

# HAVE YOUR SAY

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JUST over a decade ago, more than 12,000 flying foxes were shot or electrocuted under permit in Queensland orchards. Thousands more were killed illegally.

After revelations in the Federal Court that 18,000 had been illegally electrocuted in just one orchard in north Queensland, the State Government banned that form of killing.

In 2008, the Government also banned shooting of flying foxes. In the six years previous, 23,000 were shot under permit, a quota system that supposedly limited kills but was impossible to enforce.

The Liberal National Party has said it will overturn the ban on fruit growers killing flying foxes, a position advocated by Katter's Australian Party.

Electrocution and shooting were banned because of incontrovertible evidence of cruelty. Most electro-

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cuted or shot bats do not die quickly. Autopsies of flying foxes shot in a NSW orchard found that about three-quarters would have taken hours or days to die.

Fruit growers tout a code of practice for humane shooting of flying foxes but humaneness is impossible. Shotguns spray relatively low-velocity pellets in a cone-shaped pattern and a fatal wound is largely a matter of chance, not skill.

With a 1m wingspan, flying foxes present a large target for injury but the likelihood that pellets will hit and fatally penetrate their small skull or vital organs is low.

There is also no way of preventing the starvation of orphaned young. The ripening of most orchard fruit occurs when flying foxes give birth and up to 40 per cent of flying foxes are likely to have dependent young when killing occurs.

For conservation and animal welfare groups, there is no justification for a return to killing threatened species and no excuse for cruelty. There is also no economic justification. Most growers suffering damage now use netting – the only reliable method.