

EN1 – Adoption of Stonequarry Creek, Picton Grey-Headed Flying Fox Camp Management Plan

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TRIM 9082

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The final draft of the Stonequarry Creek, Picton Grey-headed Flying Fox Camp Management Plan is complete.
- The public exhibition period for the draft Plan has closed and Council has received 20 submissions from the Community about the draft Plan.
- The draft Plan has been sent to the Office of Environment & Heritage for review and approval, pending amendments.
- This report recommends that:
 1. Council adopt the draft Plan, as exhibited, and prepare priority actions once the document has been approved through the Office of Environment & Heritage.
 2. Council implement the priority actions within the Buffer Zone Vegetation Management Plan in accordance with the Stonequarry Creek, Picton Grey-headed Flying Fox Draft Camp Management Plan, subject to available resources.

REPORT

BACKGROUND

Council has been aware of the Grey-headed Flying Fox Camp on Stonequarry Creek, Picton since early 2014. At that stage, the camp was quite sizeable extending along Stonequarry Creek between the Viaduct and Victoria Bridge on Prince Street, Picton. Its substantial size, at that time, was likely triggered by the Hall Road fire in Balmoral Village in October 2013.

The camp fluctuates in size throughout the year, depending on weather conditions and other factors such as breeding time, and Council has been monitoring at quarterly intervals since 2014.

Council has received a number of representations from residents concerned about the noise, smell and potential disease risk to humans.

Council's Environmental Services staff engaged with the Office of Environment & Heritage for advice as the Grey-headed Flying Fox is a threatened species. The Office of Environment & Heritage recommended that Council prepare a camp management plan for the site.

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Council was successful in receiving a grant from Local Government NSW to engage a consultant to prepare specific elements of the draft Plan relating to flying fox ecology and camp management actions.

The draft Plan identifies Level 1, 2 and 3 actions.

Level 1 actions include activities such as community education, provision of subsidies for car and clothes line covers, access to high pressure washers and pruning of trees to reduce roosting sites in back yards.

Level 2 actions are focused on creating buffer zones between the camp and residents primarily through vegetation removal.

The primary tree species in the area is Privet, which is identified as a “priority weed” for control in the Greater Sydney Regional Strategic Weed Management, and removal of this weed would have broader environmental benefits. However, the Privet control must be done strategically with a view to not destabilising the steep creek banks and having minimal impact on the flying foxes.

A Vegetation Management Plan is currently being developed that will address these issues and will also need to be endorsed by Office of Environment & Heritage.

Level 3 actions are disturbance or dispersal of the camp and there has been feedback from the Community that this is the most desired option. However, the Office of Environment & Heritage have advised that this is a last option after Level 1 and 2 actions have been explored. The draft Plan also includes information clarifying that dispersal is expensive and very rarely effective. Quoting the report:

*“Review of Past Flying-fox Dispersal Actions Between 1990-2013”
Billie Roberts and Peggy Eby, June 2013.*

1. In all cases, dispersed animals did not abandon the local area.
2. In 16 of the 17 cases, dispersals did not reduce the number of flying-foxes in a local area.
3. Dispersed animals did not move far (eg. in approximately 63% of cases, the animals only moved <600m from the original site contingent on the distribution of available vegetation). In 85% of cases, new camps were established nearby.
4. In all cases, it was not possible to predict where replacement camps would form.
5. Conflict was often not resolved. In 71% of cases, conflict was still being reported either at the original site or within the local area years after the initial dispersal actions.

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6. Repeat dispersal actions were generally required (in all cases, except extensive vegetation removal).
7. The financial costs of all dispersal attempts were high ranging from tens of thousands of dollars for vegetation removal to hundreds of thousands for active dispersals (eg. using noise, smoke etc).

Council does not own or manage any of the land that the focal area of the camp occurs on. The camp did expand substantially just before Easter 2018 to extend along Victoria Park Reserve; however, this only lasted for a couple of weeks and is the only time this has occurred during Council's time of monitoring the camp since February 2014.

Council's primary role is to advocate Community concerns and secure funding to implement priority actions.

PUBLIC EXHIBITION PROCESS

The draft Plan was put on public exhibition from 5 March 2018 to 6 April 2018 and Council received 20 responses with 12 different submissions in total, as three submissions were duplicated and then sent in by other residents. The primary concerns raised by residents are health risks, noise, smell, faecal drop, devalued house and land prices and local environmental/bushland degradation and amenity.

The key Community submission points noted are:

1. The overall concerns by residents are noise, smell and faecal drop. Numerous residents reported lack of sleep creating stress; the smell and faecal drop impacting on and highlighting the need to keep windows closed, particularly during summer; children not being able to play in the back yard; not being able to hang out the clothes overnight; and having to regularly clean outdoor areas, cars, etc.
2. A majority of submissions noted that the camp size far exceeded what was identified in the draft Plan. Just after the exhibition period of the draft Plan commenced, the camp swelled to the largest it has ever been. It would seem this correlated with breeding season and an Autumn heatwave in other parts of the State. The increased numbers lasted two to three weeks and then a majority of the flying foxes departed and the camp is now the smallest it has been since Winter 2016.
3. Buffer zones between the camp and the residents should be implemented but the questions asked were "Is the buffer zone wide enough?" and "Who will cover the cost?"

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4. A number of submissions noted dispersal as a priority and a FaceBook page has been setup "Relocate Flying Fox Colony from Stonequarry Creek in Picton". Please refer to Background and Level 3 actions in this report.
5. Concern was raised about the transferral of disease, namely Lyssavirus and Hendra virus to humans.

Contact or exposures to bat faeces, urine or blood does not pose a risk of exposure to Lyssavirus nor does living, playing or walking near bat roosting areas. It can only be contracted through bites or scratches.

Hendra virus has only been contracted through human contact with an infected horse. All confirmed human cases to date became infected following high level exposures to body fluids of an infected horse, such as doing autopsies on horses without wearing appropriate personal protective equipment or being extensively sprayed with respiratory secretions.

There is no evidence of human-to-human, bat-to-human, bat-to-dog or dog-to-human transmission.

If any injured bats are found, it is recommended not to handle them. It is best to ring the local WIRES Volunteers on 4684 1656.

The submissions from the Community have clarified and expanded upon the Community's concerns; however, they did not identify any areas for changes or needs to the draft Plan.

CONSULTATION

The Office of Environment & Heritage, Local Government NSW, Ecosure (consultant engaged to prepare the technical aspects of the draft Plan) and local residents.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No funding has been allocated for this project/item and it is suggested that, once the Plan has been approved by the Office of Environment & Heritage, funding grants be sourced by Council to coordinate and implement the Plan.

There will be administration costs for Council staff managing and coordinating the program; however, this will be done under existing budgets as part of the normal works program.

Caring for the Environment
Report to the Ordinary Meeting of Council held on Monday 21 May 2018

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ATTACHMENTS INCLUDED IN A SEPARATE BOOKLET

1. Stonequarry Creek, Picton Grey-headed Flying Fox Draft Camp Management Plan.
2. Community submissions for the Stonequarry Creek, Picton Grey-headed Flying Fox Draft Camp Management Plan.
3. Stonequarry Creek, Picton Grey-headed Flying Fox Draft Camp Management Plan Summary.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That Council adopt the Stonequarry Creek Grey-headed Flying Fox Draft Camp Management Plan pending approval of the Plan by the Office of Environment & Heritage.
2. That Council implement the priority actions (Level 2) within the Vegetation Management Plan in accordance with the Stonequarry Creek, Picton Grey-headed Flying Fox Draft Camp Management Plan.