

NICK DAMETTO
Member for Hinchinbrook



MEDIA RELEASE

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Minister stumbles over bat question

ENVIRONMENT Minister Leeanne Enoch has failed to provide a straight answer over what support her department will provide Hinchinbrook Shire Council as they attempt to rid Ingham of a massive bat colony.

In a Question Without Notice from Hinchinbrook MP Nick Dametto in parliament on Tuesday morning, Mr Dametto referenced the “technical and financial support” promised by the Department of Environment and Science in a statement to the Herbert River Express in an online story on January 21.

Mr Dametto then asked Ms Enoch if she could confirm whether funds would be made available through the government's existing \$2.7 million package to improve management of urban flying fox roosts and when this would happen.

But Ms Enoch struggled to provide any clarity over specific technical expertise and funding from the Department for council to help clear the bat roost, only saying “that was still being negotiated”.

Mr Dametto said he was “extremely disappointed” by Ms Enoch’s response at a time when the Ingham community was “crying out for help” from the government.

“This was a non-answer from the Minister, who appears out of touch with the reality of what we are dealing with,” he said.

“This is a long-standing issue that has resulted in years of lobbying the Minister’s office for help. Last month, our town was under siege when an influx of hundreds of thousands of bats joined our town’s established roost, which saw the colony over spill in to places residents have never seen them before. This flying fox plague threatened the health and safety of residents and resulted in an incident where the emergency helicopter was forced to divert to Ingham Airport after being unable to land at the hospital.

“This situation is unacceptable and Ingham will not be forced to learn to live with flying foxes because of Labors green-leaning policies.”

Mr Dametto said the dispersal of the bat colony had been left to Hinchinbrook Shire Council, who has now engaged environmental management firm Biodiversity Australia for assistance, and Ingham State School, which took measures to clear bats out of neighboring trees before students returned to school late last month.

“The Department of Environment and Science did very little that was tangible at the peak of this crisis two weeks ago, despite what they told our local newspaper. It took a combined effort between council and the Department of Education to contain the roost and bring our state school up to a standard of cleanliness for students to start the new school year.

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“While some have now moved on, the bat colony still remains larger than ever at the Ingham Botanical Gardens and the roost has also splintered resulting in a new colony taking up residency in APEX Park, located close to aged residential units. I understand that flying foxes are a migratory animal but their plague-like visits are becoming larger and more frequent.”

Since his question to the Minister in parliament on Tuesday morning, Mr Dametto has been successful in securing a meeting with Ms Enoch to discuss options for State Government funding to help with the planned roost relocation.

—ENDS—

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Photo captions

The Ingham Bat colony.

Hinchinbrook MP Nick Dametto at the Ingham Memorial Botanical Gardens.

Hinchinbrook MP Nick Dametto, Mayor Ramon Jayo and Biodiversity Australia operations manager and senior ecologist Karl Robertson inspect Ingham’s bat colony.

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