

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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I wish to provide a vignette of three problems, related to Victorian Grey-headed flying fox conservation that our members have found troubling and bewildering. These problems indicate a failure to appreciate the implications of Climate Change and a disconnect between what is said (protection and valuing of declining native species) and what is done (deliberate destruction of environment and unnecessary displacement of native Vulnerable species for parochial, even trivial, reasons). It is as if our decision making processes were being informed by a value set, and environmental circumstances, of the 1950's rather than those of the 21st century.

Example 1: SPZ - Special Protection Zones - Planning Standards for timber harvesting operations in Victoria's State Forests 2014 (Appendix 5 to the Management Standards and Procedures for timber harvesting in Victoria State forests 2014)

p.49 Gippsland FMAs Grey-headed flying fox. *Pteropus poliocephalus*: "consider establishing a SPZ of 100 m radius for a roost site that has a pattern of regular seasonal usage."

Our Comment : The problem here is threefold : First unlike the dozens of other listed EPBC `Vulnerable` mammal species the timber harvester (Vicforest et al) is asked to "consider" rather than simply instructed to "establish". The second problem is that flying foxes colonies (the collection of animals) need camps (the physical location) like bees need hives. They cannot and do not function as sole entities and these camps are very vulnerable to disturbance and stress by unusual loud noises and human intrusion. A SPZ of 100 metre radius of an occupied camp is entirely inadequate. if timber harvest were undertaken at the edge of this zone it would disperse the entire colony and likely result in abortions in pregnant females. Stressed bats are unhealthy bats. DELWP needs to consult groups that work with flying fox colonies for years and know them intimately.

Recommendation : An instruction to "establish a SPZ with a radius of 500 metres" would be adequate".

Problem 2: Firewood. Even after the megafires of 2019/ 2020 had destroyed millions of hectares Vicforest continued to advertise for tender the extraction and sale of thirty thousand tonnes of unburnt Gippsland eucalyptus forest - for firewood. This forest form a critical remnant of available habitat for a range of species and food resources for native

forest pollinating Grey-headed flying foxes.

Our Comment: To further destroy already decimated native forests by removing healthy unburnt trees for firewood (BBQs and Pizza ovens) is an insult and environmental violence to Victoria and all who care for its ecological future. Firewood can be readily sourced from waste building industry timber off-cuts and refits and renovations. Many tonnes of this usable/burnable timber go to landfill each week in Victoria.

Recommendation: End immediately the removal of native forest of all kinds (burnt and unburnt) for firewood.

Problem 3: Unnecessary Grey-headed Flying fox Colony Dispersal Colac Botanic Gardens Victoria

Comment: The Colac Otway Shire successfully applied to DELWP for an ATCW (Authority to Control Wildlife) being issued permit No: 14860502. An entire Grey-headed flying fox colony has been denied access to the only summer heatwave survivable roosting site in the region. No other areas provide the shade and cool of the gardens. It is "air-conditioned" by lake Colac and during times (2019/ 2020 when tens of thousands of this species died in heatwaves across Victoria, NSW and SA, the Colac colony survived with few deaths. No effort has been made to accommodate the colony in the Gardens or to improve the amenity for both the flying foxes or visitors. No interpretive signage, sails over the children's play areas, BBQ pathways improvements. Nothing has been undertaken. No effort at all has been expended or ideas considered in spite of considerable correspondence our group and many others have devoted to engaging the Colac Otway Shire. It has displayed a single mission to remove the bats no matter the cost. The main argument made is impact on a sole "heritage" Pagoda tree. It is the focus of the Shires efforts to displace an entire colony that (migratory) numbers 100 or less in winter up to 3000 in summer. Thousands of these keystone pollinating flying foxes (bats we need to rebuild our forests!) will likely perish as a result of the parochial fixations of one shire council and the mismanagement of the issuing of this ATCW on spurious grounds. Until indigenous heritage, especially when the life and death of listed species are at stake, receives equal consideration as "heritage" equivalent to imported trees and and other non-living "infrastructure" and "BBQ amenity" our biodiversity and ancient unique Australian heritage of millions of years will be imperiled and treated as deserving only lip-service.

Recommendation:

Issue no further ATCWs to remove Grey-headed flying fox colonies and halt those already issued. Review the entire process by which ATCWs, lethal and non-lethal are made.

FINAL : These three examples are a fraction of the mismanagement and disregard for native species that occurs right across spectrum of Victorian Government activities in Victoria. They suggest an unwillingness to consult aboriginal people or to value their heritage and view. In Melbourne, for the Wurundjeri people, the Grey-headed flying fox is Balayang or Buliyong, a brother to creator ancestor Bunjil the eagle. It is of important religious and spiritual significance. From Brisbane to Adelaide Balayang has migrated and lived in nature since time immemorial.

I hope my comments have been instructive and that they stimulate discussion and change.

Best Regards

Lawrence Pope

President - Friends of Bats & Bushcare Inc.