

THREATENED SPECIES SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Established under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

Stephen Palethorpe
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

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Dear Mr Palethorpe,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the supplementary submission by Professor Carrick and Drs Melzer, Ellis and Fitzgibbon. The Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC) appreciates their contribution. The assessment of a species' conservation status is by its very nature an iterative process, since status may change over time, as may available information. Consequently, the TSSC remains at all times receptive to new information and looks forward to the Senate Committee's final report informing our future discussions.

The TSSC will restrict its response to the main issues raised by Professor Carrick and Drs Melzer, Ellis and Fitzgibbon that specifically relate to the TSSC's deliberations on the koala.

The criteria used by the TSSC in listing assessments of all species, including koala, are provided in the submission by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Populations and Communities (SEWPaC) to the Senate inquiry, and available on its website (Submission #73). The Precautionary Principle is built into these criteria. The guidelines for their application deal explicitly with uncertainty, advocating a balance between a precautionary and an evidentiary approach. The TSSC recognises that the approach of listing threatened species relies on reacting to an existing problem. The TSSC supports, and has advocated, development of more proactive approaches, and notes the recent release of the government's response to the review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act), and attendant speech by Minister Burke.

The TSSC notes the comments about the use of genetic information to assess the potential for listing sub-sets of koala separately. The TSSC has provided additional information on our approach in response to Questions on Notice since the Melbourne hearing (Senate inquiry website - Answers to Questions on Notice #29). Any future recommendation from the TSSC to the Minister that he recognise separate "species" of koala under section 517 of the EPBC Act would entail a different approach to that used to date, and would require development of new assessment guidelines for consistent application to all species. The TSSC is actively considering a strategic approach to widespread species of conservation concern.

The TSSC's view of the influence of drought has been provided in the listing advice (see the above-mentioned SEWPaC submission), at the Melbourne hearing (Hansard transcript pp46-47) and in the TSSC's response to Questions on Notice. Similarly, the TSSC's opinion on the efficacy of the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009-2014 has been sought and provided on a number of occasions (SEWPaC submission - listing advice and accompanying letter to the Minister, Hansard transcript p51).

The TSSC notes that, unlike the United States' listing process, it uses the criteria developed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which is the standard adopted by most nations across the world for consistent and objective assessment of the status of species.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide more information.

Sincerely,

Helene Marsh FTSE

Professor

Chair, Threatened Species Scientific Committee

Secretariat: Species Listing section

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