



Conference Delegates
17th International Congress of Speleology
Sydney, Australia

Via email:

Welcome to all cavers coming to Sydney for the 17th International Congress of Speleology.

I am writing to seek your help in keeping Australia free of a serious disease affecting cave-dwelling bats, called white-nose syndrome (WNS). It was first seen in North America in 2006, and since then has killed more than five million bats in that region.

If WNS was introduced in Australia, it could have significant impacts on native bat species, including some that are already critically endangered.

For those attending the congress from other countries, we advise against bringing your used caving clothing, footwear and equipment with you. You are welcome to bring new equipment that has never been used in a cave, or contact the congress organisers about the availability of loan gear.

Clothing and equipment that has been used in caves in other countries pose a risk of introducing WNS into Australia and exposing our native bats to the disease. The Australian Government takes this risk very seriously, and the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources is introducing measures at the border to prevent entry of WNS into Australia.

There is no effective treatment that our officers can safely apply 'on-the-spot' as you pass through the airport. At the time of the Congress, we will be asking for your voluntary compliance to decontaminate your clothing and gear prior to use. The most convenient decontamination procedure that will not damage your equipment is immersion in water at 60°C (140°F) for 20 minutes. This requirement to decontaminate equipment will ultimately become mandatory, so please take this into consideration when planning future trips to Australia.

In the future, when these decontamination procedures become mandatory, gear belonging to Australian cavers who visit caves in other countries, will also be subject to treatment when re-entering Australia.

We acknowledge that these interventions are likely to cause inconvenience. However, I am sure you understand the importance of protecting Australia's natural environment and wildlife.

For more information visit our website (<http://www.agriculture.gov.au/pests-diseases-weeds/animal/white-nose-syndrome>).

Yours sincerely

Dr Mark Schipp

26 June 2017