Bats Qld (Flying Foxes & Microbats) Inc
Policy and Procedure

Anti-Gossiping Policy

Version 1 (September 2018)

PURPOSE OF POLICY

Bats Qld (Flying Foxes & Microbats) Inc ('Bats Qld') has a **zero tolerance** for gossip.

Gossip is an activity that can drain, corrupt, distract and downshift bats & microbats carer and rehabilitator satisfaction. It has the potential to destroy an organisation or an individual person. Most people involved in gossip may not intend to do harm, but gossip can have a significant negative impact as it has the potential to destroy a person's life, and ruin Bats Qld's credibility and reputation.

Any member of Bats Qld who is proven, following the organisation's formal procedures, to participate in or instigate gossip about a member of Bats Qld will receive disciplinary action and may have their membership revoked.

DEFINITION

Definition of 'gossip':

(noun)
- Conversation or reports about other people's private lives that might be unkind, disapproving, or not true
- Rumour or talk of a personal, sensational or intimate nature
- Trivial, chatty talk or writing
- Idle, often sensational and groundless talk about others

(verb)
- To engage in or spread gossip

What constitutes 'gossip':

- Talking about a person or a person's personal life when they are not present
- Negative or unwelcome communication criticising another person or persons
- Repeating information that can injure a person's credibility or reputation
- Repeating information about a person to a third party or parties
- Repeating information that is overheard or hearsay
- Repeating information given to you in confidence without that person's permission or knowledge

NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF GOSSIP

Gossip can have one or all of the following negative results:

- Lost productivity and wasted time
- Erosion of trust and morale
- Increased anxiety among volunteers as rumours circulate without any clear information as to what is fact and what is not
- Growing divisiveness among volunteers as people 'take sides'
- Hurt feelings and reputations
- Jeopardised chances for the gossipers' advancement within the organisation as they are perceived as unprofessional
- Attrition as good volunteers leave the organisation due to the unhealthy volunteer atmosphere.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF IT IS 'GOSSIP'?

If you are tempted to participate in rumours or gossip, either passively or actively, it is always a good idea to step back and ask yourself several questions:

- Is what I am about to say ***true***?
- Is it ***harmless***?
- Is it ***necessary***?
- How would I feel if someone said something ***similar about me***?
- How would I feel if I saw my words quoted in the ***daily newspaper tomorrow***?
- How am I going to ***feel later*** if I say this (or listen to this)?
- Does engaging in gossip honour my ***own personal values***?

Much is to be gained by turning down the opportunity to gossip. With conscious effort and conviction, members can do their part to derail the harmful effects of destructive gossip and keep the Bats Qld volunteer environment healthy and happy for all.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR STOPPING GOSSIP?

It is ***everyone***'s responsibility to prevent and stop gossip. It is not only the Bats Qld Management Committee that is responsible for taking action, but also that of the organisation's Coordinators and every single member of Bats Qld. All members should put a stop to gossip as soon as they hear it.

WHAT CAN MEMBERS OF BATS QLD CAN DO TO PREVENT GOSSIP?

It is essential that all Bats Qld members always conduct themselves in such a way as to prevent and minimise gossip.

It is very easy to get drawn into the gossip circle, and often difficult to resist. However, to avoid getting involved in non-productive and destructive gossip, members should abide by the following points:

- Do not speak or insinuate another person's name when that person is not present unless it is to compliment, praise or to ask about matters related directly to their volunteer work with Bats Qld.
- Refuse to participate when another person speaks about a person not present in a negative light.
- Do not respond to an email or pass it on to any other person if it is derogatory about another member.
- Actively call a halt to a discussion if the person or persons initiate gossip about another person when that person is not present.
- If a member of Bats Qld does something unethical, incorrect, against Bats Qld's policies, or is disruptive, use the proper channels to bring it to the attention of the Bats Qld Core Committee and/or Head Coordinators so that they can resolve the conflict.
- Mind your own business, be a dedicated carer and rehabilitator, behave ethically and responsibly, and expect the same of others.

WHAT SHOULD MEMBERS OF BATS QLD DO IF THEY HEAR OTHER MEMBERS GOSSIPING?

First, as a member you should follow the suggestions listed above under the topic 'What can members of Bats Qld do to prevent gossip?'.

Second, if you become aware that a fellow Bats Qld member is gossiping about another member, you have an ethical responsibility to report the matter to the Bats Qld Management Committee or to a Coordinator. Consider how you would feel if derogatory or untrue information about you was being freely discussed amongst other members. We all have an obligation to prevent gossiping in the volunteer environment.

You can report the matter to the Management Committee confidentially, by forwarding the details to the Bats Qld Secretary by email to secretary@batsqld.org.au or by post to PO Box 549, Helensvale Plaza, Helensvale 4210. The information provided will only be provided to the Bats Qld Management Committee and/or the Coordinators and the matter will remain confidential.

A person from the Bats Qld Management Committee and/or Coordinator will be assigned to deal with the issue directly with the person alleged to have engaged in gossip. Upon assignment of the person to the matter, the member subject to the proceedings (i.e. alleged gossiper) will be informed in writing, as soon as practicable, of the allegations made and be invited to respond. The member allegedly responsible for the gossip will be given the opportunity to respond to the allegations made during a fair and impartial hearing. The date of the hearing will be agreed upon by the parties. If within 28 days of being informed in writing of the matter and invited to respond, the person subject to the proceedings does not contact the person assigned to hear the matter, the hearing may

proceed and a decision may be made *in absentia.* To ensure the fairness and impartiality of the hearing, the following procedures will be observed:

- If the person making the initial report is either of the following: The President of Bats Qld, a member of the Management Committee of Bats Qld and/or a Coordinator of Bats Qld, such person will be precluded from chairing the initial hearing.
- If the person the object of the gossip (i.e. the victim of gossip) is either of the following: The President of Bats Qld, a member of the Management Committee of Bats Qld and/or a Coordinator of Bats Qld, such person will be precluded from chairing the initial hearing.
- The person alleged to have engaged in gossip may present any and all relevant evidence either in person at the hearing, or by providing relevant documentation to the person hearing the matter at least one week prior to the date of the hearing.

Following the hearing, if the allegations are made out or agreed to, the person may be provided with either a verbal or written warning directing them to refrain from further destructive behaviour or have their membership revoked.

If, following the initial hearing, the person subject to the proceedings (i.e. the person alleged to have engaged in gossip) believes that due to a procedural error, the decision of the person hearing the matter initially is unfair or unjust, the person may, within 28 days of the communication of the finding, request in writing that the initial decision be reviewed. The decision of the initial hearing may be reviewed by a panel consisting of three members of the Bats Qld Management Committee and/or Coordinators. The panel cannot consist of the person initially hearing the matter, or any of the following: The President of Bats Qld, any member of the Management Committee of Bats Qld and/or a Coordinator of Bats Qld if any such persons either made the initial report against the person subject to the proceedings (i.e. alleged gossiper) or is the object of the gossip (i.e. victim of gossip). The appeal hearing will be conducted on the basis of documentary evidence only. The decision of the panel is final. The person subject to the proceedings will be informed of the panel's decision as soon as practicable, but no later than 14 days after the hearing.

DISCIPLINARY ACTION FOR HABITUAL GOSSIPERS

Bats Qld cannot, and will not, tolerate habitual gossipers.

If a member of Bats Qld is found to have been involved, on more than one occasion, (as having either instigated, encouraged or contributed to, either passively or actively) in gossip against another member, then the following consequences may be taken by the Bats Qld Management Committee:

- Either a verbal or written warning will be provided to the member directing that they immediately cease the gossiping activity – this may include counselling with the member.
- If a further incident occurs, the Bats Qld Management Committee has the right to:

- Discipline the member in a way considered appropriate by the Bats Qld Management Committee and/or Coordinators. Disciplinary action may take the form of any of the following (this list is not meant to be exhaustive):
  - Revocation of their Permit Endorsement;
  - Removal of the member from the Bats Qld membership list;
  - Exclusion of the member from attending Bats Qld training workshops;
  - Exclusion of the member from attending Bats Qld events including social functions, displays, talks, etc;
  - Removal of the member from any key role held by them such as Coordinator/Committee Member or any position as appointed by the Management Committee;
- Terminate that member's membership to the organisation in accordance with Bats Qld Termination of Membership Policy and Bats Qld Constitution.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT CONSTITUTES GOSSIP IN BATS QLD

It is often difficult for members to differentiate what constitutes gossip and what doesn't.

To try to put things into perspective, think of 'gossiping' as 'whispering'. If you say something and think that it is necessary to lower your voice, stop and consider that what you are about to say is most likely 'gossip'.

The following examples are provided to assist members in determining what constitutes gossip. They are not exhaustive.

	Scenario	***Gossip – Yes or No***
1	Carer Alfred tells the Adult Rehabilitation Coordinator that he is concerned about a bat in care with Carer James. He saw the bat while dropping off another injured bat to Carer Alfred's house. The bat was injured and had not been assessed by a vet.	**NO** – this is not gossip. Carer James has an ethical obligation to report this to the appropriate Coordinator so that the issue can be dealt with. This is an animal welfare issue. Alternatively, Carer James may report this to the Bats Qld Committee.
2	Carer James tells Carer Nigella that he thinks that Carer Alfred is a bad carer because he had a bat in care that was not taken to a vet and he wasn't looking after properly.	**YES** – this **IS** gossip. Carer James has no right to repeat this information to any other person. If he has reported this issue to the appropriate Coordinator, then he should not discuss this matter any further with any other person.
3	Carer Mary and Carer Michael are at a workshop and discussing Carer Beatrice. Carer Beatrice cares for a lot of pre-mature baby bats and she has recently had a number of the babies die while in her care. Carer Mary and Carer Michael are discussing that Carer Beatrice must not be a very good carer because some of her animals have died.	**YES** – this **IS** gossip. There may be a genuine reason why several of the baby bats in the care of Carer Beatrice have not survived. Discussing this can hurt Carer Beatrice's reputation and would hurt Carer Beatrice's feelings.

4	Carer Magda is talking to Carer Beth. Carer Beth starts to talk about Carer Beatrice and is telling Carer Magda about all the things that she has heard about Beatrice and that everyone thinks that she isn't a very good carer.	**YES** – this **IS** gossip. Carer Beth has no right to discuss another member whilst that person is not present nor does she have the right to repeat information that she has heard from other people (that is 'hearsay'). Carer Magda is equally responsible for this situation. She should have stopped Carer Beth from speaking and told her that she does not want to listen to gossip and that Carer Beth should refrain from gossiping about another member. Carer Magda should remind Carer Beth about Bats Qld's zero tolerance on gossiping policy. Carer Magda should report this matter to the Bats Qld Core Committee or a Head Coordinator.
5	Carer Julie is friends with Carer Louise. Carer Louise carers for microbats and Carer Julie is aware that she has over 12 microbats in her care and is having trouble adequately meeting the housing and feeding requirements for all these animals. Carer Louise is a very private person and won't ask for help. Carer Julie is very concerned about not only the welfare of the microbats but also Carer Louise's emotional and physical health so she discusses the matter with the Microbat Coordinator.	**NO** - this is not gossip. Carer Julie should speak with the Microbat Coordinator so that a solution can be found to help relieve Carer Louise of some of the microbats in care. This should be done confidentially and discreetly so that Carer Louise is not offended. As this is an animal welfare issue also, Carer Julie has an ethical obligation to the animals to report the matter.
6	The Microbat Coordinator tells all the Bats Qld telephone people not to send Carer Louise out on any rescues. The Microbat Coordinator also tells all of the microbat carers not to give Carer Louise any more microbats because she isn't coping with the microbats that she already has and isn't able to look after them properly. She also tells them that some of her microbats will be taken off her.	**YES** – this **IS** gossip. The Microbat Coordinator has no right to divulge any of this information to any other person, including other microbat carers and/or the Bats Qld telephone operators. There are more discreet ways to handle this situation. This will put Carer Louise's reputation at risk as some members may assume that animals are being taken off her because she is a bad carer.
7	Carer Bella is telling Carer Rosalie about Carer John. Apparently Carer John lost his job and his wife is having an affair.	**YES** – this **IS** gossip. This is private information and should not be discussed with anyone.
8	Volunteer June told Carer Piper that Carer Richard was doing a wonderful job rescuing injured bats and should receive an award for his efforts.	**NO** – this is not gossip. It is nice to praise the work of others.