

City of Ipswich

Flying-fox Roost Management Plan Summary

November 2024



ipswich.qld.gov.au/flyingfox

BACKGROUND

The Flying-fox Roost Management Plan is an important document that sets out how council manages flying-fox roosts on council land, and the broader impacts and considerations for flying-fox roosts across the City of Ipswich.

The Plan was adopted in 2014. Since then, our city has changed significantly. In 2022-2024 we re-evaluated our plan for roost management to ensure the best outcomes for flying-foxes and the community.

Flying-foxes and their habitat are protected under both Australian and Queensland law. Any action to manage flying-foxes must protect the animals' welfare.



THE PROCESS

In 2022, council started the process for updating its Flying-fox Roost Management Plan.

In July 2022, Ipswich City Council was successful under Round 3 of the Queensland Government Flying-fox Roost Management – Local Government Grants Program. Council received \$30,000 to update the Plan to incorporate new long-term roost management strategies.

There has been key stakeholder and community engagement as part of the process, including:

- A survey and interactive map on council's Shape Your Ipswich online platform in May 2023
- Promotion of the engagement through social media and a letterbox drop to neighbourhoods close to roosts.

INCORPORATING COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

There were 29 respondents to the survey on Shape Your Ipswich in May 2023.

83 per cent said they lived in Ipswich near a flying-fox roost, and 52 per cent said they had been impacted.

There were polarised personal opinions among the respondents about flying-foxes. About half had very positive personal feelings, scoring 5 out of 5. The other half of respondents scored 1-3 out of 5.

IMPACTS ON RESIDENTS

The main concerns raised by respondents were impacts to their property, droppings outside their property, noise from a roost, and noise from fly-out.

The Flying-fox Roost Management Plan details both reactive and proactive measures council may consider to manage the complexities of human-wildlife conflict at roosts. It also considers the financial and community risk of actions taken to ensure decisions are considered holistically.

This suite of options will allow council to manage impacts in a way that is tailored to the needs of the community and the welfare of the animals.

NERMIA GARDENS

Nerima Gardens in Queens Park was mentioned by respondents for having access restrictions due to flying-fox impacts.

Council has incorporated actions specific to Queens Park and Nerima Gardens into the Flying-Fox Roost Management Plan.

In 2024 council installed walkway covers at the Ipswich Nature Centre, to provide better amenity to visitors during the peak flying-fox season.

SUITABLE ROOST LOCATIONS

The most popular action for managing the impacts of flying-foxes was to enhance habitat in suitable locations away from urban areas.

Council has made recommendations in the Flying-fox Roost Management Plan to progress this, including identifying and consulting on potential low-conflict sites, considering roost habitat in environmental acquisitions, and investigating Planning Scheme mechanisms.

ABOUT FLYING-FOX ROOSTS

ESSENTIAL POLLINATORS

Flying-foxes are essential pollinators by transporting pollen grains and fruit seeds between tree species while feeding. The ecological function of flying-foxes maintains native forest ecosystems, including hardwood species which are commercially important.

Flying-foxes are able to maintain genetic diversity of forest ecosystems as they have high mobility between roosts and can travel long distances regularly. This genetic movement is becoming even more important with increased habitat fragmentation.

VARIABILITY OF ROOSTS

Flying-fox roosts are highly variable. The seasonal migration of nomadic Little red flying-foxes is one of the main reasons. Roosts often swell in size dramatically over summer due to an influx of Little reds, but these changes are often short-lived.

Flying-foxes' ability to fly and tendency to migrate large distances in search of food means that many change their roosting site frequently.

Flying-foxes predominately forage within 25km from a roost. They can travel hundreds of kilometres over several nights when moving between roosts, which allows them to arrive in large numbers, seemingly 'overnight', to local flowering events.

DISTURBED ROOSTS

Flying-fox roosts have been historically disturbed to remove them from urban and rural centres. This means significant roosts have fragmented, resulting in numerous splinter roosts. Along waterway corridors this can also result in 'roost hopping' where a roost shifts up and down a vegetated corridor.

The splintering of roosts means the number and overall impact of roosts has increased, especially in urban areas.

The management of flying-fox roosts must consider their variable and dynamic nature. Often, 'successful' dispersals have been confused with the animals moving and/or migrating based on their natural behaviour.

In addition, flying-foxes may later attempt to reoccupy roosts from which they have been dispersed, only days or weeks later.

ROOST SENSITIVITIES

Flying-foxes produce a single offspring each year, resulting in slow population growth. Disturbance of roosts should be avoided during mating and birthing seasons.

Any works should be undertaken at times of year that minimise impacts to breeding cycles and dependent young.

Of particular importance to flying-fox survival are good canopy cover for shade, a dense understorey to regulate the microclimate and access to water.

Flying foxes are extremely vulnerable to high temperatures above 38 degrees and have suffered widespread mass mortality events where temperatures exceed 42 degrees.

RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ROOST MANAGEMENT

The responsibility to manage flying-foxes is with the owners of lands containing flying-fox roosts.

The Flying-fox Roost Management Plan relates to council's management of flying-fox roosts on council land. It was developed to provide effective, long-term management of flying-fox roosts, particularly in high-conflict areas.

Where private landholders seek to conduct roost management actions on their land, they will require a permit from the State Government.

- Council may provide advice to private landholders with flying-fox roost management issues. Council may also undertake joint management actions where a roost is across both council and private lands.
- Council supports the retention and protection of flying-fox roosts unless a high risk to public health can be demonstrated for flying-fox roosts on council owned or managed land. In these cases, council will provide a tailored management strategy to the site.
- Council supports the identification, rehabilitation and establishment of low-conflict, long-term flying-fox roost locations throughout the region. They are preferred on council or State-managed lands to ensure effective, long-term sustainable management of roosts.
- Council supports the protection and restoration of foraging habitats.
- Council supports additional research to fill knowledge gaps in flying-fox ecology, roost choice behaviours, foraging tree species preferences and management strategies.

IMPACTS OF LIVING WITH FLYING-FOXES

When flying-fox roosts are close to urban or residential areas, there is the potential for human/wildlife conflict.

Typical impacts include:

- Noise, especially where roosts are disturbed or during summer influx
- Odour, especially following rain, during hot and humid weather or influxes
- Droppings, especially close to feeding sites
- Vegetation damage, such as temporary loss of leaves and damage to branches
- Concerns about viruses and bacteria that can be harmful to humans.

REACTIVE MANAGEMENT

Generally, community concerns and requests for council advice or action regarding flying-fox roosts peaks in summer with the influx of migrating Little red flying-foxes.

Council will consider reactive interventions on a case-by-case basis.

The Flying-fox Roost Management Plan describes both the process for considering and responding to customer requests, and the process for assessing roost risk to identify appropriate management actions.

There are a broad range of management actions possible, from low-impact to highly invasive. There is a strong correlation between the increasing level of roost intervention, and increasing costs and risk.

These may include:

- Increased monitoring of roosts during summer
- Education such as community information on current roosts, engagement with residents near roosts
- Works such as fencing around trees, building improvements to reduce noise and other impacts
- Vegetation management (in accordance with legislation requirements) varying from low-risk weed management to major vegetation works, such as clearing buffers, that are likely to result in high levels of flying-fox disturbance
- Dispersal – although attempts are rarely successful, extremely costly and may result in flying-foxes shifting to less desirable locations such as backyards or other areas in which conflict may occur
- Relocating people (lowest preference option).

During peak season council may also consider additional reactive actions on council land, including:

- Footpath and street cleaning for safety where there are foraged fruit and droppings
- Flying-fox heat stress response actions during a heatwave, such as
 - Public information
 - Park signage or closures
 - Liaison with wildlife carers
 - Waste disposal

PROACTIVE MANAGEMENT

The Flying-fox Roost Management Plan includes proactive measures that council will undertake throughout the year, including:

- Quarterly monitoring of roosts
- Education and engagement to achieve enhanced community environmental awareness
- Communication with residents particularly near high-risk roosts
- Pre-emptive buffering and vegetation trimming around a roost
- Embellishing or protecting alternative, low-conflict roosting and foraging habitat
- Heat event preparation

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of short, medium and long term management actions have been identified in the Flying-fox Roost Management Plan.

Council will aim to:

- Deliver actions in accordance with council budget and resourcing allowances
- Seek opportunities (such as grants) for delivering actions with the State, research partners or industry
- Have a flexible approach to deliver recommendations as circumstances change
- Have a balance between management of impacts to the community and conservation of flying-foxes
- Maintain a high standard of written and verbal communication with impacted residents and community members

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS	
Queens Park	Provide additional covered areas and walkways at Queens Park's Nerima Gardens and Ipswich Nature Centre
	Prepare and implement a site-specific roost management plan for Nerima Gardens to achieve sustainable outcomes for stakeholders and park amenity.
	Update and implement permanent flying-fox education signage at Nerima Gardens and Ipswich Nature Centre
Roosts	Formalise a quarterly monitoring program of flying-fox roosts
	Investigate funding opportunities for enhanced roost monitoring and survey tools.
	Investigate proactive roost management activities to create managed buffers where appropriate
	Investigate canopy sprinklers at high conflict roosts
	Investigate technologies/strategies for increased heat stress resilience such as temperature and humidity sensors, water taps/tanks, sprinklers or heat stress refuges
	Create plans for alternate roost habitat embellishments, including consultation for identified sites
Council - internal	Implement measures to accurately record and file customer questions and complaints
	Include consideration of flying-fox low conflict habitat in environmental acquisition process
	Develop heat stress response procedure and associated internal documents
	Investigate a dedicated urban wildlife conflict officer, specialising in community flying-fox education and conflict management
	Develop a management plan for ibis that includes the influence between ibis and flying-foxes
	Complete local refinement of foraging habitat mapping, including identifying important seasonal food trees and vegetation communities
	Opportunities to include flying-fox roosts and foraging habitats as matters of local environmental significance under the Ipswich Planning Scheme

Regional	Establish a regional flying-fox management communications register
	Investigate a coordinated approach to Hendra virus vaccination and awareness
	Investigate opportunities to collaborate with State and local governments to improve flying-fox knowledge through research
Community	Investigate grant opportunities for local wildlife carers to facilitate ongoing support for local community groups and individuals
	Investigate opportunities for environmental education programs to increase community capacity to co-exist with flying-foxes



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