batcon.org
BAT CONSERVATION
INTERNATIONAL

August 31, 2015

Mrs. C. Jhowry
Deputy Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security
9th Floor NPF Building
Port Louis, Mauritius

Dear Mrs. Jhowry,

Re: Bat Conservation International's Position on the proposed control of Mauritius Fruit Bats *Pteropus niger*

Bat Conservation International (BCI) is a US-based non-governmental organization dedicated to the conservation of the world's bats to ensure a healthy planet. For over 30 years, we have worked collaboratively with governments, conservation groups, the corporate sector, and private individuals to proactively achieve sustainable conservation in a manner that also accounts for the needs of human economies. BCI joins the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and a growing number of individuals and organizations opposed to the culling of the Mauritius Fruit Bat. We strongly encourage you to reconsider and discontinue plans for culling this globally important flying fox.

Culling flying fox colonies is not an effective means of control, and based on extensive research and observations in Australia, it has proven to be ineffective and often inhumane. Bats that are killed are replaced by increased reproductive success in the remaining population. Further, culling bats is widely recognized as inhumane as a proportion of bats shot do not immediately die, and many only succumb to their wounds over hours. Culling bats when they are reproductive is simply unacceptable as it can result in young bats starving to death as they were abandoned due to disturbance of their mothers were killed.

Flying foxes play an important role in the pollination and seed distribution of native trees. Upon review of existing research, we acknowledge that there is ongoing depredation of some of Mauritius' commercial fruits like mangos and litchis. However, we believe the level of damage has been exaggerated due to inappropriate assumptions and problematic study methods in some of the research. We believe the preliminary analyses from a post-doc research study are much more defensible. It is notable that the majority of fruits lost on both big and small trees were due to physical causes, 20 percent and 13 percent, respectively. Results also indicate that fruits bats account for up to 11 percent of the damage on big mango trees (3 percent on small trees) as compared to the 1 percent of the damage caused by birds on big trees (8 percent on small trees). Litchi orchards show an estimated 9 percent damage by bats, whereas at least 16 percent were lost due to over ripening; another 13 percent were overripe, but still on the trees. These overripe fruits likely attract birds and bats to forage in the orchards.

The Mauritian post-doc study reliably demonstrated that the bats can travel long distances on the island and routinely move among roost sites, making it exceptionally difficult to establish a reliably population estimate for the species. BCI encourages you to engage with the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation to establish a robust monitoring network based on the proven model used on Rodrigues. Such a monitoring program would use

simultaneous counts by trained observers at all major roosts over several days and be repeated three times annually to better understand seasonal variations in the distribution of the bats throughout Mauritius.

BCI applauds the government for maintaining its subsidy on the purchase of nets to protect orchards. Research from Australia has shown that the only effective measure to reduce damage to fruit trees is by netting individual fruit trees (or the entire orchard). Harvesting fruit at a peak time for market and local consumption will reduce the loss to bats and birds. Further, people should be encouraged to prune trees and/or replace large trees (where much of the fruit is not harvestable) with dwarf trees would facilitate a more effective harvest of most of the fruit and allow for correct net placement. BCI encourages Mauritius to renew the netting subsidy in 2015 and to consider a new subsidy to trim trees to facilitate the effectiveness of netting. Further, we recommend that Mauritius call for more research into the effectiveness of sacrificial crops; native and/or introduced plants that produce non-commercial fruits or fruits of low-value that are preferred by bats over commercial fruits. Restoration of native forests is also encouraged as over time an expanded native forest system will provide alternate roosts and native food resources for the bats.

BCI is firmly opposed to culling of the Mauritius Fruit Bats and believes culling bats would open Mauritius to widespread criticism and be a significant setback to the reputation of the country. We recognize that Mauritius faces very real challenges to conserve their flying foxes in the face of public opinion and encourage you to seek the advice and support of the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation as they are exceptionally knowledgeable and are best positioned to be of assistance. We also suggest you request the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation present the results from the current post-doc study to the Ministry and planters associations. BCI is available to offer our insights to help identify a lasting solution that is evidence-based.

As Mauritius was a first signatory to the Convention on Biodiversity, BCI expects Mauritius will continue to be a courageous global leader for the conservation of biodiversity and will not make a decision that negates its tremendous successes in conservation over the past 40 years.

We look forward to hearing from you on this important conservation issue.

Sincerely

David L Waldien, Ph.D.
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Director, Mauritian Wildlife Foundation
Director, National Parks and Conservation Service
Conservator of Forests, Forestry Service
Officer in Charge, Mauritius Society for Animal Welfare
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