

Final plenary debate: camp management, research matters and community involvement integrated with fruit and flying-foxes in the 21st century

Chair: Pat Hutchings

Royal Zoological Society of NSW

PAT HUTCHINGS: We have three questions to discuss and then I want to see if this large group of people here today, who have been working so well, can actually come up with a series of recommendations. As you are aware, we have had a lot of interest from the media and I know that they are going to phone us next week and say, "What were the major recommendations?" National Parks and Wildlife Service is looking for some guidance. So I am hopeful that we can come up with some ideas.

The first question is: "What are the legal instruments that could be used to protect and manage flying-fox camps and buffer zones?" Now, just to put one thing in context, I am a member of the Scientific Committee and I am hopeful we have already had a preliminary determination for clearing as a key threatening process in New South Wales. We have been through the letters of objections. I believe that the committee will very shortly decide on making the final determination to list clearing in New South Wales as a key threatening process. I mean, it is not yet approved but I think it is highly likely that it will take place in the next two to three months. (It became a final determination on 21 September 2001- eds.) So that is something that will help. Can I have comments from the floor about what are the legal instruments that we can use?

GWEN PARRY-JONES: I was going to suggest something that we have already suggested to Gosford council. During the Menangle problem, it was found that flying-fox faeces were found up to 350 metres from the flying-fox colony. So we have put in a submission to Gosford council that all properties should have on their 149 Certificate

that they are within 350 metres of the flying-fox colony site and could expect problems with faeces, urine and noise.

VANESSA RICHARDSON (NPWS): Maybe something like a SEPP such as what we have for koala habitat. (SEPP is a State Environmental Planning Policy - eds.) The idea is to make local and state government aware of the environments that flying-foxes inhabit and try to stop them being cleared. (This matter of best options for using existing planning legislation was taken up in detail by Anne Conway in response to this and related questions or suggestions as to how to apply planning law. Anne Conway's paper appears immediately after this plenary. eds)

MARTIN SMITH (NPWS): At the practical level, a legal instrument which we have found useful is the Firearms Act. Through working with our local police command, we have been able to develop a relationship that we will be pursuing further during the next fruit ripening season whereby any public complaints about gunshots in the hinterland of Coffs Harbour will be reported to us and we will be able to pursue where those gunshots are coming from and perhaps locate incidences of illegal shooting.

ANNE CONWAY (Countrywide Ecological Services): People should be using the EPA Act a lot more than they are at the moment. An incentive to do that will be if the various listings happen very quickly. LEPs - these are Local Environment Plans, but the particularly powerful part of the Act is Part 5, which is not used to the extent it should be used. A lot of government agencies make decisions in which they are required to look at environmental impact assessment. They do not do it and people do not make them do it. The use of the *Threatened Species*

Conservation Act coming into effect will force people to do what they are required to do now, but do it properly, and that will certainly be one way of protecting some of these things.

GEMMA O'BRIEN (University of New England): You mentioned the need to prevent clearing of important flying-fox habitat. We have started studying flying-foxes in non-coastal regions and found they are using habitats sometimes differently - particularly campsites - from on the coast. So this is a plea to accurately identify what land is being used, what features of campsites are important inland, and do not just apply coastal information or we may destroy important habitat.

ELIZABETH HARTNELL (Ku-ring-gai Bat Conservation Society): I would like to tell you what happened at Gordon (a flying-fox camp in a Sydney suburb—eds). Initially, the flying-foxes were partially on council reserve and partially on private property. A subdivision was put through on the private land. The state government and Ku-ring-gai council each bought half of the subdivision and added it to the reserve. Following that, a Voluntary Conservation Agreement was entered into between Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. A plan of management was prepared for the reserve. It has been reviewed and it is now a document that governs anything that is done in the reserve. (Larsen *et al* have expanded on this matter in a separate paper, which appears after this plenary. eds)

The council applied to the geographical names board and the valley was renamed as the Ku-ring-gai Flying Fox Reserve. It now appears on all maps so that no-one can now buy land adjoining the reserve without really knowing that there is a flying-fox camp there. If someone is buying land in the middle of a residential area with expensive houses, they contact council and many enquiries are referred to members of the committee. They ask, "What's it like living near a flying-fox reserve?" You give them the spiel of the ecological importance of flying-foxes and then you suggest, "Talk to your prospective neighbours and ask them how they find living near a flying-fox reserve." As far as I know, there is no hold up on properties changing hands. People are satisfied. They

grizzle about a few things, mulberry trees particularly. Neither council nor National Parks and Wildlife Service, as far as I know, have had any major complaints or problems from residents near that reserve.

PAT HUTCHINGS: That is very pleasing to hear.

KATHY DAVIS (University of Newcastle): EISs must be made over a 12-month period. It has to include any migratory animal. For a school building to be put up literally metres from an animal that is considered to be a health hazard, really has the onus on the developers, and the council and such. EIS certainly have their part to play.

MR: Sorry, this is actually just seeking a point of clarification. I don't know if anyone here can answer it. Does the Department of School Education actually have to go through EIS processes?

ANNE CONWAY: No.

PAT HUTCHINGS: From what I am hearing around the room we already have existing legislation. We need to make sure that it is enforced, not only for the protection of the actual camps, but also to recognise the importance of the surrounding buffer zones. This will only happen if there is community involvement. It happened in Gordon. We need to work out how to change public perception of flying-foxes. How do we move them from being considered a pest species to an ecologically important species?

DEEDEE WOODSIDE (Corporate and Community Sustainability International): This follows from comments from Chris Tidemann and Greg Richards. It seems to me that today we are more exchanging information than addressing some of these issues. That might be a good way to address this is to move into a taskforce relationship where there is a common element among the growers and the other partners in the process. It would need to be a facilitated process that enters into integrated adaptive management that includes public education, as well as talking to the relevant groups about what are the barriers. We need to start to trial some adaptive management techniques. Though we are going to inform people, the next step, such as adaptive management trials, needs to happen.

JOHN ROGERS: I would like to take it a step further. I think one of the things that comes out so clearly to me is the need for a standing consultative process of the type that we have in Queensland. We have so many issues before us today. We have so many unanswered questions. We have such difficulty in finding clarity on the issues. I think the only way we can do this is to develop a process of consultation with all the stakeholders and use that process to do what I think is most desperately needed, and that is to increase the research that can provide the answers to the questions that we have left unanswered today.

PAT HUTCHINGS: By the Scientific Committee having listed the species as being vulnerable actually brings on a legislative requirement for National Parks and Wildlife Service to develop a plan of management – a Recovery Plan. That could probably be incorporated and follow some of your ideas of having this consultative committee.

JOHN ROGERS: Yes, I just make the point that if we come back in three years' time in much the same state we find ourselves now, it would be a national scandal. It would be an embarrassment for us all.

ED SLATER (Canberra): I suggest you get in touch with the ABC Natural History unit, which is located in Melbourne, quite seriously, and see whether a program can be broadcast - particularly the camp at Gordon - in the Sydney area would be worthwhile. If you could get hold of Attenborough, who does come to Australia fairly frequently - because I think he has a son in Canberra. He would be a person that is in the public eye and could impress the public generally.

PAT HUTCHINGS: The camera crews that were here earlier on this morning were from the ABC, so we are hoping to get some follow up.

CHRIS BANFFY (NPWS): Apart from having a consultative council or a task-force – it is obvious that we have to move in that direction - you also need extension officers for a period of time. I think one of the recommendations that should come from the taskforce is that we have extension officers for, say, a period of 5 years to go throughout New South Wales and ensure that it actually gets down

to the field operatives. Relying on National Parks and Wildlife Service staff, for example, in specific areas is not good enough. There has to be additional resources to support that process.

PAT HUTCHINGS: So that is a second recommendation. I do not see any dissenters.

JOHN GOUGH: Why not look at what Queensland has done and see whether we can improve on that or go with the same thing. I must agree with John Rogers here, we reinvent the wheel on this subject so many times. If we do not move forward now, god help the flying-foxes.

PAT HUTCHINGS: Good point.

JOHN BICKNELL: I have the fear that if we just leave it to the Queensland consultative committee that all we shall hear about is their problems. We have different problems in this area and we need a consultative committee to look after us down here.

PAT HUTCHINGS: There certainly should be liaison between the two.

KELLY WAPLES (NPWS): I think it is a fantastic idea to have a consultative committee. It is something that we are hoping to set up very soon. It was one of the things that Brian Gilligan opened with this morning. It is one of the positive steps that National Parks and Wildlife Service is taking on right now. We are hoping to have our first meeting within the next month.

JANE MULLER (Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers): We can change the public perception of flying-foxes being a pest when they are not being a pest to agriculturalists any more. Queensland's consultative committee has been really valuable, but we have not solved the problem yet. We still have a desperate crisis with flying-fox management in Queensland, both from a conservation as well as a crop protection point of view. I must emphasise the need for resources to find the solutions. The other thing I want to say is that I do not think court cases help us. They do not provide solutions, they just suck up the limited resources that we have.

KERRY PARRY-JONES: I was talking to a few of the growers at afternoon tea time and there is a lot of information out there in the community which does not seem to get

to anyone working on flying-foxes. I think there has to be some liaison between researchers and growers, otherwise we cannot work out what is going on and then come up with solutions. We should support the task force with that being one of its aims.

ED BIEL (New South Wales Farmers): This room is full of so much goodwill, it really makes the heart feel warm. But one thing is lacking - it is money.

I would like to say that from a grower's perspective, it has been heartening to hear the amount of goodwill that appears to emanate from what used to be seen as the other side. But what I would counsel everyone to do, and especially the more organised groups like the conservation movement, is lobby the politicians to let go of the purse strings, and as I said in my little speech. We are signatory to a number of conventions. We have policies until they come out our ears, but we are very lacking on the ground because of the lack of actual money to go towards implementing the warm and fuzzy sentiments that have been expressed here today. So I would counsel everybody, in conjunction with New South Wales Farmers, National Farmers, any other farmers you can think of, and all the conservation groups to lobby, lobby, lobby and more lobby to make the politicians actually pay for the public good.

VICKII LETT (NPWS and WIRES): I am a bit of a hybrid. My comment is basically more from a grass roots community point of view. Over the years I have seen people change dramatically when they actually had some contact with flying-foxes, you know, with babies or adults and just get a close look at them. The thing that has sort of ruined that is the diseases, like lyssavirus. If we could find a way to safely allow people access to education animals. I think that is why Ku-ring-gai has been so successful. They have had those education animals.

DENISE FORD (Ku-ring-gai Bat Conservation Society): It is important to recognise that there are different issues for people living in an urban area than there are for people living in a rural or semi-rural area. Our experience has been in an urban area. It has been a very positive thing. We have been able to change negative perceptions. It is

probably different because there are different issues for people who are growing fruit.

Secondly, in answer to Vickii's comment, we found that the advent of the lyssavirus has not had a major impact on our education program. The only thing we have changed in our education program is that we do not allow anyone to touch the bats, but people still get a close look at them and it does not seem to have made one iota of difference. People love to look and watch their behaviour. It makes people ask lots of questions and it is fascinating to them. So I do not think that the touching the animal has to be the way of changing people's attitudes, but I must admit, having a live animal and seeing it close up does make a difference.

LEN MARTIN: It might be paradoxical that I can understand the growers being a little bit concerned that the Grey-headed Flying-fox was put on the Vulnerable list. But it might be the best news for the growers because, as this meeting today has shown, there is a great deal of information coming out and the publication of the document that comes out from this meeting may be an important influence in finally getting the powers that be, whoever they are, to finally pull their flaming finger out. It turns along the lines that Ed's talking about. I think one of the things that has impressed me is the quality of the information that has come out from the growers today. What I am saying to you lot is, put down as a document all of your concerns to the greatest extent you can because the document that comes out is going to have your side of it. It is also going to have a lot of science in it and it is going to be a document which I think can be used to go to the governments, federal and state, to try and unlock the keys and get some money to do the research that is desperately needed because little furry, cuddly animals need conserving and we have an industry at risk.

ANNE CONWAY: Can I build on Jim Shields's suggestion about the two major chains, Coles and Woolies. They are the people that flog the lovely produce that you buy. Now, I personally would be really prepared to pay an extra cent and if they rounded it up so that the things that were generating the funds were sold for an even dollar. So instead of \$8.99, the stone fruit is \$9, and the money then goes to fund research

and the sorts of things like working out what is an appropriate alternate food source for the period of time that those animals are in your orchards - October/November / December, something that comes out at that period of time and then we get the community involved.

We get Landcare, we get government departments that own land, and we go up and we plant up an appropriate area, away from your orchards, so that the animals go there instead of the orchards. A lot of feel good stuff. Coles and Woolies feel fantastic. I buy the fruit, I feel good. You would get the price you were supposed to get, the animals get somewhere to go and some research gets done. Hopefully that is a possibility.

JIM SHIELDS (State Forests of NSW): Anne made the point that I wanted to, so I get to say what I wanted to earlier, which relates to who pays. Aside from dealing with the loss from shooting and the loss to the orchardists, one of the other financial constraints is simply who owns the land where the camps are? The major financial contribution will be to get the money to gain control of that land. A very easy way, one avenue that was not available to us before for who pays, is the trust set up by government in May this year to purchase land for exactly these purposes, for nature conservation. There is a trust in New South Wales paying for land for conservation and I think we need to focus the outcomes of this forum to getting some of those funds directed into other areas we need to control which needs money to pay for it, and that one source for it.

PAT HUTCHINGS: Do we actually have an inventory of the location of all the major camps in New South Wales, and what the ownership of the land?

PEGGY EBY: We have a GIS database of the locations of the camps that we know about. I certainly am not here to say that we know where all the camps are. They are in coastal areas. We do not know the camps west of the escarpment, nor do we know how they use those lands. In the database is an indication of the status of the camps in terms of ownership, not down to a specific owner, but the tenure and zoning. That database is held by National Parks and Wildlife Service.

PAT HUTCHINGS: What about the buffer zones around the existing camps?

PEGGY EBY: That is a matter of looking at individual sites and going through them. We are not there yet.

MIKE CROWLEY (State Forests of NSW): Now that the flying-foxes have been listed as Vulnerable, it means that local governments will have to address them under Section 5a. But one of the things that local governments throughout the state do not have is the location of the flying-fox camps. I think that some small amount of money may be able to be set aside to produce a GIS layer, as Peggy has suggested, and that should be distributed to all Local Government Areas, as it appears that most of these camps are on private property. To prevent what has been happening up the north coast occurring continuously, I think local governments have to be made aware of where camps are to be found. Therefore they will have the knowledge and they will have to address any flying-fox camp that has been brought to their attention under section 5a of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act*.

GEMMA O'BRIEN (UNE): Going back to the question of who pays: rather than asking us to pay extra for our fruit and veges via the large food chains, I propose that any money that those food chains spend, either sponsoring the cost of meeting directly, or contributing to research into flying-fox and orchard interactions, should be written off by the government as a total tax rebate, possibly at the 125 or 150 per cent rate.

GREG RICHARDS: Under the question who pays, I would like to suggest that there are some people paying already who should be excluded. Certainly Queensland DPI, they are obviously putting money into it and they did that before their animals were listed. In New South Wales, it seems to me, that National Parks and Wildlife Service is putting money in already, and could I suggest that all of us at this meeting lobby the New South Wales Agricultural Minister to inject whatever he sees fit right now, for research, and to try and steer some of these ideas and options along. It would be a lot easier than trying to get money out of Coles/Myer or Woolworths, but that could be something down the track if we think about flying-fox friendly fruit.

BOB LITTLE (Five Star Supermarket in Maclean [Maclean is on the lower Clarence in northern NSW. eds]) : I am probably the only person representing supermarkets here today, which is a bit unusual, but I would like to make a few comments about some of the ideas about getting Woolworths and Coles to put some money into research. I do not think you have got any chance at all of achieving any of that. Woolworths and Coles are major chain stores. They are very, very aggressive in the way they do business. They could not give a tinker's cuss about how much damage they do to fruit-growers, other independent operators, or other small businesses. They will wipe out anybody if they can do it and all in all, the answer to them is that they are the saviour of all you people, because they are there to help protect you people from high prices, but the reality is, they contribute very little to anybody other than themselves. I do not think you would have any hope in getting anything out of them. If you want to get something out of them, do not support them.

ED BIEL: I must concur with my friend up there. As I said in my speech, "Who pays?" The beneficiary should pay. There is nothing magical about "who pays, the beneficiary pays". I shall give you some details on one particular instance in South Australia, the Coorong district local action plan. They had severe environmental problems and there was a framework which recommended cost sharing for land-holders, the local community and the wider community. Land-holders paid 6 per cent of the cost of activities aimed at remnant vegetation, wetland and habitat conservation while the local community paid 17 per cent and the wider community paid 77 per cent. This arrangement implied that these activities generated mainly a public good that accrued to the general community, and, let's face it, "user pays" is the political speak of the moment. The government is saying that users must pay and at this stage it is the flying-fox that pays and, with respect, it is the grower that is feeding the flying-fox and consequently diminishing his back pocket.

MARTIN SMITH (NPWS): If we accept that one of the major things that is required is research, a mechanism that we found useful is encouraging academia and developing a strong relationship with the local university. In a practical way we have

some useful results from postgraduate students taking on projects in close association with park managers. If we want to further explore the kinds of research required, we need to set up an ongoing relationship with our local universities to encourage students to tackle these questions.

PAT HUTCHINGS: We have a close liaison with Queensland and presumably we should have with Victoria because we are talking about the same species. So I am only writing down "liaison with Queensland and Victoria". We have a general agreement that we have enough legislation. We need to look at mechanisms to ensure that all facets of our current existing legislation are used to the full. I am not specifying particular bits of legislation, I just think that we are not being imaginative enough in the way that we use the existing legislation.

SHERRIE-LEE EVANS (NPWS): You could argue the same thing - it took a while to protect wetlands. We could make that argument for both koalas and wetlands that we really needed state environmental planning policies.

PAT HUTCHINGS: So you want a SEPP specifically for the Grey-headed Flying-fox.

DEDEE WOODSIDE: The recommendation I was making goes back a step - the task force is not about liaising yet, it is not a formality. I think that there is some right brain work to do, some imaginative work to do before everybody continues in this left-brain side because a community does not work on the left brain, they work on the right brain. My suggestion is that even if a task force is a one-day event, it needs to be a facilitated process out of which a design for an adaptive management trial emerges. It would come up with some suggestions about going forward, funding, and early extension or educational processes. The task force would need to come up with a range of initial options then one of those may be a standing committee that follows through. The really important element is to come up with some adaptive management trials.

I think the idea of doing endless research that has a barren acceptance is no good. You have to have a target, carry out a trial, do your research against that trial and move on in a cyclic process.

VANESSA RICHARDSON (NPWS): There are two areas into which we need to focus resources: research and raising the profile of the species. There are lots of people in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria that only get the negative aspects of flying-foxes. They are cute enough to raise a profile; I do not know what is stopping us.

PAT HUTCHINGS: Is another recommendation that we need funding for specific questions that will facilitate the management and protection of the species? I don't think we should just say "funds for more research".

JOHN ROGERS: We seem to be in danger of starting to run down the track of making policy on the run. We have a unique opportunity to form an alliance between farmers, science and the environmental movement. I think that is going to be a very powerful alliance, it should bring together the best experience and training that we have on the subject. I think if we can get the balance of the consultative committee right, that should be able to identify the issues and to seek the funding for the investigation of those issues. I really do wonder about the process that we are now starting of identifying a whole range of issues that would be better coming out of the considered consultation process.

PAT HUTCHINGS: From the applause I suggest that we put these matters to the task force, including building of bridges and building on the strengths and support that I have sensed in this room today.

CHRIS BANFFY (NPWS): It is obvious that if you put in a consultative committee or a task force, of course it will come up with recommendations. You do need extension services. So why not say straight out that we need to identify resources for those extension services once the strategies have been put in place. Let us get that happening now, rather than waiting for the committee to come up with it.

PAT HUTCHINGS: But the task force is going to need resources to do those initial recommendation. Are you suggesting that this comes first?

ADAM FAWCETT (State Forests of NSW): I actually think that would come as part of the recovery planning part of the task

force, which is what Brian Gilligan mentioned this morning. The task force would lead into the recovery team and that would then lead onto doing exactly what you have just said.

JANET UDEN: I am wondering about issuing more licences this year, whether that has gone by the by and we are going to go into the same cycle of just issuing licences all over again.

PAT HUTCHINGS: I think there certainly will be licences issued this year, but I also think it is clear from what has been said today that the results of the compliance with those licences is going to be much better enforced than it has been in the past, simply because it is a vulnerable species. They are going to try and phase it out, but we need to have alternative methods for the farmers.

KERRY PARRY-JONES: It is all right to think about a task force but possibly within that task force there would be certain areas of specific interest that people should be able to join by email groups or whatever, have some sort of way of collaboration, of keeping people in contact with others who might be interested in similar problems.

PAT HUTCHINGS: The Royal Zoological Society of NSW has the funds to publish this forum. The meeting today has generated so much good feeling and good vibes, but also a sense of where we are at. We cannot lose this impetus and the questions and answers will be included in the proceedings.

I would like to thank all the speakers that came today for concentrating on positive attitudes. We did not get negative papers. We basically had people who were here to see how we can work with the current listing of the Grey-headed Flying-fox as a vulnerable species in New South Wales. I think that was very positive, people looked at "how do we resolve the conflict", not "it's impossible to resolve". I would also like to thank all the participants for asking questions and basically making sure that we have had a really successful day. There are also a few housekeeping points. Today would not have happened without some funding from National Parks and Wildlife; the Australian Museum donated this room for free; and also, various members of the RZS council, mainly Peggy Eby and Dan Lunney, but also the people today who sat outside

and hardly heard anything that was happening, doing the registrations and basically making today feasible and possible. So thank you all very much.

LEN MARTIN: Can I make a little joke. This is inspired by John Bicknell and I just want to make the point that when scientists get to talk to growers and hear what the growers have to say you start to turn over some things in your mind. John was going on about smelling the person, and then Greg

came up with pythons' poo, yet nobody has mentioned biotechnology today. So, we get the gene that makes the stink in the pythons' poo, and then we clone it into an insect, a beneficial insect, that lives in fruit orchards and it smears the equivalent of python poo and keeps the flying-foxes out.

PAT HUTCHINGS: Okay, as the museum has closed, you'll have to go back out the way you came in, via the William Street entrance.