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MR16/002 GREY HEADED FLYING FOXES

File Ref: E15.9191

- Attachments:
1. Summary of attempts by other councils and organisations to disperse GHFF
  2. Map of area for proposed expanded support program
  3. Member for Gilmore's media release

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Our community continues to suffer the impacts associated with an unprecedented influx of Grey Headed Flying Foxes (GHFF) to the Eurobodalla and particularly the Batemans Bay area. The problems being faced by residents living near the flying fox camps, under their flight paths and near their feeding sources, are significant and unfortunately are not easily addressed.

The current situation is unprecedented and advice from the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) is that we have never experienced a known GHFF population as large as this in the Eurobodalla. The population is estimated at 100,000 which equates to 20% of the National population. It is understood that the GHFF have travelled to the Eurobodalla from other areas due to favourable seasonal conditions and food sources.

OEH believe that the low seasonal rainfall in the northern parts of the country and the significant flowering in our local spotted gum forests may have caused the GHFF to move into the area to take advantage of the food supply.

This situation has led to a broader impact on our community. Previously the impact of the GHFF was primarily felt by residents and business owners in the vicinity of the GHFF camp at the Water Gardens, however given the size of the current population, the GHFF have also established roosts into other locations including the Catalina area. In addition to the impacts directly from the camps, broader sections of the community are now being impacted as a result of the night time feeding activities of the large number of GHFF as these animals can travel large distances for food sources and return to a small range for roosting or to their camps. There are reports right across the Eurobodalla of night time feeding activity.

Some in our community have been critical of Council, based on a perception that Council has not taken action to address the problem. This is not true. The criticism that we have not listened to our community is unfounded. We acknowledge the concerns of our residents and are faced with a conundrum where there is no simple fix.

Council has engaged with the OEH and independent experts, to try and address the impacts being experienced by our community. We have also sought advice from other councils dealing with this problem and have reviewed actions taken elsewhere to determine what has worked and what has not worked.

### **REPORT**

There has been a strong view among some in our community that Council should 'get rid of the flying foxes' or 'move them on', commonly referred to as dispersal. Dispersal may involve the use of loud industrial noise, bright lights and smoke in the early hours of the morning over prolonged periods (weeks to months) to discourage the GHFF from returning to their camps. Council examined this option in consultation with the community when preparing the Water

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Gardens GHFF Camp Management Plan in December 2015, a plan prepared in accordance with the NSW Government guidelines.

As part of this process we considered the outcomes of attempts by other councils and organisations to disperse GHFF camps (see Attachment 1 for summary). We also considered professional advice on the likely success of a dispersal attempt at the Water Gardens.

The review of previous attempts showed that the vast majority (16 out of 17) were unsuccessful and where the GHFF camp was dispersed they only moved a short distance (less than 600m). Dispersal in these cases, despite the significant cost, was not a solution, it simply shifted the problem to another part of the community. An examination of our local area at that time showed that this was the most likely outcome, not a solution but rather a relocation of the problem within close proximity to the Water Gardens.

Notwithstanding, Council has considered the best available advice and taken a number of actions to attempt to manage the situation and the impact on our community. These have included:

- (a) Independent consultancy advice
- (b) Buffer zones created providing a physical separation between roosting habitat and homes in the Water Gardens area
- (c) Subsidised services for residents within 250m of the Water Gardens: access to free high pressure cleaning equipment, clothes lines covers, car covers, removal of exotic palms (feeding sources)
- (d) Community support and advice.

A total of \$70,000 has been expended to date and this includes \$10,000 financial support from the Office of Environment and Heritage. Significant staff resources from Council and the NSW Government have also been invested and we continue to seek NSW and Australian Government funding to assist in attempts to manage the issues experienced.

Since Council adopted the Water Gardens GHFF Camp Management Plan in December 2015, circumstances have changed where we are now experiencing an unprecedented event. It is therefore appropriate to reassess the situation and to reconsider the management options and the likely success.

Council has therefore sought professional and independent assessment of the current situation and advice on the management options, including the possible dispersal of the GHFF camps. Once this advice is received Council can consider potential actions to further assist the community in addressing the issues being faced. Importantly we should also consult the community and consider their views prior to making a decision on any proposed actions, including potential dispersal, given the significant cost and risk that such action may only shift the problem, not fix it.

Given the change in circumstances, I recommend to Council that we should immediately expand the support program provided to residents in the vicinity of the Water Gardens camp to those adjacent to the camps in the Catalina area, as defined in the map contained in Attachment 2. Whilst I know this will not fix the problem, it will provide some level of assistance and relief to those who are most severely affected.

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It is important to note that while this problem is facing our community, this is not a problem that impacts only the Eurobodalla. It is a problem that faces many communities across multiple local government areas such as Clarence Valley, Singleton, Pittwater, Sutherland, and Maclean, and in other states.

As the threatened species listing and importance placed on this GHFF by both the NSW and Australian Governments, the implications and role the legislation plays in the GHFF management is significant. The role in managing threatened species and the impacts of the species over multiple local government areas and multiple states, requires a coordinated response involving all three tiers of government. For this reason we have approached and made representations to both the NSW and Australian Governments.

I am pleased to advise that with the assistance of the Member for Gilmore, Ann Sudamalis, I have been able to meet with the Federal Minister for the Environment, the Hon Greg Hunt MP. This opportunity allowed me to highlight the distress and concerns of our community and the need to have a coordinated response and efforts to help our residents and business and seek solutions to the problems we currently face.

I have also met with the Federal Member for Hunter, the Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP, who has Minister Hunt's support for a Senate enquiry into the management of the issues surrounding GHFF camps. As the Member for Hunter, Mr Fitzgibbon is very aware of the issues, with numerous communities within his electorate facing the impacts of GHFF camps, including Maitland, Cessnock and Singleton.

Importantly, at a Federal Government level there is a recognition of the need for this problem to be tackled cooperatively by the three tiers of government, a point noted by the Member for Gilmore, Ann Sudamalis, in her recent media release (Attachment 3). This is an enormous problem which goes beyond our local community and requires the involvement and support, politically, professionally and financially from all three levels of government; support which I hope is provided to address the GHFF problems facing our and other communities.

Council is currently arranging a public information session about the Grey Headed Flying Foxes, to be held on 16 May 2016, 5pm -7pm, at the Batemans Bay Soldiers Club. We are seeking attendance by the Premier, the Hon Mike Baird MP, the Minister for the Environment, the Hon Mark Speakman MP, the local State Member, the Hon Andrew Constance MP, local Federal Members and the Federal Minister for the Environment, along with the relevant agencies to attend the public meeting in Batemans Bay. In addition we will have experts on the matter in attendance to discuss and answer questions from the community on the national and local context, the processes to date, the local situation and the options for managing the current and future situation. This event will also allow Council and invited guests to hear direct from the community about their concerns and experiences.

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**RECOMMENDATION**

THAT:

1. Council note that professional advice has been sought to:
  - (a) Reassess the current situation inclusive of the Water Gardens, Catalina and surrounds where flying foxes are residing
  - (b) Provide advice on the current management options including dispersal
  - (c) Identify the costs, risks and likelihood of success of the suggested management options including dispersal to enable Council to consider and make a determination of what further action to take.
2. The scope of the works be expanded to include the preparation of a draft dispersal plan for consideration by Council.
3. Council expand the existing resident support of providing car covers, clothes line covers, access to pressure washers and removal of exotic palms to those residents within the Catalina area as identified in Attachment 1.
4. The budget impacts of the additional activities in addressing the issues associated with the Grey Headed Flying Fox camps, be considered as part of the quarterly financial review process.
5. Council continue to advocate the NSW and Australian Governments for a coordinated Statewide program and response to the management of the impacts of the Grey Headed Flying Fox, inclusive of financial assistance of impacted residences and councils.

## Review of past dispersal actions by Roberts and Eby (2013)

Location	Species	FF population estimate at time of dispersal	Method	Did the animals leave the local area?	Did the local population reduce in size?	How far did they move?	Were new camps formed (number of new camps if known)?	Number of separate actions	Cost (if known)	Was conflict resolved at the original site?	Was conflict resolved for the community?	Sources
Barcaldine, Qld	R	>50,000	VN	no	no	≈2 km	yes (1)	trees in township felled		yes	no	1,2
Batchelor, NT	B	200	BNS	no	no	<400 m	yes (1)	2		yes	yes	3,4
Boyerne Island, Qld	BR	25,000	LNS	no	no	<500 m	yes (2)	3		yes	no	5,6,7
Bundall, Qld	GB	<400	V	no	no	uk, but 4 camps were within 5 km	yes (3)	1		yes	uk	8,9,10
Charters Towers, Qld	RB	variable	HLNPOW	no	no	200 m	no (returned to original site)	repeated since 2000	>\$500,000	no	no	11,12
Dallis Park, NSW	BG	28,000	V	no	yes	300 m	yes (1)	2		yes	no	13
Duaninga, Qld	R	>30,000	VNFO	no	no	400 m	yes	1	\$150,000	yes	uk	14
Gayndah, Qld	RB	200,000	VN	no	no	600 m	yes	3 actions, repeated		yes	no	9
Macleay, NSW	BGR	20,000	NS	no	no	350 m	yes (7)	>23	>\$400,000 and ongoing	no	no	13
Mataranka, NT	BR	>200,000	BHLNOSW	no	no	<300 m	uk	>0		no	no	13
North Eton, Qld	B	4800	VNFB	uk	no	<1.5 km initially	yes (≈4 majority temporary)	2	\$45,000	yes	yes (conflict at one site)	10,15,16, 17
Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne, Vic	G	30,000	NS	no	no	6.5 km	yes (2)	6 mths	\$3 million	yes	yes, ongoing management required	13
Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, NSW	G	3,000	LNPOW	no	no	4 km	no	ongoing daily actions for 12 mths	>\$1 million and ongoing	yes	yes	13,18,19
Singleton, NSW	GR	500	LNWUW	no	no	<900 m	no (returned to original site)	>3	\$117,000 and ongoing	no	no	13,20

Water Gardens GHFF Plan

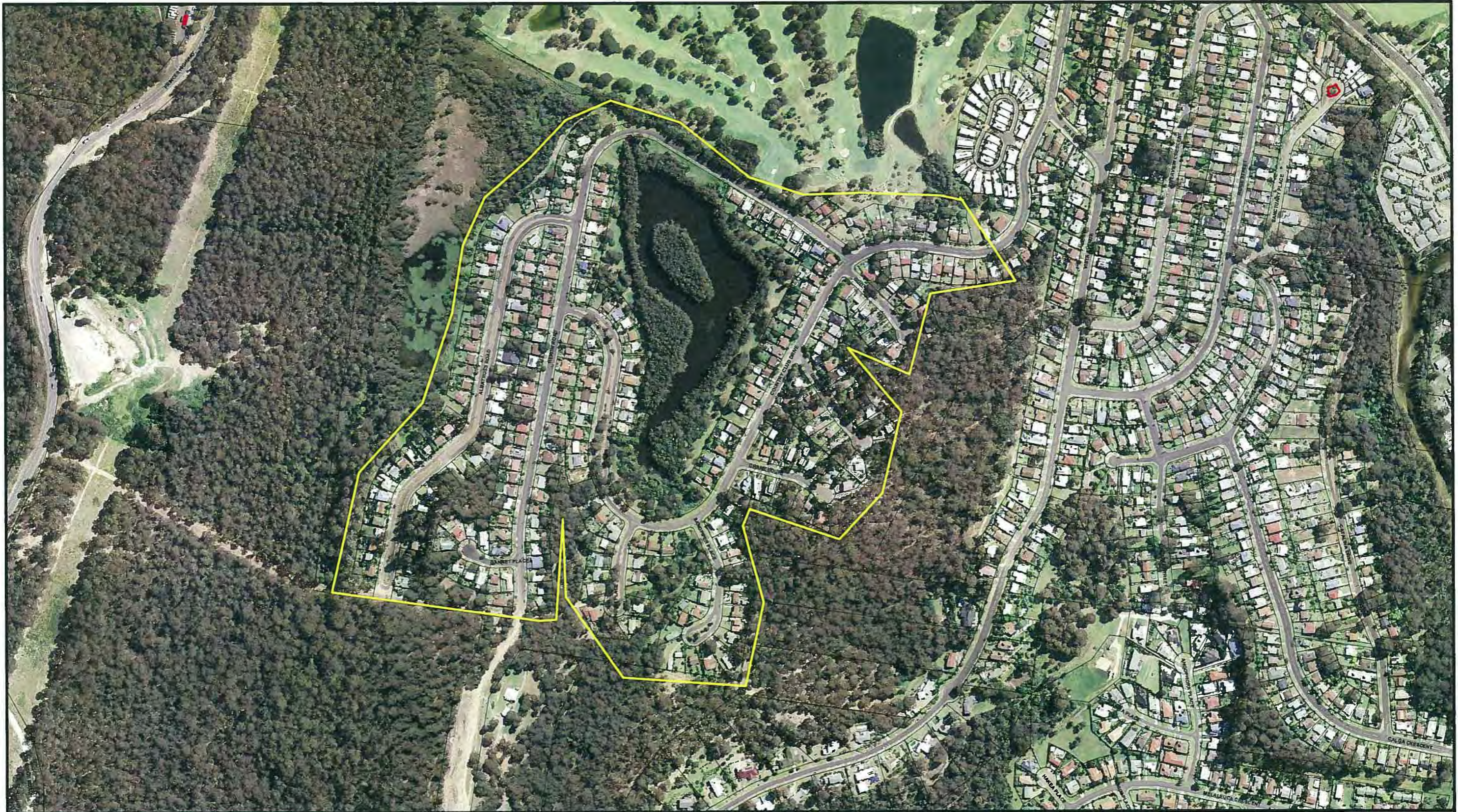
Location	Species	FF population estimate at time of dispersal	Method	Did the animals leave the local area?	Did the local population reduce in size?	How far did they move?	Were new camps formed (number of new camps if known)?	Number of separate actions	Cost (if known)	Was conflict resolved at the original site?	Was conflict resolved for the community?	Source+
Townsville, Qld	BR	35,000	BNS	no	no	400 m	no (returned to original site)	5		no	no	13
Wanwick, Qld	GRB (dispersal targeted R)	200,000	NLBP	no	no	≈1 km	no (site known to be previously occupied by GB)	5 days	\$28,000	yes	Uk (complaints persisted until migration)	8,21,22
Young, NSW	L	<5000	VN	no	no	<600 m	yes (1)	uk		yes	no	23

\* G = grey-headed flying-fox; B = black flying-fox; R = little red flying-fox

# B = "birdfrite", F = fog; H = helicopter; L = lights; N = noise; P = physical deterrent; O = octour; S = smoke; U = ultrasonic sound; V = extensive vegetation removal; W = water.

+ 1 Storm Stanford (Wildlife carer, pers comm. 2013); 2 Louise Saunders (Bats Qld, pers comm. 2013); 3 Phillips *et al.* (2007) Displacement of Black flying-foxes *Pteropus alecto* at Batchelor, Northern Territory *Australian Zoologist* 34: 119-124; 4 John McCarthy (Northern Territory Government, pers comm. 2010); 5 Roberts (2006) *Management of Urban Flying-fox Camps: Issues of Relevance to Camps in the Lower Clarence, NSW*. Valley Watch Inc., Maclean; 6 Information from Gladstone Regional Council in 2010 and 2013; 7 Joe Adair (formerly DEHP, pers. comm. 2010); 8 Trish Winberly (Australia Bat Clinic pers. comm. 2013); 9 Information obtained from Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (DEHP) in 2013; 10 Billie Roberts unpublished data; 11 Scott Sullivan (DEHP, pers. comm. 2010); 12 Information from Charters Towers Regional Council in 2010 and 2013; 13 Roberts *et al.* (2012b) and additional references within; 14 Perry Deards (Central Highlands Regional Council, pers. comm 2013); 15 Jarmaine (2010) *Species Management Plan*, Mackay Regional Council; 16 Heidi Jarmaine (Mackay Regional Council, pers. comm. 2013); 17 Daryl Barnes (Walkerston resident, per comm. 2013) 18 Peggy Eby (Ecologist, pers comm. 2013) 19 John Martin (RBG, pers comm. 2013); 20 Singleton Council Meeting Minutes; 21 Information from the Southern Downs Regional Council in 2013; 22 Tim Low (pers. comm. 2013); 23 Young Shire Council.

uk = unknown



## Proposed Catalina Subsidised Services



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(<http://www.annsudmalismp.com.au/>)

## Sudmalis holds fruitful meeting with Minister for Environment (<http://www.annsudmalismp.com.au/sudmalis-holds-fruitful-meeting-minister-environment/>)

April 19, 2016

On Monday Federal Member for Gilmore, Ann Sudmalis MP, held productive talks with The Minister for the Environment, The Hon Greg Hunt MP, and Eurobodalla Shire Council Mayor, Lindsay Brown, in Parliament House, Canberra.

Mrs Sudmalis said residents of Batemans Bay have been calling for more to be done with the population of flying foxes plaguing the township and the Mayor had contacted her to address the issue with the Minister.

"I have heard first-hand from residents of Batemans Bay that the situation with the Grey-Headed Flying Foxes is truly intolerable," Mrs Sudmalis said.

"Yesterday's meeting was a constructive round-table with the Minister for the Environment and CL Lindsay Brown.

"Councillor Brown showed maps and studies that have been carried out by Eurobodalla Council and there is more work to be done.

"The Minister really understood the dilemma facing local residents and was very engaged in seeing how the Commonwealth can work with the community to resolve this serious issue.

"It is clear to me that all three tiers of Government will need to be involved.

"I am committed to assisting in finding a solution for the people of Batemans Bay on this issue," Mrs Sudmalis concluded.