

# WILDLIFE VICTORIA SUBMISSION TO NORTH EAST LINK PROJECT

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## Preamble

This submission relates to information in the EES documents:

- Chapter 10 Proposed avoidance and mitigation measures
- Chapter 15 Arboriculture
- Chapter 25 Ecology
- Technical Report G Arboriculture
- Technical Report Q Ecology

## Section 1: Animal Welfare Concerns

In this section we make recommendations relating to animal welfare to be considered for inclusion in the CEMP via EPR FF1 (Fauna Management Measures)

### Animal Welfare Concerns

Every tree, particularly mature trees with hollows or rough bark, and including dead trees, is home to many animals (mammals, birds and reptiles) whose life and deaths interests must be considered when removing habitat.

- Small tree hollows may be home to microbats, small hollow-nesting birds, and gliders
- Large tree hollows may be home to brushtail possums and large hollow-nesting birds
- Tree branches and forks may be occupied by nesting birds, and by ringtail possum dreys
- Rough and lifting bark may be used by microbats as a daytime roost, and by small lizards such as skinks
- The area immediately around the tree may provide habitat for lizards and snakes (especially if rocks and fallen timber are present)
- Rocky areas, and fallen timber, may provide habitat for lizards and snakes.

Every tree should be thoroughly examined no earlier than 4 weeks prior to removal, preferably on multiple occasions, to accurately ascertain what birds and animals are relying on that tree for shelter. Observations made on one occasion, or too far ahead of planned removal may fail to detect animals present at the time of removal.

Resident mammals (possums, gliders and microbats) should be provided with alternative shelter 2 weeks prior to tree removal with a protocol to encourage them to relocate to the new accommodation provided.

A professional animal rescue service (such as Nigel's Animal Rescue, or Five Freedoms Animal Rescue) should be contracted throughout the project period to respond to situations requiring retrieval/rescue of affected wildlife.

A professional snake relocation service should be contracted throughout the project period to respond to situations requiring removal of snakes.

A professional microbat scientist (e.g. Dr Lindy Lumsden (Arthur Rylah Institute) or Rob Gration (EcoAerial)) should be contracted throughout the project period to respond to situations requiring detection and relocation of microbats.

### Net loss of habitat

Although 30,000 trees will be planted to offset the loss of 16,000 "amenity" trees removed, it will be many years before these new trees will functionally replace lost habitat. This may be partly ameliorated by planting advanced trees, by commencing planting as soon as possible, and by installing artificial nest boxes to replace lost nesting hollows.

A total of 52 hectares of native bushland will be destroyed by the NEL project. Offsets will protect bushland in other sites, but there will nevertheless be a net loss of habitat. We believe that suitable new habitat of a similar area should be created to replace lost habitat and food resources. This could include industrial sites and vacant land that can be revegetated.

Green spaces in the urban landscape are vital, with incremental "chipping away" occurring over time due to development. Green spaces lost to development should be offset by acquiring land of similar size so that no net loss of green space occurs.

### Microbats

There are at up to 15 species of microbats found in urban Melbourne. During the day microbats will be roosting under bark and in hollows, either as isolated individuals or in groups. During winter they will be in a state of torpor and in spring and summer there may be dependent young present in the roost.

Due to the diversity of microbat species present in urban Melbourne, a professional microbat scientist should be consulted when planning for tree removal.

Assessment should include recording of bat echolocation calls to determine the species that are likely to be using roost sites in the area. Tree removal should be planned so that disturbance avoids the birthing season for the microbat species detected in the area.

Pre-removal every tree should be thoroughly investigated to identify microbat roosting opportunities. If hollows or rough/lifting bark is present, it should be assumed that microbats use these roost sites. While hollow-dwelling microbats may have a number of roost sites in the vicinity, artificial roost sites (microbat boxes) should be installed to replace any roosting hollows lost during the process of tree removal. Boxes should be maintained into the future as replacement of lost natural hollows may take decades to form.

### Possums and Gliders

Ringtail possums sleep in a “drey” constructed from sticks and leaves, while brushtails and gliders favour hollows. Each tree should be thoroughly examined for dreys and hollows. Alternative suitable replacement daytime refuges (possum boxes and artificial dreys) should be established in nearby trees, and disturbance of possums to encourage re-location to the new refuges should be conducted prior to tree removal. Boxes should be maintained into the future as replacement of lost natural hollows may take decades to form.

### Birds

Birds will be nesting in tree branches during their breeding season. Every tree should be thoroughly examined for nests and the presence of eggs or chicks determined.

Active bird nests (with eggs or chicks) should be relocated where this is feasible, with eggs/chicks moved to an artificial nest nearby. The success of relocation should be established (i.e. parents continue to incubate eggs or feed chicks). Where chicks are abandoned a professional wildlife animal rescue service should be contacted to retrieve the chicks.

### Reptiles

Lizards and snakes may be residing in the rocks and fallen timber. Professional advice should be sought as to how and where successful relocation of such animals can be achieved.

## Section 2: Grey-headed Flying fox camp at Yarra Bend Park

This section concerns works on the south side of the Eastern Freeway.

### Camp size and proximity to works

The number of animals in the camp varies considerably from year to year. While the EES (Chap 25 Ecology, p.14) puts the variability from 6,000 in winter to 30,000 in summer, in fact the numbers were as low as 2,000 in winter of 2018, and as high as 45,000 in summer 2018/19. This summer the animals were much closer to the Eastern Freeway bridge (Fig 1, arrow 1) than we have seen them in previous years. This means that the observations in Nov 2017 overestimate the distance between works and the nearest roosting locations. The EES (Chap 25 Ecology, p.33) puts this at “approximately 700 metres downstream from the proposed works, or approximately 400 metres directly”.

The EES (Chap 25 Ecology p.33) indicates works include “bridge upgrade and widening of the Eastern Freeway”. It is unclear to what extent this will affect the south side. The camp is extremely close to the freeway a little to the west of the bridges (Fig 1, arrow 2, and Fig 2), with only a few metres separating the summer roosting trees from the freeway. Any works in this area has the potential to disturb the camp during the summer peak, and any loss of trees may have a significant impact on the camp, where new plantings are many decades away from providing replacement roost trees.

While the colony is very accommodating of freeway noise (which is predictable and constant), sudden, loud and unexpected noises may in fact disturb animals and make them move further downstream. This creates the possibility of more bats roosting closer to houses at and beyond River Retreat. This should be considered when the CNVMP is prepared and should consider the time of year that works are occurring as this will be a crucial factor in the extent to which works are likely to disturb the colony.

On a minor note, the “No-Go Zone” falls a little short of the actual extent of the camp on the west side (Fig 1, arrow 3 and Fig 3).

**We request clarification** of exactly what works will occur on the south side of the Eastern Freeway, and mitigation of noise, dust and light pollution at night.

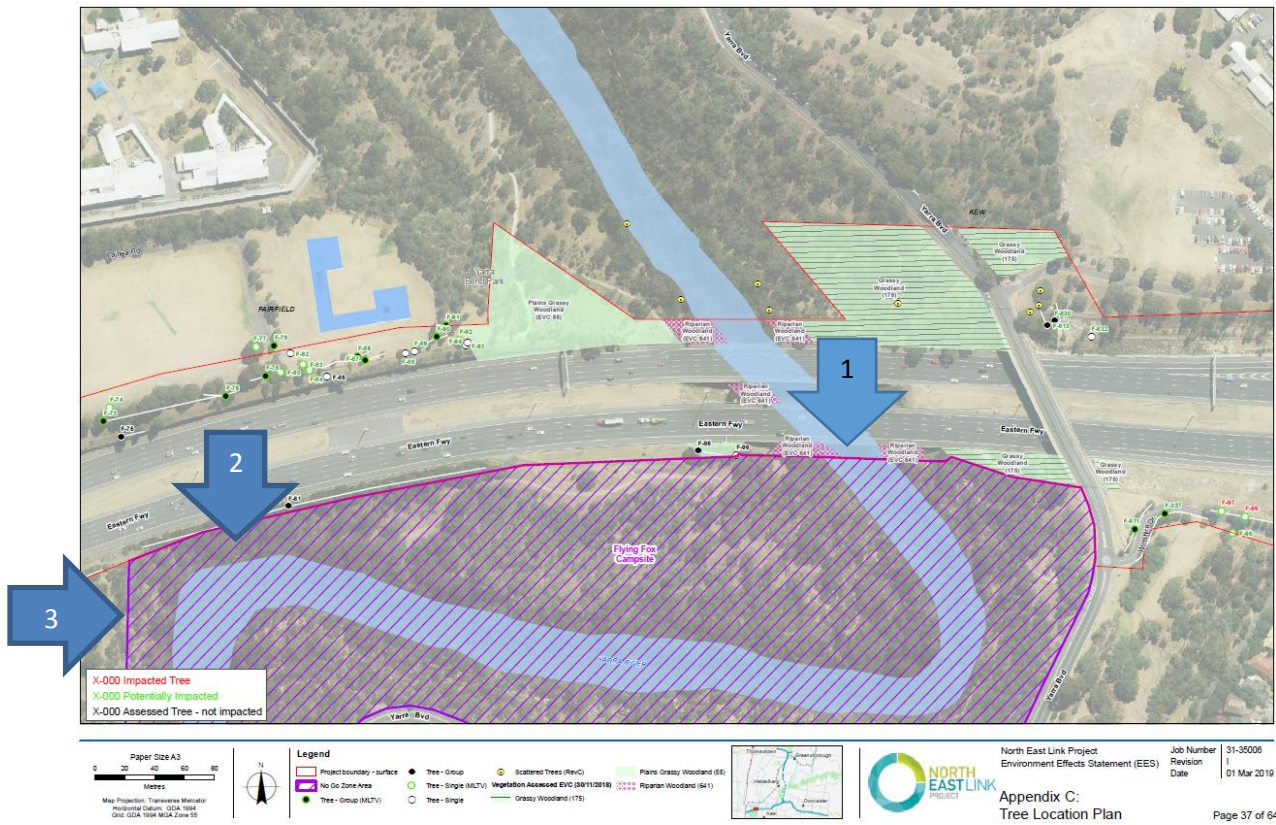


Figure 1: Proximity of works to GHFF camp



Figure 2: Proximity of freeway on the left to the Yarra river on the right (Note the fence has been cut in this location for many years).

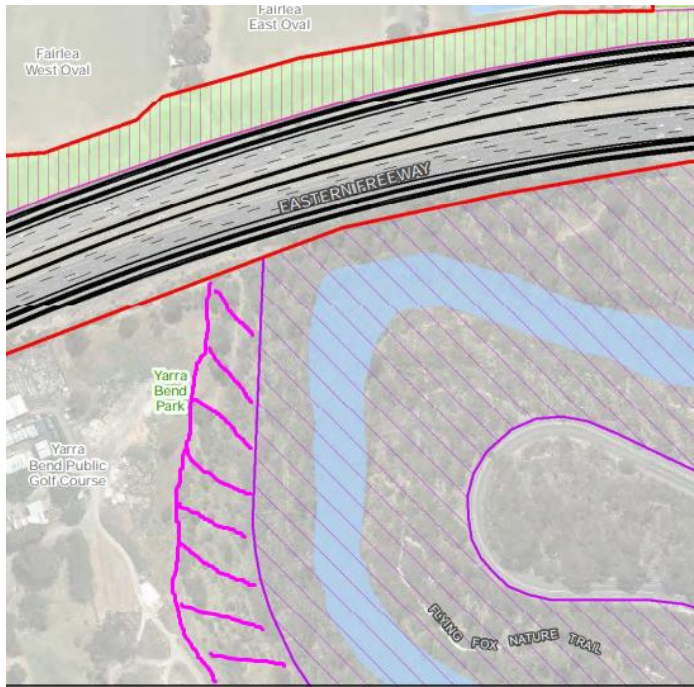


Figure 3: Actual boundary of GHFF camp.

### Loss of habitat

The ESS (Chap 25 Ecology, p.33) says that “impacts to this population are not anticipated considering the small amount of clearance and the extent of similar habitat remaining”. We believe that the clearing of bushland up to 10 metres south of the freeway bridges may indeed directly impact on this population. This tiny remnant of bushland means that any loss of existing habitat is significant. The loss of trees more broadly will reduce food source trees, with the offset approach to bushland clearing resulting in a net loss of food resources for this species in Melbourne.

**We request clarification** on the precise extent of planned clearing of habitat, and extent of works affecting the south side of the Eastern Freeway.

**We invite** a relevant project expert to conduct a walk-through the area with stakeholders:

- Wildlife Victoria (Dr Megan Davidson) [megan.davidson@wildlifelifevictoria.org.au](mailto:megan.davidson@wildlifelifevictoria.org.au)
- Friends of Bats and Bushcare (Lawrence Pope) [Lpope@inet.net.au](mailto:Lpope@inet.net.au)
- Parks Victoria Flying-Fox Project Manager (Stephen Brend) [stephen.brend@parks.vic.gov.au](mailto:stephen.brend@parks.vic.gov.au)

We advise that there has been no consultation with this group of stakeholders to date (see Technical report Q: Ecology, p.62).