



## Bat battle continues – at a cost to residents and rate payers

### Description

*As flying fox numbers continue to increase in residential areas, so does the half a million dollar ratepayer-funded bill for roost management and dispersal activities. Meanwhile, impacted residents pay a personal price as their quality of life is diminished by uncharacteristic flying fox movements.*

*Thankfully, Council is determined not to let their hard work over the last two years go to waste. Officers will be out in force this week to continue their mission to break the nexus.*

**INGHAM residents were woken in the early hours of the morning yesterday as Hinchinbrook Shire Council officers and concerned locals ramped up activities to disperse flying foxes that recently began roosting on private properties in residential streets.**

Dutton Street resident Rosalie Dunstan said that she was “relieved” that council was intervening and ready to support the efforts of council officers on the ground.

After enduring weeks of broken sleep while attempting to manage the flying foxes roosting in her rear neighbour’s back yard by herself, Ms Dunstan was up again at 4.30 am yesterday making as much noise as possible alongside council officers, slamming her wheelie bin lid so hard, and for so long, that she has blisters on her hand.

“I’m very relieved because it’s been a real hassle the last few weeks, the business with the bats started over the holiday break and you couldn’t get council over that time,” Ms Dunstan said.

“Then a lovely lady from the admin got back to me and said that basically they couldn’t do anything because there were baby bats, so it was really stressful.

“The admin lady did say that we could put up lights and make noise ... so I put my spotlight on and it did help a little bit in keeping the numbers down, but I ended up having to buy more spotlights and it’s just been an ongoing process,” she said.

While Ms Dunstan and other impacted residents have expressed gratitude and relief at council’s intervention after the uncharacteristic movements of flying foxes began affecting their quality of life and in some cases, hurting their hip pockets, the ongoing saga is adding to the financial burden that council

bears to manage the animals – and ratepayers are footing the bill.

Documents obtained under the Freedom to Information Act revealed that council has spent \$571,310.37 – after grants and co-contributions – on flying fox management in the 21 months between January 1, 2020 and September 30, 2021, a cost that Hinchinbrook Shire Mayor Ramon Jayo believes is money well spent to give the community what it asked for.

“We chose to go down the path that the community wanted us to, they didn’t want to live with the bats ... so there’s no other option for us to do what we’re doing until such time that we break that nexus,” Cr Jayo said.

“If we do nothing we go back to where we were, to me it’s like building a road, once you build a road you have to maintain it,” he said.

“It has to be maintained, but it won’t be half a million dollars moving forward, I’m budgeting around \$120,000 – \$150,000 a year, that’s what I have in my mind.”

*Hinchinbrook Shire Council Mayor, Ramon Jayo*

The previous persistent colony of Black Flying Foxes at the Ingham Botanical Gardens acted as an attractant to Little Red Flying Foxes that felt safe in the established roost, resulting in a massive influx of the migratory Little Reds in 2019 and 2020 that made National and International news headlines, a situation that council doesn’t want to see repeated.

Local community members rallied against the roost, which impacted businesses, spoiled the war memorial at the botanical gardens, encroached on the grounds of nearby primary schools and kindergartens, impeded the emergency helicopter on numerous occasions and ultimately posed a perceived health risk to residents.



***A half a million dollar problem: The Ingham Botanical Gardens was forced to close due to the influx of roosting flying foxes, the damaged they caused and the health risk they posed.***

While Cr Jayo welcomed funding contributions from the Queensland Government and Department of Education when council tackled the issue in 2020, he believes that the Department of Health should also have contributed to the costs of those initial dispersal activities considering the impact that the former roost was having on the hospital and emergency helicopter flight path.

“They should have been assisting us at that time because we resolved an issue for them, an issue that they claimed was not an issue for them, I don’t know how they can claim that,” he said.

Cr Jayo explained that the high price tag of flying fox management included procuring contractors Biodiversity Australia in 2020 to disperse the significant colony from the Botanical Gardens as well as costs associated with Biodiversity Australia training council staff so that they could effectively manage the flying foxes moving forward and capital costs for the systems that council has implemented.

Because of this training and capital expenditure, council will be handling the current and future dispersal activities independently with what they’ve learnt and procured.

Dispersal efforts were delayed until this week because animal welfare codes prevent potential harm to young pups that have been present at the residential roosting sites.

“This week is probably the first time that we felt that the pups are old enough to fly themselves, so there won’t be a massive carnage ... we have to act solely in accordance with the law,” Cr Jayo said.

"It's not our domain to sort out the bat issue on private property ... but we're not prepared to let another roost establish because if that happens then what we've done over the last two years is wasted ... we'll be back to where we started," he said.

"The intent was never that we would rid Ingham of bats, because to do so we would have to rid the world of bats, but we're in this for the long haul until we achieve what we set out to do, which is to break the nexus."

*Hinchinbrook Shire Council Mayor, Ramon Jayo*

Ms Dunstan said that the flying fox problem has been like a "battle royale" that has created noise and "really bad" smell, cost her money, impacted her sleep, required hours of consistent manhours and even prevented her from hanging out her laundry.

"I had an old spotlight but it wasn't enough, so I bought new spotlights on stands so that I could move them around and that really gave them some curry, they moved out of two trees ... I've been keeping them out of the trees here and I had to run them all night but as soon as I turned them off they would just come back.

"I've been up late at night switching the spotlights on them and moving the spotlights around, because (the bats) hide from the spotlights ... I've been up at midnight, because they're coming back early, they're not coming in at 4.30 am ... I'm not getting much sleep," she said.

"The bats in the trees are in my neighbour's yard, but they were spreading as they got worse and worse, they've been spreading from tree to tree towards the creek and there's been more and more and more."

*Resident, Ms Rosalie Dunstan*

"My washing line is under that tree, it's right on the fence ... I couldn't put my washing out, it was getting weed on and other things that bats do," she said, alluding to flying fox urine and faeces which is known to potentially carry life-threatening diseases.

Despite acknowledging that she needs help to win the battle against the bats, Ms Dunstan was thankful for the help that neighbours and other residents have provided in loaning her old lights and collecting her new lights and leads from a local store, and she remains "more than willing" to continue to support the council in their efforts.

While the financial cost to residents and ratepayers can be measured, it is obvious that the cost of disrupting and lessening the quality of life of residents cannot, so locals can only hope that with a united front and all hands on deck, the Hinchinbrook Shire will experience some relief in the very near future.



***Plague proportions: Flying foxes roost in trees at the back of Ingham State Primary School in 2020 where some were found dropping dead inside the school grounds.***

**Date Created**

19/01/2022

**Author**

rcoco