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Australia Blocks Visa Entry for Bat Scientists

August 8, 2025

– Categories: General News



Cairns, QLD, Eight international researchers were denied entry into Australia ahead of a global scientific conference focused on bat research, raising concerns from event organisers over the impact on international collaboration.

The researchers, who had been officially invited to attend the 20th International Bat Research Conference in Cairns, were from Kenya, Uganda, India, Pakistan, and Georgia. All were recognised contributors in the field of bat ecology and conservation.

Professor Justin Welbergen, the conference chair, confirmed that the scientists were scheduled to participate in the event, which ran from 3 to 8 August in Queensland. He said

their absence disrupted planned sessions and limited discussions on key issues such as biodiversity, disease surveillance, and conservation.

According to the Department of Home Affairs, visa decisions are made based on criteria outlined in Australia's migration legislation. A spokesperson stated that all non-citizens are assessed individually and must meet relevant health, character, and security checks. The department declined to comment on individual cases.

The International Bat Research Conference has been held every three years since 1968, with this year's event bringing together approximately 500 participants from 59 countries. It was the first time the conference had returned to Australia since 1989.

Organisers said a formal letter signed by nearly 150 delegates was submitted to the government, expressing concern about the visa decisions and their broader implications. The letter noted that international cooperation in science depends on the free movement of researchers and access to events that support global knowledge exchange.

Organisers stressed the need for improved visa procedures for scientific delegates in future events to ensure Australia remains a viable host for international conferences.