



The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts

C09/20956

18 DEC 2009

Mrs Julia Irwin MP
Member for Fowler
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 25 November 2009 referring me to a petition on protecting Queensland fruit orchards from flying foxes which had been lodged with your committee.

The petition raises issues about the impact of flying foxes on agricultural production, and strategies for managing flying foxes, which are primarily the responsibilities of state and territory governments. I am responding to you as Australian Government Minister responsible for matters concerning the environment. I understand that Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon. Tony Burke MP, has a legislative responsibility for agriculture and will respond separately.

The Australian Government's responsibilities under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) focus on the protection of certain matters of national environmental significance, which include nationally listed threatened species.

The Australian Government's involvement with flying-foxes is confined to those species that are listed under the EPBC Act. The only EPBC-listed flying-fox species occurring in the Southern Darling Downs area is the Grey-headed Flying-fox, which is listed as vulnerable. Disturbance or relocation of populations requires consideration under the EPBC Act.

Other flying-fox species that may occur in the area, the Black Flying-fox (*Pteropus alecto*) and the Little Red Flying-fox (*Pteropus scapulatus*), are not listed under the EPBC Act and are therefore primarily the responsibility of state government, except where they occur on Commonwealth land.

In eastern Australia particularly, diminishing habitat and reliable food sources growing in parks and gardens has forced flying fox camps into local neighbourhoods and orchards. The Australian Government supports the effective management of flying fox populations and is reviewing the EPBC Act's Policy Statement for the Grey-headed flying fox to ensure

it reflects current understanding of the potential effects of actions such as culling and relocating flying fox colonies.

The Policy Statement will complement a recently released draft National Recovery Plan: (<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/recovery/pteropus-poliocephalus.html>) which is currently open for comment. Developed with the involvement of the relevant states, the draft Plan identifies threats and recovery actions to protect habitat critical to the survival of the species. Submissions will be taken into account in formulating both the Plan and Policy Statement.

Thank you for writing on this matter.

Yours sincerely

Peter Garrett