



# AUSTRALASIAN BAT SOCIETY, INC.

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## MEDIA STATEMENT

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### **Flying-fox dispersal set to make an already difficult situation worse**

The Australasian Bat Society (ABS) acknowledges the difficult situation faced by the residents of Batemans Bay, and encourages all parties to seek a resolution that successfully minimises impacts on people while managing the welfare of our highly mobile threatened flying-foxes.

The ABS considers dispersal of flying foxes from the Water Garden in Batemans Bay to be ill-advised. With the exceptional flowering of spotted gum currently attracting vulnerable grey-headed flying-foxes to the region from across Australia's southeast, any local attempt at dispersal risks multiplying the problem by forcing flying-foxes into other people's backyards. Thus, the dispersal is likely to make an already difficult situation worse, while most flying-foxes will depart the region when the spotted gums stop flowering.

ABS president Dr Justin Welbergen says that "there is now ample evidence to show that dispersals are extremely costly and by and large unsuccessful (e.g., see [here](#)), with most resulting in the flying-foxes re-occupying their original roost soon after the dispersal activities have ceased. In those cases where flying-foxes do not return to the original roost site, they usually establish new roosts a few hundred metres away. We cannot predict where the animals may go; therefore, dispersals generally exacerbate the human-wildlife conflicts that they aim to resolve, and have negative consequences for both human and animal welfare".

The ABS believes any management actions should be based on best available scientific evidence, and should aim to minimise impacts on human communities and our native wildlife. Unfortunately, Minister Hunt, by seeking a national interest exemption and by creating a conservation agreement with the Eurobodalla Shire Council to facilitate ongoing dispersal action, does not provide a viable, evidence-based solution for the residents of the shire. In addition, these actions risk undermining the legal protection currently afforded to threatened species, and increase community antagonism towards our ecologically important flying-foxes.

Given the high costs of dispersals and the negative consequences for both human and animal welfare, the ABS consider that the best solution at present is to make funds available for immediate real-life mitigation strategies that help local residents cope with the current difficult situation. Such strategies include the provision of covers for cars and clothes lines, free hire of cleaning equipment, and engaging contractors to assist with cleaning driveways, yards, verandas, roofs and solar panels. In the medium and longer term, community wellbeing would be enhanced by proactive management that prepares roosts and

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surrounding communities for temporary influxes of flying-foxes in response to exceptional flowering events such as the one that is currently unfolding in the Eurobodalla Shire.

The ABS and others have worked tirelessly for many years to improve community attitudes towards flying-foxes, and have assisted government and industry in achieving the objectives of the EPBC Act and the Nature Conservation Act. Flying-foxes serve our economic interest by providing expensive pollination and seed dispersal services for free, and play key ecological roles in our natural environment. It is in our national interest that these attributes are factored into any local management decisions. Furthermore, while health authorities advise that the risks of human infection from bat borne diseases are extremely low and avoidable (e.g., see [here](#)), unfounded fears about bat borne diseases still complicate effective management of flying-foxes in Australia.

The ABS would like to work with all levels of government to promote the public understanding of flying-foxes, and help develop realistic management approaches to events where flying-foxes may adversely impact on community amenities.

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**This media statement was prepared by the ABS Flying-Fox Subcommittee**

**About the Australasian Bat Society (ABS), Inc.**

The ABS is 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, students, wildlife carers and members of the general public.

**About the flying-fox subcommittee (FFSC)**

The FFSC is the primary source of reliable, accurate information on Australian flying-foxes. The FFSC is represented by flying-fox specialists from research, government, industry, and advocacy groups, and it encourages a more scientific and sustainable approach to flying-fox management and conservation.

For further information please visit <http://ausbats.org.au/>.

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**High resolution images are available on request.**