

17 November 2016

The Committee Secretariat
The Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy
PO Box 6021
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600
Email: Environment.Reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Members,

Inquiry into flying-fox management in the eastern states

I welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Environment and Energy Committee inquiry into flying fox management in the eastern states. I am a film maker who has spent many years documenting the destructive actions of government agencies who have offered little to no consideration for the protection of any Flying Fox Species regardless of their imminent extinction.

I have witnessed animal cruelty first hand and captured the very crimes on camera. I have witnessed Federal and State Government departments fabricate implausible defenses to mitigate indefensible wrong doing until it was shown that a failure to act would prove a conspiracy by that department to breach laws it was there to enforce.

It was only due to determination and the support of a few (including the EDO) that I was able to force the State EHP to act. The Federal Dept. of Environment refuses to investigate even when the perpetrators caught on video pleaded guilty in a court to State Breaches of the NCA that are also Federal Breaches.

I could tell the Committee Members how Spectacled Flying Foxes that roost in the Cairns CBD have been present for millions of years. I could discuss they are a keystone species that are directly responsible for the diversity of the World Heritage Wet Tropics and directly responsible for the existence of hundreds of species of trees. Or those animals such as the Cassowary are dependent upon them for their own survival. I could show the tourism attraction they generate by delivering hours of footage of tourists visiting the camps to photograph them or direct you to the millions of Instagram, Facebook or Twitter posts created by tourists.

But this is all well documented scientifically and yet decisions continue to be made on human first agenda that is built upon an unscientific emotional dislike of the species due to a lack of education. Most complaints in urban areas we hear is 'these pests pooped on my car and they do not belong in suburbia because they scare me'. This is the real issue that is central to the attack on the species. Dispersals have been costly, ineffective and damaging to species numbers without relocating them more than 600m and often creating a worse situation. Pavements and cars can be washed and maintained cheaper.

Lyssavirus from Flying Foxes has resulted in 3 deaths in 20 years (all preventable with post vaccine) and we ignore that more than 2,000 people die every year in Australia due to influenza (no cure) by simply walking past another human or touching a handle an infected human touched before them. Horses, Dogs and even cats are responsible for far more deaths and yet we accept those figures as normal (100x more than FFs).

Government Departments justify their attack on this species with a Human before Wildlife priority. In contrast, I would like to put Human First in my submission to you now. We are facing a mass extinction of wildlife throughout our planet (WWF). Our reefs are dying, our forests are being removed and wildlife that is easily managed is instead attacked. But we are most certainly not putting man first.

Man must exist in balance with nature for his very own survival. If he does not return the balance back towards nature, we will face our own extinction. We need nature to exist. Nature most certainly does not need Man. This planet requires balance as our population exceeds 7.2 Billion people and yet the Spectacled Flying Fox species whose counts were at 200,000 a few years ago when it was listed as vulnerable are now less than 90,000 today at the same locations (CSIRO – Adan McKeown/David Westcott) and will be extinct within the next ten years if we don't change our ways.

A very wise person once said, doing the same thing over expecting a different result is the definition of Stupidity.

We need to change our tact in relation to Flying Fox Management. The management should be that of humans via education rather than our current practice of eradication of a species. Fear mongering, misinformation and failure to educate the people does not work if we all want to continue to exist on a planet that can sustain life including Man. Economics will matter little if we can no longer grow food, sustain a moderate temperature or even breath the adequate mix of elements.

Ironically, Flying Foxes are the closest native wildlife (> 90% DNA) to humans on this continent. They have a close tie to primates (Flying Lemur – Colugo) and there is a lot of conjecture and scientific discussion (Pettigrew, J.D. and Jamieson, B.G.M) as to what is the true Genus of the Megabat. We know too little and making decisions without information is not in Human best interests.

If the committee has the ability, I would advise they visit Batreach, Kuranda in the far North of Queensland. A few months ago it reopened its doors to the public and there has been a incredibly positive response to the talks that are given by Wildlife Carers with close viewing of the animals. Tourists are offering high praise and the locals that visited have changed their opinions. At Batreach you can see the benefit of education that really should be your focus today. This is all done with no funding from a Government that should be supporting them. They are doing your job for you and it needs to be supported by the State and Federal Agencies.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any queries.

Regards

Noel Castley-Wright