



Department of Sustainability and Environment

29 April 2004

Dear resident

Today, the Minister for Environment, the Hon. John Thwaites, announced that an area of Yarra Bend Park adjacent to the Bellbird Picnic Area is to become the home of Melbourne's flying-fox colony.

You may be aware that a trial was initiated in late 2001 to relocate the colony from the Royal Botanic Gardens to a pre-selected site in Ivanhoe, known as Horseshoe Bend. The trial relied on two approaches to encourage the animals to take up residence: attracting them to the site (ie. having them move themselves); and, dispersing them from the Gardens using sound. Efforts to attract the colony to Horseshoe Bend were unsuccessful. However, the project team developed a limited ability to manoeuvre the colony and to stop it from roosting in inappropriate sites.

The colony was relocated from the Gardens in April of last year and, after many months, took up residence in its current location in Yarra Bend Park in October 2003. Due to animal welfare and legal constraints, the colony was allowed to settle while it raised its young. After considering the options available to the Government over the future of the colony and acknowledging our limited ability to control the movements of the flying-foxes, the decision to secure the colony at Yarra Ben Park was made in the broad interests of the State.

The decision to secure the colony at this site was based on a number of considerations, including:

- the limitations of the techniques available to move the colony;
- the risks associated with trying to further move the colony (it could disperse into adjoining residential areas or back into inner-city parks and gardens);
- the uncertainty over whether the colony would stay at the trial site at Horseshoe Bend, if it could be moved there;
- the proven nature of their current location, in that it meets the habitat requirements of the animals; and,
- the additional positive characteristics of the current site over the trial site (ie. greater size, a better ability to contain the colony, improved visitor opportunities).

A \$1.7million management plan over five-years will be developed to ensure that the presence of the colony remains sustainable and to strike a balance between meeting the needs of the community, including users of the park and local residents, and the needs of the flying-foxes.

The management of this threatened species in an urban environment is a difficult and complex issue and there are many stakeholders with competing views and interests. However, the decision to leave the colony at Yarra Bend Park was made in the knowledge that flying-foxes will always remain in Melbourne and it is a matter of locating the urban colony in an area where the conflict between people and wildlife is minimised. Finding an area where there is no conflict is impossible.

Yarra Bend Park offers the best opportunity to minimise any conflicts and protect the interests of the broader community. It is an area of low use, relatively isolated (as much as can be in such a highly urbanised environment) and relatively distant from medium to high-density residential areas, although some site-specific issues have been acknowledged. It is an area of natural bushland and provides protection and security to the endangered flying-foxes.

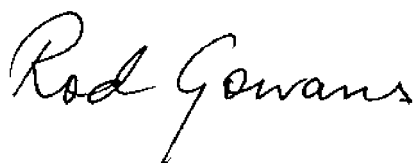
The minimisation of any impacts on local residents will be a management priority and the management plan will make provision for dealing with community concerns.

Flying-foxes play an important ecological role and are an endangered species due to human activity. Widespread habitat loss and degradation, expansion of agricultural lands and urbanisation, and culling have resulted in the national population declining by 30% in just the last ten years. Coupled with this restriction in range, urban environments have been made increasingly attractive to flying-foxes through the large-scale planting of native and exotic plants which now provide a reliable, year-round food supply, which has enabled the species to permanently reside in urban centres.

In the past, much of the attention on flying-foxes in Melbourne has been negative and failed to realise the positives. By maintaining the colony in Yarra Bend Park, impacts and risks to the broader community are minimised, the Royal Botanic Gardens will be preserved and the habitat at the site will be improved to benefit all wildlife. Infrastructure (viewing platforms, interpretive signage and paths) will be installed to provide improved visitor experience and educate the community on the Grey-headed flying-fox and the flying-foxes will have a safe home where they will be secure. Also, the community will become partners in efforts to conserve and recover this nationally threatened species.

A Questions and Answers sheet and a Fact Sheet are enclosed to provide you with more information on the management of flying-foxes. Further information on Melbourne's flying foxes can be obtained by calling the Department of Sustainability's Customer Service Centre on 136 186 or by visiting the website www.dse.vic.gov.au, under plants and animals, native plants and animals, flying-foxes.

Yours sincerely



Rod Gowans
Executive Director
Biodiversity and Natural Resources