



# Department of Sustainability and Environment

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Dear Mr Palethorpe

## **RIGHT OF REPLY INVITATION - SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS REFERENCES COMMITTEE - KOALA INQUIRY**

Thank you for your letter of 1 September 2011 to the Hon. Ryan Smith MP, Minister for Environment and Climate Change, regarding a submission from the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) to the senate inquiry into the status, health and sustainability of Australia's Koala population. The Minister has asked that I respond on his behalf.

In its submission, the AKF made several claims with respect to Victoria's management of its Koala population, including:

- Koala population estimates;
- Past management decisions with regard to translocation sites; and
- A population estimate for the Strathbogies.

I offer the following in response to these claims.

### ***Population estimates***

With regard to the legitimacy and scientific merit of population estimates provided by the Victorian Government, koala populations that are intensively managed to control over-browsing have been closely monitored. Repeated transect counts are used to provide population density estimates. These population estimates, combined with detailed demographic data collected from those actual populations, are used to model population trajectories over time, under various fertility control scenarios. These models have been published in the scientific literature (Todd *et al.* 2008, *Journal of Applied Ecology*) or in DSE scientific reports (Ramsay *et al.* 2010, Arthur Rylah Institute Technical Report No. 212). The science is based on very large sample sizes and scientifically robust methods.

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***Past selection of release sites during translocations***

In the early 1900s, Koalas had declined to very low numbers across Victoria due to the fur trade and bushfires. Translocations to two coastal islands in 1923 provided a source population that was used to recolonise areas of the state where Koalas were no longer present or present in very low numbers.

The widespread distribution and abundance of the Koala in Victoria today is testament to the decisions made regarding the selection of habitat and sites for release. DSE and Parks Victoria are working successfully to find an alternative to translocation. French Island and Raymond Island are now the only sites from which Koalas are translocated and the progressive implementation of the contraception program should see an end to translocation in the coming years.

***Population estimates for the Strathbogie***

The estimate of 180,000 Koalas in the Strathbogie Plateau area was made by researchers from Monash and Melbourne Universities, not by DSE. These researchers are highly experienced mammalogists.

Yours sincerely

**Adam Fennessy**

Deputy Secretary, Natural Resources & Environmental Policy