

Question on Notice
No. 1272
Asked on Wednesday, 16 September 2009

MRS SULLIVAN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY (MS JONES)—

QUESTION:

What is the department doing to manage and protect flying foxes in Queensland and what methods has the department used to minimise conflict with communities?

ANSWER:

Flying foxes are one of the most important pollinators of native forest and play a critical role in forest health and productivity.

They pollinate native blossom and spread seed in a way that no other animal can. The healthy, productive forests that provide so many social, economic and environmental benefits are in no small part, the result of flying fox activity. Flying fox management and the future health of forests are interwoven.

The management of flying foxes in Queensland therefore needs to be responsive to the social and economic needs of the community, while protecting the flying-fox population, and with it the long-term environmental benefits it provides.

Shooting of flying foxes for fruit protection is inhumane, as found by the Queensland Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, and it is for that reason the Department of Environment and Resource Management has in place the current prohibition on granting Damage Mitigation Permits for that purpose.

While it is critical that flying-foxes are protected, we have to recognise that these animals can be a problem for the community mainly by damaging fruit crops or roosting adjacent to urban development.

When that happens, it is difficult for fruit growers and the public to remember the important role these animals play in keeping our environment healthy.

In response to concerns raised by Granite Belt fruit growers, a Flying Fox Working Group was been established by the former Department of Primary Industries .

An action plan has now been adopted by the group and includes trialling of various non-lethal controls over the coming season, and a program of longer-term scientific research.

I believe that non-lethal fruit crop protection techniques such as netting and scaring devices, and non-lethal control certainly represents the most sustainable way forward for industry and the community.

Flying fox colonies can also impact public amenity as a result of noise, odour and perceived health risks near residential areas. I fully appreciate the genuine distress that can result from living near a roost or colony.

The Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) is currently preparing educational and informational material targeting the fruit-growing industry and the broader community. This will be distributed free of charge where the need arises.

Currently, DERM can issue approvals to relocate colonies where such action will have a definite benefit and is likely to succeed. This was done recently in Port Douglas for the BALE resort, where approval has now been granted by DERM to disperse a colony near the resort.

However, for this to be possible, there are a number of issues which must be considered, not least of which is the potential to simply transfer the problem to another, perhaps more problematic location.

We can't just rely on moving them on and I believe that we need to be working towards on-ground, practical solutions which might broker a more sustainable relationship between humans and these animals.

DERM is investigating new techniques to support this. In particular, the agency has commissioned the construction and installation of three experimental "artificial roosts".

These will be installed to address a priority flying fox issue at Woodend, near Ipswich, by providing an alternative roosting site for a problem colony.