there were no exceptional circumstances to justify this extension" he said.

We advocate that the management of urban flying-fox camps should be based on best available science and careful planning, not solely on complaints from a small number of local residents.

The Avalon dispersal was the first time the new NSW policy had been tested, and it has been found wanting.

Although the Grey-headed Flying-fox is listed as Vulnerable under Commonwealth environmental legislation, the release of guidelines for flying-fox camp management by the Commonwealth Department of the Environment means that actions like the one at Avalon do not need to be referred for assessment at a federal level. As a result, the DotE has no visibility of the actions being taken and cannot determine whether such actions meet Commonwealth requirements.

Dr Armstrong said that there is a published body of evidence showing flying-fox dispersals are unlikely to succeed, and are best thought of as an action of last resort. They are expensive, often drag on for months, and in the end, most bats do not leave the locality.

“There is also a high risk that dispersed bats may move somewhere more problematic, but many councils do not monitor adequately after a dispersal to evaluate the success or otherwise of the action” said Dr Armstrong.

The ABS acknowledges that at some flying-fox camps there are issues that need to be resolved with actions of last resort, however we believe there are alternative, more effective approaches. For example the current *draft* management plan for the Bateman’s Bay camp outlines solutions that are more satisfactory for both bats and residents, including recommending better education and support to help affected residents deal with droppings, noise and odour.

About the Australasian Bat Society, Inc.

We are a not-for-profit organisation, registered under the NSW Associations Incorporation Act 1984 through the NSW Department of Fair Trading. Our aim is to promote the conservation and study of bats in Australasia. ABS membership is wide-ranging and includes research scientists, natural resource managers, ecological consultants, educators, conservationists, students and wildlife rehabilitators. For further information please visit <http://ausbats.org.au/>

A high resolution image is available on request:

