



## North Queensland Conservation Council Inc.

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### **HENDRA VIRUS HYSTERIA**

The Horse Council wants to clear native trees, the politicians want to cull flying foxes – both are hysterical, knee-jerk responses to a complex issue, and inconsistent with scientific advice, claims Gail Hamilton, President of the North Queensland Conservation Council.

“As an organisation we are sorry for the tragedy caused by Hendra virus, but we feel that a considered scientific approach is the best way to manage the situation.” Ms Hamilton said. “It is understood that flying foxes, horses and humans can all contract the deadly Hendra virus, but the route of transmission is completely unknown. Suggestions that bats are directly responsible for Hendra virus in horses, and should therefore be removed, is inconsistent with the scientific advice. To date there is no proven causative link between bats and horses, and in fact studies to purposefully infect horses from bats have failed to do so.”

Ms Hamilton expressed her concern that culling bats or removing their habitat may in fact cause more problems than it solves. “Any disease spreads more quickly through a stressed population, and a cull of flying foxes or their habitat will no doubt cause stress, and possibly a more significant outbreak of Hendra virus”.

For human transmission, horses are the problem, not bats. Advice from DPI on the best way to manage the outbreak is for horse owners to employ strict hygiene controls and seek immediate veterinary attention if a case is suspected. “If Rosemary Menkens, Bob Katter and the Horse Council really want to make a difference they could be promoting research into a Hendra vaccine for horses” .