



Colac Otway  
SHIRE

# *Preservation of Heritage Tree Assets - Disperse or Nudge?*



*Colac Botanical Gardens  
Grey Headed Flying Fox  
Camp Management*



# Victorian GHFF Camps

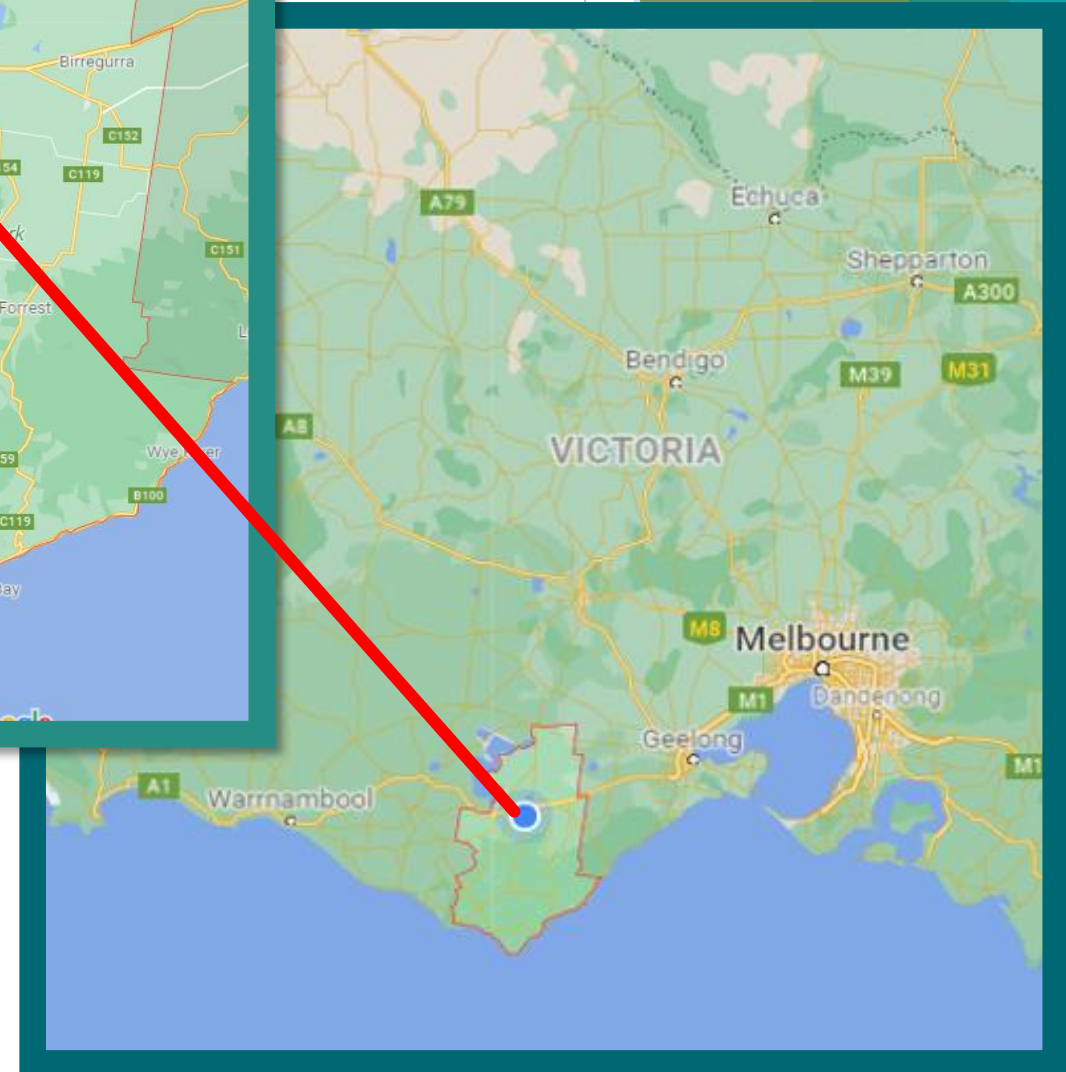
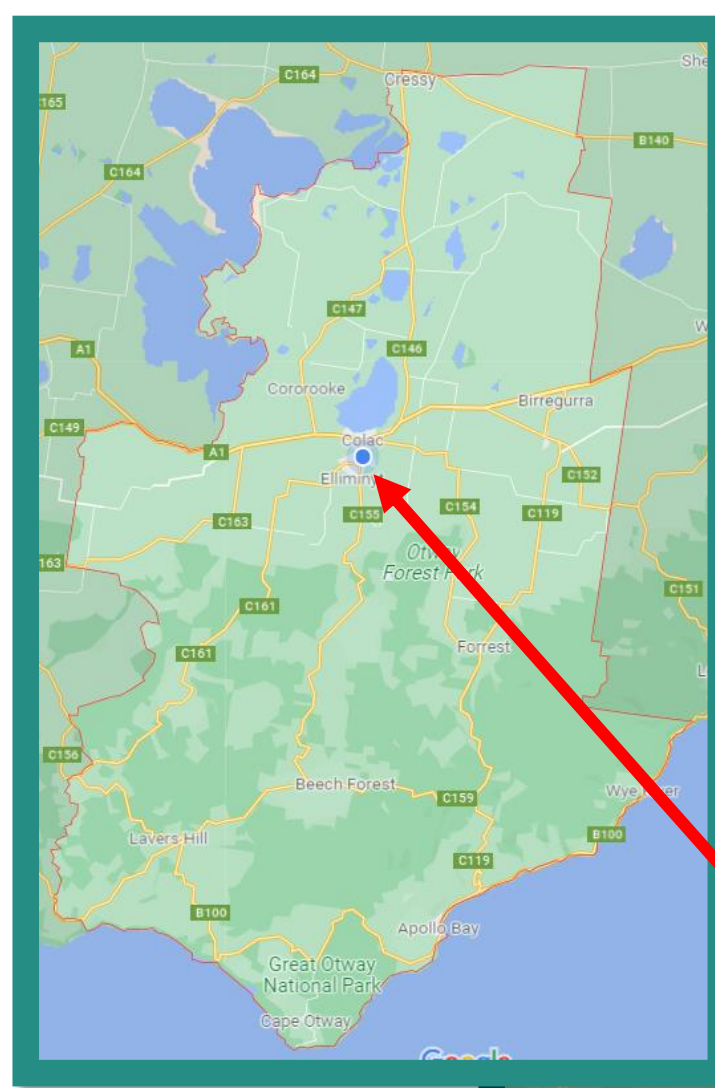


\*Dr Rod van der Ree 2020



# Colac Otway Shire

- 150km South West of Melbourne
- About 21,000 people currently live in the Colac Otway Shire,
- 13,000 people living in the shire's major industrial, commercial and service centre of Colac (Colac and Elliminyt).
- Major attractions
  - Otway National Park
  - Great Ocean Road





# Colac Grey Headed Flying Fox



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Colac Botanic Gardens



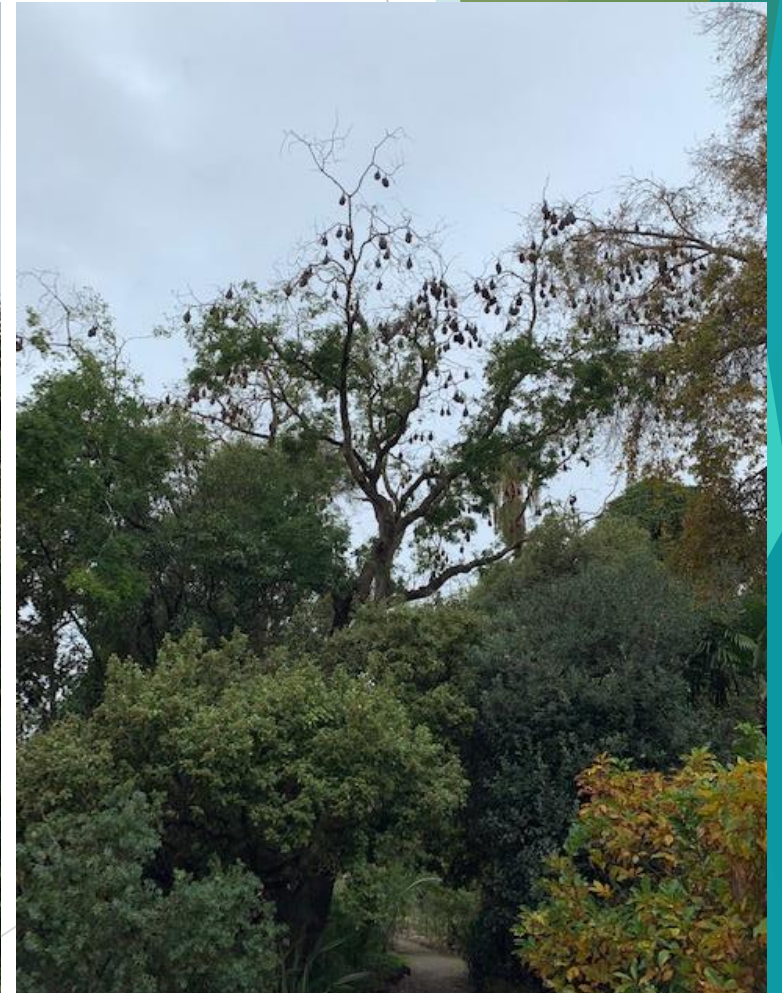
- Located at Colac Botanic Gardens
- 16 hectares
- Founded 1868
- Camp size is approximately 9,000 at peak numbers





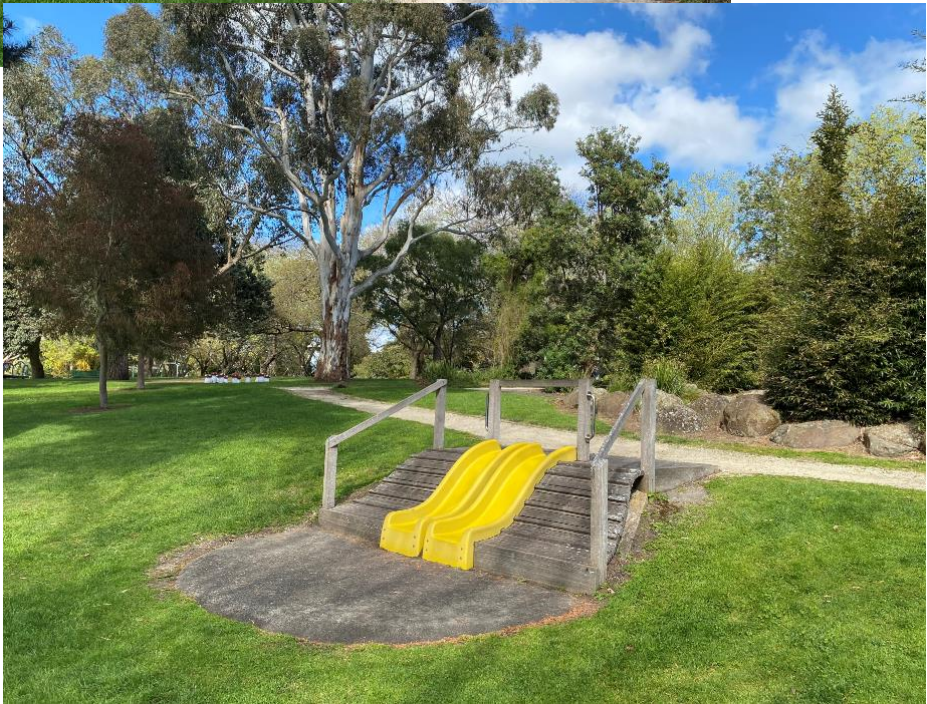
# Why? - Heritage Tree Damage

- ▶ 8 heritage trees protected by the National Trust of Victoria
- ▶ Significant damage to exotic trees





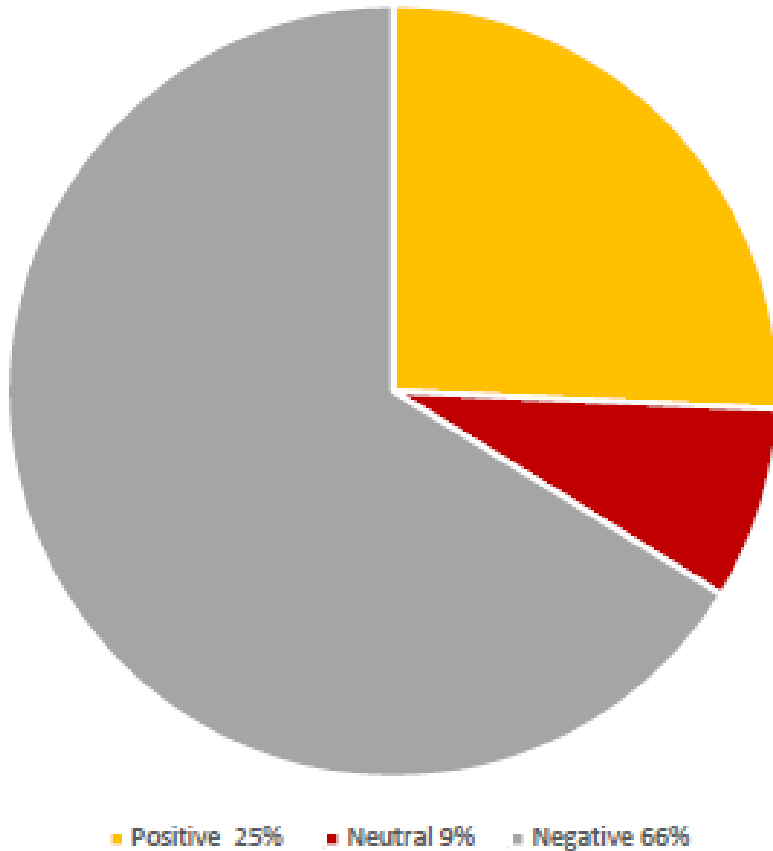
# Botanic Gardens Play Ground





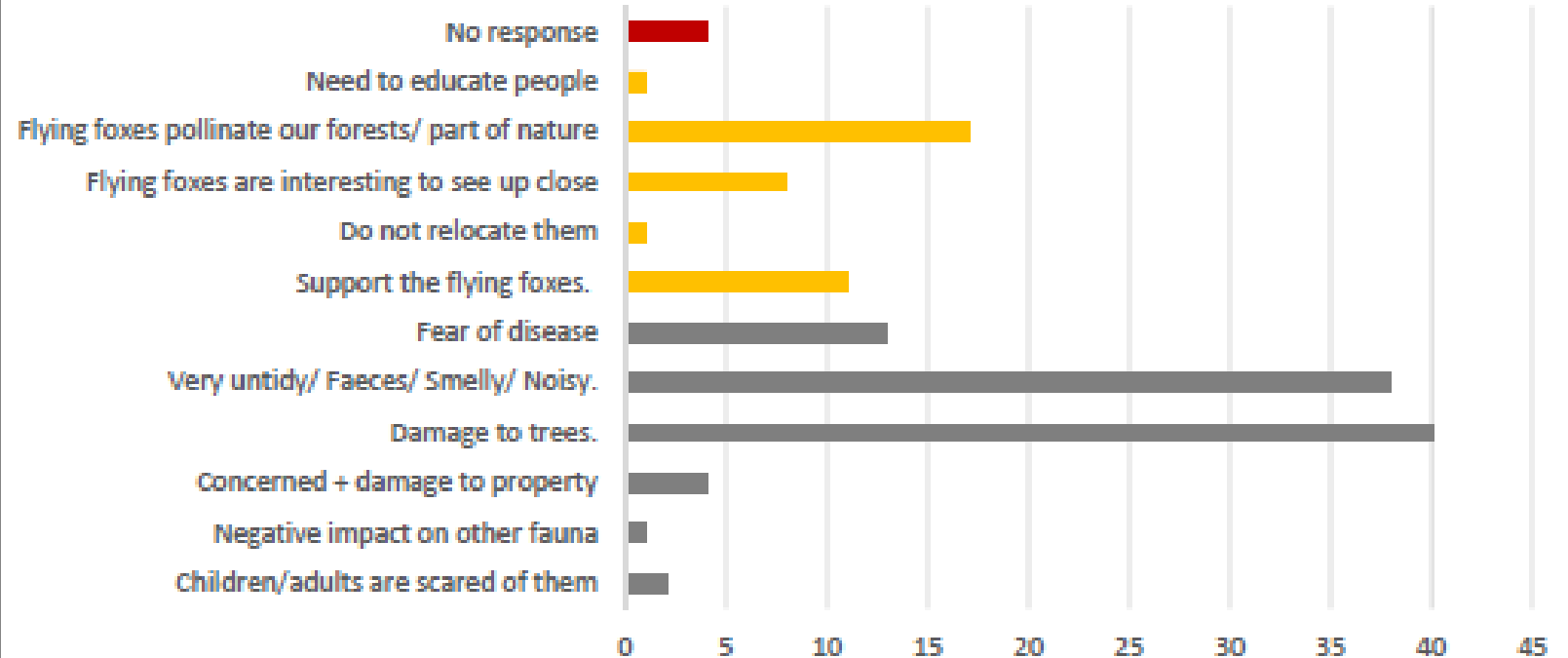
# Local Public Perception

Colac Botanic Gardens Visitor Experience



Colac and Eliminyt:

Local opinions and impacts on amenity (12 July 2019)



# Journey So Far

- ▶ Acknowledge the issue/problem
- ▶ Consult and sought guidance
- ▶ Engaged independent assessment
- ▶ Further research and education
- ▶ Gauge community perception




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# Journey So Far

- ▶ Numerous meetings with partners and stakeholders including government authorities, Dr Rod van der Ree, community groups, Council, Ecosure
- ▶ Legal steps and approvals to comply
  - ▶ *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986*
  - ▶ *Heritage Act 2017*
  - ▶ *The Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- ▶ Management Plan (Ecosure)
- ▶ ATCW Permits authority for 3 year plan (2019-23)
- ▶ Work with community to change perception to live with the GHFF population



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## Colac Grey-headed Flying-fox Management Plan

2019 - 2024

Prepared by Colac Otway Shire Council in conjunction with:

- Ecosure Consultants
- Enspect Consultant Arborists
- The Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning;
- The Commonwealth Department of Environment and Energy; and
- NSW Office of Environment and Heritage 'Flying-fox Management Plan standard template'

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D19/135416

## Council flooded with bat emails

Colac's mayor says out-of-town bat advocates should respect Colac Otway Shire Council's flying fox dispersal program, which starts at the Colac Botanic Gardens today.

A bat group arrived this morning to monitor the program, and bat advocates from around the globe have flooded the council with emails criticising the plan.

"They don't have the authority to set rules and boundaries and the shire has gone to all the correct authorities," Colac Otway Shire mayor Jason Schram said.

"These people should really keep a distance, or they might end up causing harm to the bats themselves," he said.

"It's not local attention, they're trying to force their will on others and the shire has compromised and done everything correct – it's just this group wants their way or no way, which is unfortunate, but somewhat typical of these groups.

"I've probably had 150-plus emails, and two were from within the shire. They're from overseas and everything, they just get on their environmental

network and 99 per cent of them don't understand the local issues and they've put out misinformation that people are harming and killing, and none of it's true; it's just creating a whole lot of noise to serve their own purpose.

"If they interfere with the proper process, the police have been informed and hopefully they can step in and stop these people interfering with the normal course of business," he said.

The *Colac Herald* understands there have been no flying fox sightings at the gardens in the past two days.



Cr Jason Schram

357

D19/135381

# SWOOPING IN

## Bat activists to monitor flying fox program

BY JACOB TRAYNOR

The hat saga at the Colac Botanic Gardens continues, with bat advocates landing in Colac to keep a close eye on a flying

"Directing aversive stimuli at heavily pregnant female flying foxes is nothing other than animal abuse. I know there are no pregnant females in that gardens at the mo-

The bat activists say keeping the flying foxes away from the Colac Botanic Gardens could be a death sentence for thousands of female bats and their pups during summer.

free roam among other trees from September 1 to May 1.

The group has also criticised the council for misrepresentation, with the East Gippsland Wildlife Rehabilitators this week claiming it had never been contacted by the council, after the council indicated in April that it would remain in contact with the group.

Grey-headed flying foxes are native and listed as vulnerable under Commonwealth law and as threatened in Victoria, with strict regulations about management.

The council has committed to acting under these strict conditions set out in its dispersal licence and to keep the animals safe, with plans to abort the program if any bat dies or becomes heavily pregnant.

• See page 2 for more.

# STRICT GUIDELINES FOR FLYING FOX DISPERSAL

Colac Otway Shire Council says its flying fox dispersal plan ticks all the boxes to keep the animals safe while discouraging them from roosting in the Colac Botanic Gardens.

Meanwhile, the cost of the project could be up to \$150,000, and the council is warning residents to let the experts deal with the process.

Flying foxes are a vulnerable native species and councils require authorisation to relocate colonies.

The council's operations and services manager Frank Castles said flying fox experts from Queensland helped design the dispersal plan within federal and state guidelines, and the State Government had ticked off on the plan, which begins with an initial 16-day concentrated program on Wednesday.

"We feel pretty good about how we've gone about it and we're comfortable that we'll do the right thing," he said.

"Our permit only goes for two-and-a-half hours a day, it'll be smoke, strobe lights pointing up, flood lights pointing up, and there'll be random noise typically from 4pm right through to 7.30pm."

"The important thing that people should know is that we are absolutely operating within the law; there are legal penalties if you don't, there's an \$8-million fine and two years' jail if you get it wrong," he said.

Mr Castles said about 100 bats currently roosted in the gardens, mostly male or too young to be pregnant, but an independent expert had cited 6500

"We feel pretty good about how we've gone about it and we're comfortable that we'll do the right thing."

FRANK CASTLES

bats earlier this year.

The plan aims to unsettle arriving flying foxes and discourage them from establishing a home base at the gardens in the warmer months, with most females in Australia likely currently pregnant.

"If they ever get heavily pregnant, or one dies, we have to stop our program, and there's no way we're going to breach that," Mr Castles said.

He said the cost of the plan was "significant", with the council currently putting aside \$150,000 for the project, but Mr Castles said he believed the final dollar figure would be less.

"The other thing we're emphasising is we don't want people to take the matter into their own hands – there are a lot of people around who don't have the same respect for wildlife that we have, and if they do that it not only spoils our plan but it puts them at risk of breaking the law."

Mr Castles said the plan aimed to protect heritage-listed trees and attract people back to the gardens.

"For months last year it hardly had any visitors; people stopped using the playground because it had faeces all over it and the barbecues too, so that

whole facility stopped being used," he said.

"If we left them to destroy the trees, they would lose the shade and eventually have to move somewhere else anyway."

"Who knows, they might not even come; drought has broken in Queensland and there's a lot more food up there, there might not be many or any, it's totally unpredictable."

Mr Castles said the council was unable to control where the bats would go once the dispersal plan started, but had contacted the community warning them about potential yardward bats in the coming months.

"We've done wide community engagement and letter drops around Evans Street, to police, schools, and the Colac Racecourse," he said.

"There are other sites; one thing's for sure, you can't control where they'll go like they weren't here before and now they are, and they used to have a colony near Carlisle River where they thrived as well."

"If a bat hits the ground, I really encourage people not to touch them. There is a risk of getting disease," he said.

## Flying fox talk enlightening

I attended the flying fox information session at Red Rock Regional Theatre and Gallery on Friday.

Lawrence Pope gave some really interesting facts and a great presentation on Australian bats, especially the grey-headed flying foxes that we have here in the Colac Botanic Gardens.

It was great to see other members of the public come to learn about these amazing creatures.

One thing I learnt was that the bats have quite a long highway of travel, from NSW all the way down the coast, through Melbourne, Geelong, Colac and Warrambol stretching into SA.

Colac is just one of the stops that flying foxes make during their lives.

This makes a lot of sense, humans travelling from Melbourne to Warrambol stop at McDonald's for lunch and to pee!

I believe we should be welcoming flying foxes into our town for as long as they need to rest, relax, pollinate our local plants and then move on.

Thank you to Lawrence Pope, RRRTAG and Friends of the Wild for putting on the evening.

Dani Hill, Colac

It is not 1950. We are in trouble. The Arctic and Amazon are on fire and we have deforested this land nearly to death. Species are being lost daily.

Please Colac Otway Shire focus on how you can help these animals survive instead of harassing them. Be generous. Spend the money allocated to harassment on serious reforestation around Lake Colac. Install proper interpretive educational signage. Create some new parks dedicated to conservation and in a couple of decades, if the bats survive, they and their pups may relocate of their own volition but until then they need our help to live which is their ancient right.

Lawrence Pope, Friends of Bats and Bushcare Inc, Carlton North



PROTEST: Bat activists protested outside Colac Otway Shire Council's offices in Rae Street, Colac, on Wednesday morning in opposition to plans to deter flying foxes from Colac Botanic Gardens. Pictured are Craig Davy, Gary Ward, Tony Murphy, Tracey Davy, Jan Virgo and Lawrence Pope.



DAMAGED: Unknown offenders have vandalised flying fox dispersal equipment at the Colac Botanic Gardens less than 24 hours after the program began.

## Protests at council office

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The incidents came on the same day as protests against the council's plans to disperse the bats.

Activists gathered in Colac early Wednesday morning to make a racket outside the Colac Otway Shire Council office building in Rae Street, but the street was mostly empty and the group left before 9.30am.

Friends of Bats and Bushcare president Lawrence Pope indicated the group would maintain a presence across the planned two-week concentrated dispersal program in the gardens.

The group said it would monitor the council's grey-headed flying fox dispersal program at the Colac Botanic Gardens for incidents of "abuse", but the *Colac Herald*

understands the program did not get the go-ahead on Wednesday because there were no bats roosting anywhere in the gardens.

"The bats have gone and hopefully they've moved to some native parklands so that the community can still enjoy the gardens," Cr Schram said.

About eight activists gathered at the gardens on Wednesday morning,

but work commitments meant only six remained to picket the council offices.

Mr Pope told the *Colac Herald* earlier this week that the group would not engage in any illegal behaviour while protesting.

The *Colac Herald* is not suggesting the protesters were involved with the vandalism or threats to damage trees.

## Flying fox dispersal stays on backburner

BY JACOB TRAYNOR

A flying fox dispersal program at the Colac Botanic Gardens remains on hold until bats arrive, while a Colac Otway Shire councillor wants documents outlining the program to become public.

The council said it was continuing to monitor Colac Botanic Gardens and assess the rollout of its grey-headed flying fox dispersal program in line with its Permit to Control Wildlife.

"There has been no evidence of grey-



D19/135701

# 'IT'S A DISGRACE'

## Vandalism attack on bat dispersal program

BY JACOB TRAYNOR

Unknown offenders have vandalised flying fox dispersal equipment at the Colac Botanic Gardens and promised to kill community trees if any animals are hurt during a dispersal program.

Police are investigating after two of Colac Otway Shire Council's bat dispersal light towers had wiring cut and tyres slashed some time between 4pm Wednesday and 6am yesterday, causing up to \$2000

worth of damage.

Council workers reported the vandalism to police after discovering the damage yesterday morning.

Anyone with information about the incident should contact Colac Police Station on 5232 8200.

Meanwhile, police were also notified after the council and the *Colac Herald* both received aggressive anonymous letters which threatened to kill heritage-listed trees in the botanic gardens.

"For every bat that is harmed by your actions we will ringbark now or in six months' time five of your s\*\*t imported trees. A\*\*\*holes. Extinction Emergency Wildlife Defence," the letter said.

The letter also included an angry, hand-drawn explosive-laden cartoon.

The incidents came as the council was set to start a two-week dispersal to deter flying foxes from settling in the gardens, due to concerns the native

bats had damaged heritage trees.

Council's mayor Jason Schram hit out at the offenders and urged the community to keep watch and report any illegal activity.

"It's a disgrace, we don't know who has done this but it would be good for people to keep an eye out and we urge them to contact police if they know anything," Cr Schram said.

"It's extremely disappointing because the council has worked very hard

to resolve a problem, they had the expert consultants down there, they had a briefing with staff about the bats' safety on Wednesday, but the equipment couldn't be left there even one night.

"What's unfortunate with these groups is if you don't agree with their ideology, they'll force it upon you. Now people are writing aggressive letters threatening community assets, it's disappointing."

• STORY CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



## 2019 - Dry Run - Trial

Plan from April 1<sup>st</sup> to  
August 31<sup>st</sup>

- ▶ 1 Month Permit
- ▶ In consultation and approval from DELWP and Ecosure

## 2020 - Year 1 - Dispersal Plan

- ▶ 3 year permit (ATCW)
- ▶ Trained Staff, Ecologist and DEWLP on site
- ▶ 200 GHFF
- ▶ Councils preferred option for 2021



# Guiding Principals for Nudge

- ▶ Meet legislative requirements
- ▶ Zero harm to GHFF
- ▶ Minimize tree damage
- ▶ Note that actions at Colac affect other camps
- ▶ Accept GHFF are in the Shire and important to local ecology





# 2021 - Year 2 - Nudging Program

Move from heritage section to northern boundary trees  
8 trees protected by National Trust of Victoria

*To*

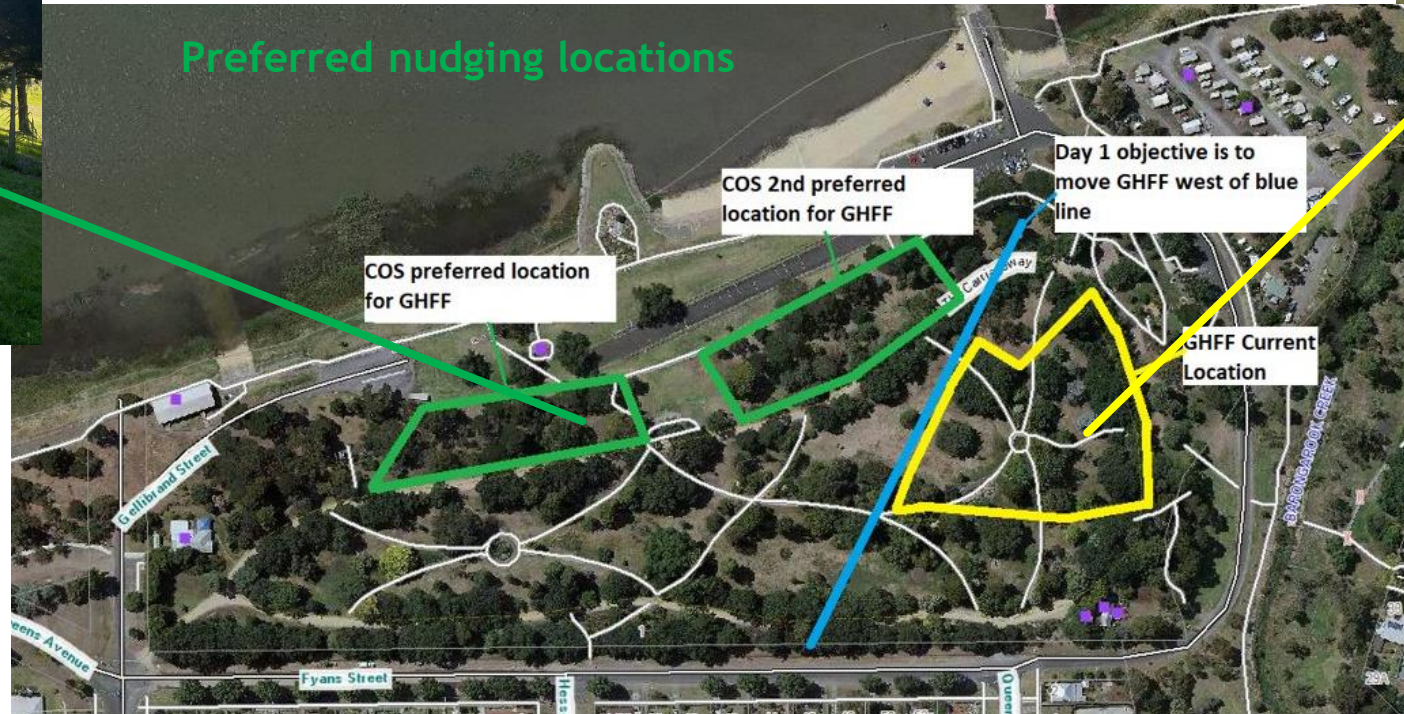


*From*



Northern Boundary Trees

Preferred nudging locations



Heritage Tree



# 2021 - Year 2 - Nudging Program

- ▶ Trained Staff, Ecologist and DELWP on site
- ▶ 2000 GHFF
- ▶ **Methods** (in accordance with management plan)
  - ▶ Flashing lights
  - ▶ Air horns
  - ▶ Pans and polly pipe
  - ▶ ATV and portable speaker
  - ▶ Wind Dancers

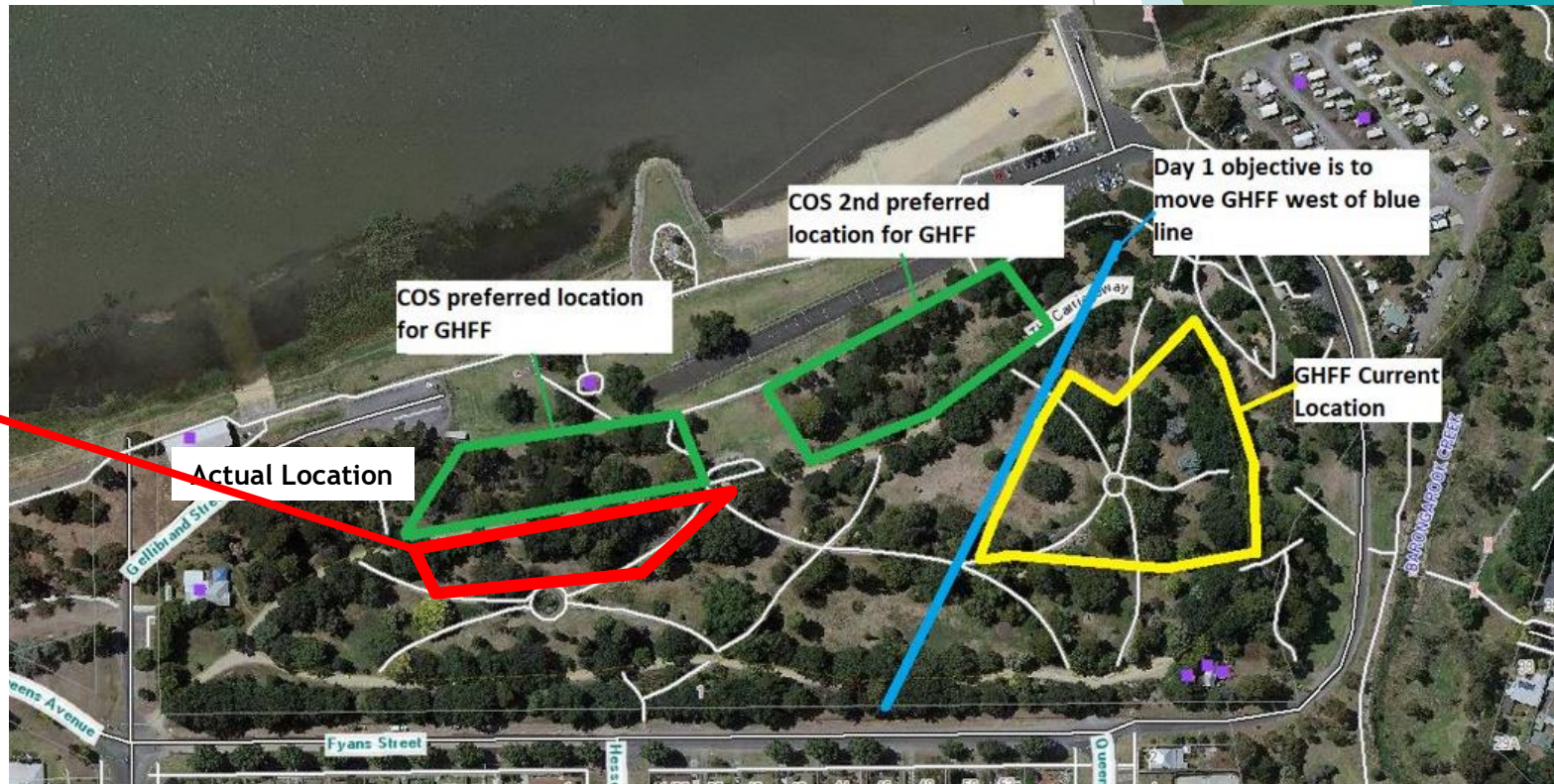




# 2021 - Year 2 - Nudging Program

## Results

- ▶ 200 GHFF took flight after nudging





# Measures for Success for Nudging

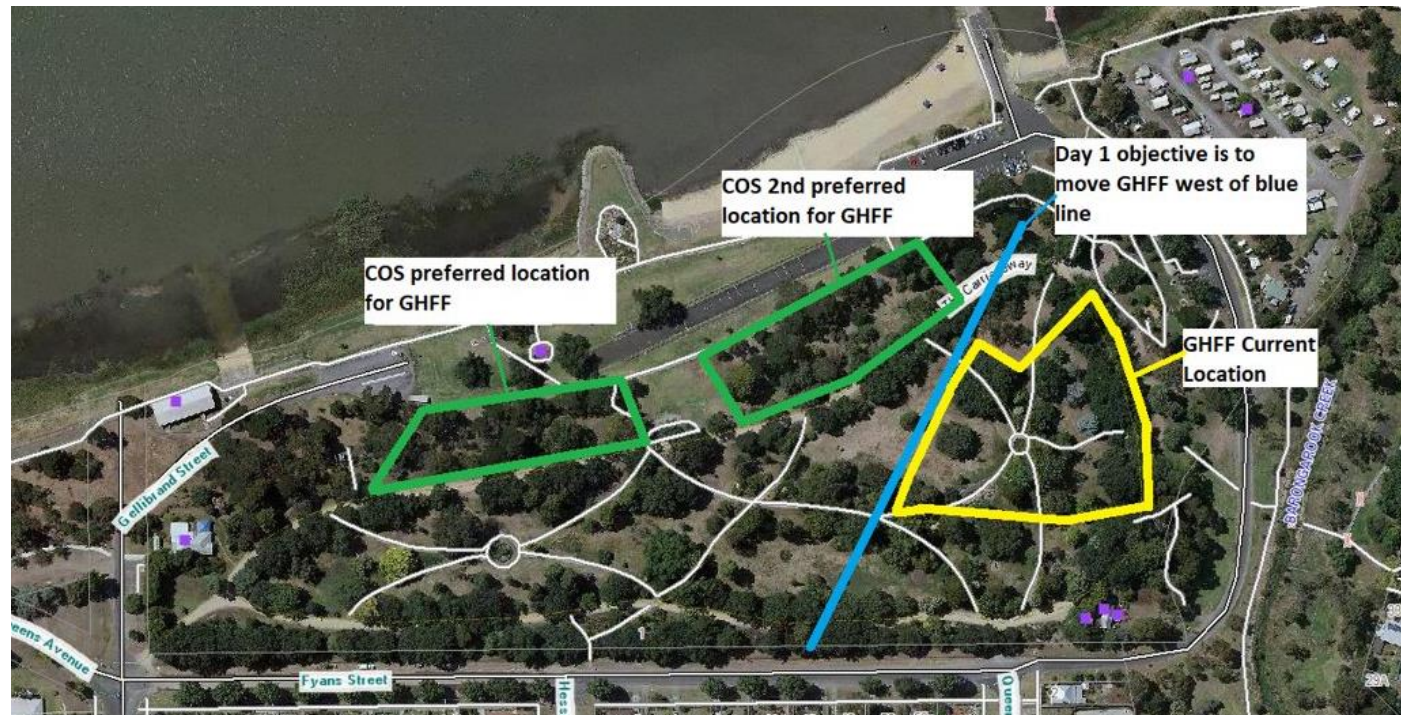
- ▶ Timing of the nudging activities differs each day depending on light
- ▶ Flexibility of method depending on the behaviour of the GHFF
- ▶ Vehicles had to be excluded from location as GHFF lifted very easily with noise
- ▶ Early indications are the wind dancers are very effective





# 2022 - Year 3 - Nudging Program Continuation

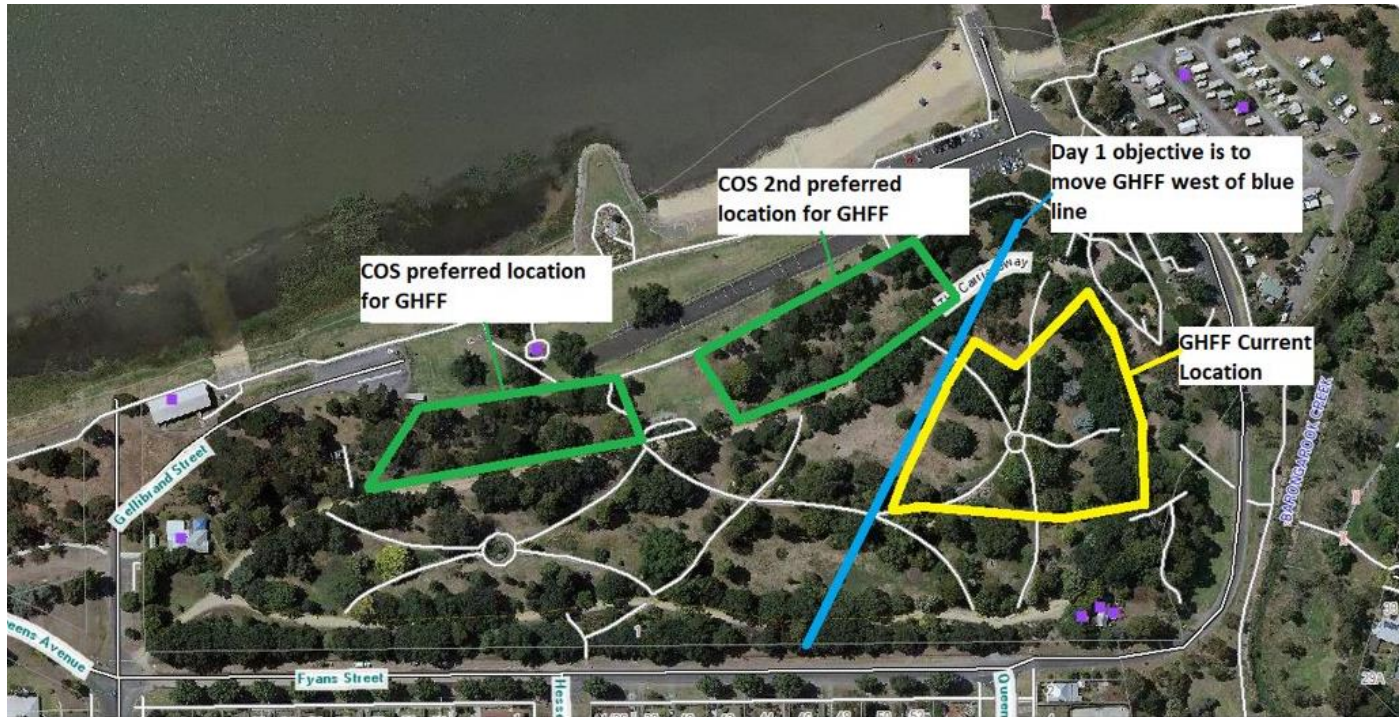
- ▶ Council Approval
- ▶ Continuation to move from heritage section to boundary trees





# Conclusion

- ▶ Nudging is the preferred method and outcome
- ▶ Preservation of heritage assets







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# Thank you.

