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# Media Release

## Bat Care Brisbane

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15/10/2009

### **Hendra media sparks fear & retribution.**

Bat Care Brisbane (BCB) has received disturbing information that the flying-fox colonies located around Mackay and Rockhampton are being threatened with destruction by people who are fearful about the spread of Hendra virus from bats.

BCB is alarmed at recent media reports about Hendra virus which may lead to people acting irresponsibly causing unnecessary harm to bats. The media throughout Qld could be improved by including some balanced conservation messages.

It is now critical that some factual information about the importance of bats be relayed to the public. This includes: Australian native forests, including World Heritage Rainforests rely on bats as an essential pollinator and seed disperser. Forests in European countries are pollinated by wind – in Australia it is the bats moving across our landscape, they are pivotal to long term forest health. Flying-foxes have a very low birth rate for an animal of their size – only one young per year with a long gestation period of 6 months and a long dependency on mother until independent. Their populations are suffering major declines not only by decreased foraging and roosting habitat, they also suffer huge mortalities through heat events, drought, illegal shooting and many other threats such as barbed-wire etc.

In relation to Hendra virus and its association with bats we as an organisation believe that more research into the transmission path from bats to horses is required as other possible vectors need to be explored. Until we have more research we cannot rely of assumptions and theories as to how the virus is transmitted. Therefore it is the obligation of government agencies and of the media to report accurately and responsibly to the public to allay fear and retribution to this critically important member of our wildlife family. It is important to add that humans are not at risk of Hendra virus from bats. Bat carers are living proof.

Public ignorance about bats is the greatest threat – a lot more focus should be placed in improving public understanding about bats and their worth this is long overdue and is now urgent. Positive information dissemination is proven to lead to tolerance and understanding. This hopefully will lead to less destructive behaviour towards bats from the public, such as what is being planned in Rockhampton and Mackay.

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