

Submission for Senate Inquiry:

Status, health and sustainability of Australia's koala population

While I do not have the time or expertise to comment specifically on the details of the government's present policies regarding koala management and conservation, I do wish to offer suggestions regarding larger issues affecting koala habitat and conservation.

As a 7th generation Australian, I have been dismayed to witness over the decades, the decline of our natural environment and native species, all in the name of "progress" and "development". Attempts to 'save' species facing extinction usually come at a point when it is too late to do anything significant as far as natural populations of the species is concerned; rather it is our final forced gesture of 'stewardship' to save us from the shame of having yet another species added to the "species now extinct" list. Even the iconic status of our cute and unique koala, has not been enough to save it from the threat of extinction.

Like so many of our vulnerable marsupials, the koala is unlikely to get off the threatened species list if we don't collectively address the following issues:

1. Habitat destruction for residential use

This will only be addressed in the long-term if we reduce demand for land through new policies which start to cap Australia's burgeoning population, including reducing immigration and providing disincentives to reproduce (stop the "baby bonus" which is NOT needed to stimulate breeding; stop family tax benefits after the second child, etc). I've travelled to many countries and have seen the tragic downside to overpopulation and habitat destruction. Let's learn from this!!

2. Foresight in land use planning

Set aside valuable habitats **before** greedy developers snatch-up land by offering huge sums of money to existing land owners on the prospect of being able to carve the land up into multiple residential allotments and make a big profit.

3. Land clearing for agricultural use

In Queensland, over 90% of annual land clearing is done by farmers – mostly pastoralists for animal production. A comprehensive report released in Nov 2006 by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations states: *"The livestock sector emerges as one of the top two or three most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale from local to global. The findings of this report suggest that it should be a major policy focus when dealing with problems of land degradation, climate change and air pollution, water shortage and water pollution, and loss of biodiversity."*

In short, we need to change our diet from an animal based one to a plant-based one if we are ever to address this massive problem.

4. Manage koala disease, domestic predators and mortalities on roads

These threats are best commented upon by the experts in the field, but it is worth considering that the stress of loss of habitat and encroaching human habitation is the primary contributing factor to these.