

GRIFFITH CITY COUNCIL
MAYORAL MINUTE

MM01

SUBJECT: ACTION TO REMOVE OR RELOCATE BATS (KNOWN AS LITTLE RED FLYING FOXES) - FROM 39 KOOKORA STREET GRIFFITH
FROM: John Dal Broi, Mayor

SUMMARY

This report is presented for Council consideration of the flying fox camp which occupy London Plane trees located at 37-39 Kookora Street.

RECOMMENDATION

(a) Council lop the trees in front of 37 and 39 Kookora Street as soon as reasonably and legally possible as currently, this is the most likely deterrent for flying foxes camping in this location, subject to agreement of the property owners.

(b) Council approach the relevant Minister with a view to the Minister granting immediate permission for steps to be taken in the elimination/removal of the bat/flying fox problem should local health authorities deem such extermination action is required to ensure the health and well-being of members of the community.

BACKGROUND

Murrumbidgee Local Health advises that Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV) is a deadly virus that affects the nervous system of bats. This virus is found in all species of bats. Three cases of human infection with ABLV have been recorded since the virus was first identified in 1996, all three people have died. Lyssavirus (a form of rabies) has been detected in a flying fox from Griffith, when a person from Leeton was scratched by an animal they had picked up and taken to the National Parks and Wildlife office thinking the animal was sick and needed treatment. Although Council has previously considered this matter via Councillor Thorpe, the recent lyssavirus incident has added another reason for concern for the residents in 39 Kookora Street who have been asking for some time for Council and others to do something and I support Councillor Thorpe in seeking urgent assistance to affected residents.

The options are limited because the flying foxes are a protected species and legislation prevents them being harmed. However, there are a number of deterrents that can be considered. These include lopping the trees and/or placing nets over them to prevent the flying foxes from roosting there next season. Scare guns, lights and streamers have also been used elsewhere but with limited success and might be too much of a nuisance in the CBD. Netting is going to be difficult and expensive for such large trees, and needs to be done in a particular way so the nets themselves do not cause harm to the flying foxes if they get trapped in a net.

The National Parks & Wildlife Service advises that no deterrent methods are authorised during pup season (March-May) so June would seem the earliest time for a deterrent

such as lopping of relevant trees.

Migration is likely to occur soon as the Autumn progresses. After they are lopped, the trees will grow back again over time and it is likely the flying foxes will roost somewhere else when they return after migration, perhaps in adjoining street trees, but in my opinion Council should trial the lopping of the trees to see what happens.

I am also aware that some people may prefer extermination of the flying foxes. I understand this is only possible with the consent of the Minister, which will take time and, frankly, is unlikely to be granted given the extent of flying fox populations in other parts of NSW. In any case, it is not clear how this can be done in the CBD, it is not necessary if the camp moves on, and would not create a positive impression for Council or the community of Griffith to be killing off protected native animals when there might be other options.

The camp seems to occupy about 5 London Plane trees outside two particular dwellings. Whilst the views of the occupants of 39 Kookora Street are well known to us, I cannot say the same for the residents or owners of 37 Kookora Street so I suggest they be consulted first.

Lopping of the 5 trees will be an additional cost to Council that is not in the budget, estimated by Council staff to be \$10,000, but I believe urgent action is required. These trees were last lopped about 20 years ago at a time when Council regularly pruned street trees.

It should also be kept in mind that there are other flying fox camps in the City and taking action on this one might trigger requests from other residents.

For all these reasons, Council should work toward a longer term strategy to manage the issue.

The risk of infection of humans by lyssavirus from flying foxes is greatest when people are bitten or scratched when handling the animals. Council should also undertake a public education campaign to remind people not to handle flying foxes.

Staff from the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service have offered to assist Council in managing flying foxes in the CBD and are available to meet with Councillors to discuss the options.

OPTIONS

- (a) Council adopt recommendations as listed.
- (b) Council may choose not to adopt these recommendations.

STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

a) Policy Implications

Not Applicable

b) Financial Implications

Possible solutions will impact on the 2013/14 budget or the draft 2014/15 budget.

c) Legal/Statutory Implications

Some deterrent measures would require permission from the NSW Minister for Office of Environment & Heritage or concurrence with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

CONSULTATION

NSW National Parks & Wildlife staff (Griffith)
Senior Management Team

STRATEGIC LINKS

a) Growth Strategy Plan

Not Applicable

b) Corporate/Business Plan

Not Applicable