

EXCELLENCE IN THE ENVIRONMENT AWARDS



COUNCIL NAME

Byron Shire
Council

No Bat No Me: A flying-fox and koala secret network of nature

WEB ADDRESS

www.byron.nsw.gov.au

SIZE

566 square
kilometres

POPULATION

35,773

Overview

The "No Bat No Me" project was a unique ecology project held over twelve months, offering Byron Shire children and broader community an opportunity to explore the fascinating world of flying-foxes. Inspired by the book *The Secret Network of Nature*,¹ the initiative aimed to educate the community about the crucial role flying-foxes play in the Australian ecosystem, while raising awareness of the threats they face due to habitat loss.

The project was implemented through a tailored media campaign, local cinema streaming and 17 school workshops. Pre- and post-workshop surveys revealed a significant shift in perceptions, with 82.5% of participating children having changed their views on flying-foxes. It also contributed to a 67% reduction in flying-fox-related complaints to Council from 2022-2024.

Background

Flying-foxes have coexisted with Australia's landscape for over 25 million years and they are key to maintaining healthy ecosystems. They have co-evolved with Eucalyptus trees and their long-distance travel plays a vital role in pollination, helping to form lush forests and promoting genetic diversity.

Despite their importance, flying-foxes are often misunderstood and vilified, largely due to negative perceptions of bats. The "No Bat No Me" campaign aimed to shift local attitudes, emphasising their essential ecological role and symbiotic relationship with gum trees. It sought to foster greater community acceptance and, by extension, a deeper connection to the local environment.

The project followed a 4-year period of active management of the flying-fox camps and Byron's initial Flying-fox Camp Management Plan (2018-2023). Council carried out habitat restoration and created vegetation buffers to reduce the environmental impact of flying fox camps. Council observed changes in the surrounding camp areas and recognised a significant gap in public awareness and understanding of the local bat population.

¹ Reference: Wohlleben, Peter 2019 *The Secret Network of Nature - The Delicate Balance of All Living Things*. Random House, UK



Implementation

Council created the “No Bat No Me” project, a tailored educational and multi-media campaign, to bridge the gap in public understanding of flying-foxes. Council spread essential ecological knowledge to the community by engaging with local scientists and incorporating innovative social marketing strategies. Targeted communications were released fortnightly over five months through social media, local newspapers, street banners, and a cinema streaming campaign.

The project had a one-year duration, with the first trimester dedicated to developing media designs. The project used existing messaging from flying-fox and koala communication collateral, which was then tested, refined and delivered to the Byron Shire community.

The second and third trimesters focused on conducting workshops in schools covering 9 local schools (out of 10 proposed) and 1 homeschooling group. A second-hand flying-fox mascot costume was also sourced for *Splendour in the Grass* called “Frankie Jr.”, inspired by Sunshine Coast Council’s own “Frankie”. The mascot has since been adopted by Port Macquarie, and the “Frankie” fan club network is growing along the East Coast.

The “No Bat No Me” project was funded by a grant from WIRES², who also participated in several school workshops and shared their perspective on the survival of the species.

Outcomes

The project reached 13,095 viewers through cinema streaming and directly engaged 318 children through the workshops. Success was measured through surveys, including pre- and post- workshop surveys and a broad community survey to assess shifts in public perception. Before the workshops, only 56% of participating children believed flying-foxes were important for the environment, but after the program, 95% recognised their significant role.

The initiative contributed to council receiving a 67% reduction in flying-fox-related complaints between 2022 and 2024 and garnered national recognition at the 2023 National Flying-fox Forum. The use and adaption of existing flying-fox educational collateral and the sharing of new approaches helped maximise the reach of the educational messages within and beyond shire boundaries.

Key learnings and challenges

The project highlighted the need to strengthen bridges between scientific research and local environmental issues, particularly through school engagement.

A key learning was the effectiveness of combining hands-on, in-person delivery—such as school workshops—with a broader, tailored media campaign. This approach allowed for continuous community engagement over an extended period, ensuring that the

² The total grant amounted to \$27,000, with 67% of it allocated to the development of the social marketing.

message reached diverse audiences and reinforced the educational impact. The integration of these two strategies proved to be a powerful way to bridge knowledge gaps and create lasting change in community attitudes to local environmental issues.

The project also recognised the importance of reinforcing both internal and external messaging to ensure staff members as well as the general community were aware of the species' importance, the potential conflicts it could lead to, and the primary cause of these conflicts – habitat destruction.

Challenges included copyright issues for audio visual materials, as well as managing the impact of the 2022 floods and its associated impact on the availability of contractors.

The campaign content is versatile and is available for future replication. It can therefore be used for diverse audiences and can be reinforced as the community changes. Future projects should allow more time to engage with local Traditional Custodians to better guide the stories and, ideally in the planning stage, include a partnership with Landcare to promote tree planting.



Contact:

Name: Claudia Caliarì
Position: Biodiversity Projects Officer
Phone: +61 2 6626 7054
Email: ccaliari@byron.nsw.gov.au

This project received a Highly Commended Award in the Communication, Education and Empowerment category at the 2024 LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards.