



Speech by

Mrs E. CUNNINGHAM

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard 23 March 1999

GLADSTONE BAT COLONY

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—IND) (7.01 p.m.): I rise to speak on a matter of concern in my community in West Gladstone. I refer to the proximity of a bat colony to an urban community. The colony may have been there for some time. It has shifted geographically slightly. There were always houses in proximity to the colony but there has been a lot of in-filling and the community is quite adversely affected by the colony.

The community is divided. There are those who stridently support the retention of the colony—that is that no attempts be made to relocate it. The people who support the retention of the colony do not live in proximity to the colony at all and are thus not affected. The people who live nearby are affected in a number of ways. Most importantly, they are concerned about the possibility of the lyssavirus. They are concerned about any other infections or diseases that the bats may carry. They are concerned about the noise. They are concerned about odour. They are concerned about general quality of life issues.

The community has made representations to the Gladstone City Council on a number of occasions, and the Gladstone City Council has said in the media that flying foxes as a species are protected by the State Government and that it is up to the State Government to remedy the situation. There have been a lot of negotiations with the Department of Environment.

In one instance the Gladstone City Council made some attempts to affect the impact of this colony. In March 1998 the Department of Environment wrote to Len Woodman, who is the Director of Environmental Services, and said—

"The mitigation techniques that were being trialled"—

that is, trialled by the council—

"included aerosol fogging using kerosene along the mangroves as well as the placement of individual reflective strips randomly within the mangrove adjacent to Palm Drive. Both of these activities have been deemed potentially damaging to the environment and Mr Allpress"—

who is the Gladstone City Council environmental health officer—

"has been asked by this department firstly to cease all fogging activity directly related to the flying fox colony until it can be proven to have no effect on the health of either the flying foxes or the area of mangrove concerned."

In the interim, there have been a lot of qualitative and quantitative reports carried out by university people and by experts on flying foxes. None of those reports has effectively allayed the concerns of the community. One of the reports told the community that people need not be concerned about the flying fox colony or its proximity and that there was no need to worry. However, an incident occurred in Gladstone and I will just quote from the local paper—

"A self-confessed Gladstone 'animal lover' says his view on flying foxes has changed since a close encounter with one of the creatures on Sunday night."

This article appeared in the paper on 10 March. It continues—

"Hank van Meegen had fallen asleep on his bed when a flying fox hit the wall above him and fell on a pillow 22 centimetres from his head. The flying fox was black and about 60 centimetres long."

'I was reading a book on my bed at about 10.30 p.m. when I dozed off,' he said. 'I heard a hell of a noise and I looked up and my nose was nine inches from a bat. This thing hit the wall hard.'

Mr van Meegen left the room and slept in another room. The next morning he donned extra layers of clothing and re-entered the bedroom to capture the animal."

He did that because of the fear of lyssavirus. The article continues—

"When I opened the door (the next morning), I threw a quilt over it and put it in the back yard. An hour later it was gone."

Because of time, I will not go through the other notes. There have been a lot of representations to the Minister for the Environment and we have received a lot of responses on the issue. The colony is still there. It is directly across a dual pavement road. It would be less distance than from me to Mr Speaker away from houses. If I had my children living as close as that to a bat colony—and there are thousands of bats—I would be concerned, too. One of the comments from the Department of Environment is that people do not need to handle the bats and therefore they are not at risk. Mr van Meegen did not handle the bat; it landed near him in his home. There is a lot of genuine concern.

Time expired.
